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# Towards a Contemporary Sociology of Children and Consumption

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A thesis submitted to Durham University as a requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Applied Social Sciences
Durham University

**2011**

**Declaration**

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# ABSTRACT

This research explores children's consumption practices, and through doing so contributes to the sociology of children and of consumption.

Although there exists a growing body of research on children's consumption, children and childhood are often only viewed as one of the contexts in which consumption takes place. Furthermore practices of consumption are seen as something which children are socialised into, moving from incompetent (child) to competent (adult) consumer. There are many taken for granted yet ambiguous conceptualisations of children's relationship with consumer culture, for example the dichotomy between empowered and exploited child consumers. Consequently this research attempts to go beyond these taken for granted assumptions by engaging in face-to-face empirical work which explores the ways in which a group of children, aged between six and ten years old consume. The children took part in interviews and accompanied shopping trips, as well as completing journals in order to provide a detailed account of their practices of consumption. The ways in which children come to consume were explored and in particular the influence of family, peer groups, and the market was examined.

Ultimately, this research provides one of the first empirical explorations of Daniel Cook's (2010) theory of 'commercial enculturation'. In doing so this thesis recognises that children are not mini-consumers in need of consumer socialisation, instead they are agentic social actors who constantly create and re-create their own social worlds which includes aspects of consumption. For the most part consumption is not something which stands outside of childhood experience and it is neither inherently exploitative nor empowering. Additionally, an exploration of moderation provides an original insight into children's consumption practices. Children do not simply pester significant others in order to get what they want, instead they adopt and maintain a sophisticated understanding and relationship with consumption. Furthermore an examination of children's consumption practices acknowledges consumption as a relational practice firmly located within the wider social relationships of the family.

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# INTRODUCTION

> The world of consumption and marketplaces represents a key and absolutely necessary site for the study of childhood – as well as for social action – precisely because it disrupts even the most generous of conceptions about children and the locus of power. To keep consumption, popular culture and media culture separate and distant from children and childhood in our studies and undertakings is to reaffirm a vision of social life disconnected from lived experience. (Cook, 2005: 158).

Despite the insights provided by scholars of childhood research and theory and those of consumption and consumer culture, thus far these two voices have not come together and instead, "refer back onto themselves, their own audiences and areas of thought" (Cook, 2005: 155). Consequently this research, through an examination of children and consumption, will demonstrate that children and childhood are undeniably linked to the commercial world - children are not separate from but are an integral part of consumer culture.

The study of children and consumption not only tells us about children's consumption per se, but an examination of children's consumption contributes to understandings of consumption *and* of children. The two are not mutually exclusive and instead inform and support the understanding of each other. Consequently this thesis takes the perspective which sees children and childhood as a lens through which we can understand more about consumption, whilst at the same time our understanding of the ways in which children consume contributes to our knowledge of children and of childhood. Nevertheless children are more than a tool through which we can explore the sociology of children and consumption; children are also living social actors that consume.

The overall aim of this study is to provide a snapshot account of children's engagement with practices of consumption. Therefore, since the objective of this research is to contribute to understandings of how children consume, it is necessary to examine both the extent and detail of children's consumption practices. Children are located within familial contexts and the negotiations which take place within families, as well as with peers and siblings, tell us how children consume and how these practices are managed,

within the context of children's everyday experiences. Furthermore, in recognising the agentic nature of children it is important to develop an understanding of the aspects of creativity that children apply to their practices of consumption, and the ways in which they are involved in the co-construction of the world around them. Consequently, the four research questions that this research seeks to answer are:

1. What form do the consumption practices of children aged six to ten years old take?

2. What knowledge of consumption practices do children have and how is this knowledge gained?

3. What roles do children's family, peer group, and the market play in constituting children's consumption practices?

4. What creative features are aspects of children's consumption activities?

In answering these questions it will be demonstrated that this thesis contributes to the growing area of sociological research regarding children and consumption. This work is important and valuable as it recognises that children are social actors, therefore consumption will be a part of their daily lives. It recognises that children are not mini consumers on their way to competent consumption as demonstrated by an imagined competent adult consumer, socialised and developing the skills necessary for consumption as they grow, nor are they pint-sized consumers whose practices of consumption are less worthy of sociological attention than adults. Such research is crucial as it contributes to and goes beyond the current literature by presenting findings from empirical, face-to-face research with children, within the 6-10 year old age group. A participant group which is still currently under studied (Martens *et al*., 2004; Pilcher, 2010). This thesis is also important as it focuses on children's consumption practices in their everyday, lived settings, and the pertinent social relationships in which they are embedded.

This research provides original insights within the field of children's consumption by going beyond commercial socialisation and the belief that children follow a straight forward linear path from the not-knowing to the knowing adult consumer, from incompetent to competent consumer. This is achieved in particular through an analysis

of the work of Daniel Cook and specifically his theory of 'commercial enculturation', of which this thesis, with its focus on the lived experiences of a group of 6-10 year olds, provides one of the first empirical examinations of this concept. A critical exploration of children as both exploited and empowered by practices of consumption contributes to our understanding of children as active participants in consumer life, as well as understandings of what it means to be a child. Additionally, in refuting claims of commercial socialisation this thesis also opens the way for the exploration of consumption as a relational practice and examines the place and role of moderation in children's consumption practices. The identification of moderation in children's consumption practices is particularly original and is an important component of this thesis as it has long been assumed that children always make demands and pester their parents for the latest consumer goods. Consequently in suggesting that children may demonstrate restraint and moderation in their consumption practices this research breaks down some of the taken for granted assumptions concerning children's consumption.

Since the overall aim of the research is to provide a snapshot account of children's engagement with practices of consumption, the first chapter of this thesis is dedicated to establishing what is meant by the categories of children and childhood within an historical context in order to establish a yardstick from which modern day conceptualisations of children and childhood as seen in subsequent chapters can be evaluated. This first chapter begins with a culture-historical analysis of children and childhood, which provides an account of some of the earliest references to children and childhood, commencing with the classical philosopher Plato, before moving on to the teachings of Saint Augustine, followed by the pre-enlightenment literature of Chaucer and Shakespeare. Having comprehensively established the beliefs and attitudes surrounding the conceptions of children and childhood that existed at this time, this first chapter moves on to consider the enduring philosophical treatments of childhood in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century through the work of John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The chapter closes with a discussion of Ariès (1962) who provides the most significant account of the development of childhood into the modern era.

Contemporary models of the child and of childhood are examined in chapter two. The ways in which the child is constituted in law and in education is explored. Developmental psychology and the work of Jean Piaget are then examined, followed by the socialisation theories of Talcott Parsons. The 'new sociology of childhood' and its commitment to placing children at the centre of the research process, by recognising the plurality of childhood experience, the power (or lack of power) experienced by children within the research process, and that children are competent social actors, which forms the foundations for the methodological considerations of this thesis, is examined in the chapter. Finally, 'interpretive reproductionism' and the work of Corsaro (1985, 1997) is examined and acknowledged as providing the most adequate framework for this thesis in understanding children's consumption as it draws heavily on the meaning making which is constructed in peer groups.

Theories of consumption and consumer culture are examined in chapter three. Commodity fetishism as presented by Marx is our starting point, which is followed by discussions on Veblen and conspicuous consumption, and Simmel on fashion. Such work is useful as it sets up the debate surrounding theories of emulation, and the importance of the role of clothing, for children and for adults, in signifying aspects of our social selves, as discussed further in chapters six and seven. Marcuse's critical theory is then examined as it introduces the discussion as to whether consumption is an inherently exploitative or empowering feature of social life. Marcuse also provides the foundations for Baudrillard's critique of consumer society in which Baudrillard argues that commodities are bought and displayed as much for their sign-value as their use-value, and that it is the signs, the images, the message, and not the goods themselves which are consumed. Finally, Bourdieu's (1984) *Distinction* is examined, as the discussions on cultural capital, taste, and habitus inform the research questions as to how children gain information on practices of consumption, and the role of the family, peer group, and the market in constituting children's consumption practices, which is developed further in chapters six and seven.

Chapter four brings together the most recent research on children's consumption. Firstly a brief social and economic history of children's consumption is presented, which is followed by a history of children's consumption based upon aesthetics and emotions.

From this historical basis we move forward to contemporary understandings of children's engagement with consumer culture. The conflicting argument as to whether children are exploited or empowered by practices of consumption is explored. The notion of 'commercial enculturation' as introduced by Cook (2010) is then examined and is presented as a more appropriate means to understand children's engagement with practices of consumption than consumer socialisation. Resultantly this thesis is one of the first studies to empirically explore the notion of commercial enculturation.

The methodology of this research is discussed in chapter five, where the advantages and disadvantages of employing a child-focused research methodology are discussed. The methods used in this research, namely semi-structured interviews, accompanied shopping trips and journals are explored. In keeping with the objectives of this research, consent, power, ethics, reflexivity and the involvement of children in the research process are examined in detail.

Having suggested in chapter four that 'consumer enculturation' may be a more useful way to understand how children come to experience and know consumption, than consumer socialisation, chapter 6 provides original insight to the field of children's consumption and explores this very theme. In line with this thesis's third research question and the overall aim of the thesis to understand children's consumption within its lived settings, through explorations of trinkets and collectibles, fashion, and the metaphor of consumption as care, the role played by family, friends and peers, and the market in children's consumption is examined. This also contributes to an understanding of the relational aspects of children's consumption.

Further original insights into children's consumption practices are provided in chapter seven, where the concept of moderation, including restraint and respectability, and the dichotomy that arises between the empowered and exploited child consumer is explored. In doing so new light is shed on some of the taken for granted assumptions of what it means to be a child consumer.

The conclusion provides an overview of the research, summarising the main findings and highlighting the original aspects of the research. Specifically these original aspects relate to the theme of moderation, providing an alternative to consumer socialisation

through an empirical exploration of commercial enculturation, and going beyond seeing children as incompetent or vulnerable consumers. Finally suggestions are made to the directions in which further research on the sociology of children and consumption could be taken.

# CHAPTER 1: CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

We begin with a cultural-historical analysis of children and childhood initially based on early authoritative and reflective writings, following this we will move on to consider the enduring philosophical treatments of childhood in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century.[1] It will close with a discussion of the most influential account of the passage of childhood into the modern era.

## 1.1 PRE-ENLIGHTENMENT SOCIETY

Children have appeared in a vast array of works of literature and philosophy throughout history. This section serves to provide an exposition of some of the earliest references to children and childhood, beginning with the classical Greek philosopher Plato.

References to children and childhood appear in the works of Plato (427BC–347BC). Firstly the voices of children are used by Plato to provide support for his philosophies. Secondly, and more importantly, Plato provides us with the first theory of education. Theories of education are important, since not only do they have a direct bearing on the lives of children, as children are the focus of theories of education, but in establishing a theory of education one also establishes the nature of the child (Baker, 2003). For example, in *Meno* (1997) in discussing whether virtue can be taught, the mathematical thinking of a slave boy is used by Socrates to demonstrate to Meno that learning is not a matter of discovering something new but rather of recollecting something the soul knew before birth but has since forgotten:

[1] This thesis uses the phrase 'children and childhood' in order to provide flexibility in the understanding and analysis of children as individual social actors, and childhood as the constantly created and re-created temporal, social, and cultural space that children inhabit (Cunningham, 1995: 1). Section 1.3 and chapter two, will provide further discussion on this issue.

> As the soul is immortal, has been born often and has seen all things here and in the underworld, there is nothing which it has not learned; so it is in no way surprising that it can recollect the things it knew before, both about virtue and other things. As the whole of nature is akin, and the soul has learned everything, nothing prevents a man, after recalling one thing only – a process men call learning – discovering everything for himself, if he is brave and does not tire of the search, for searching and learning are, as a whole, recollection. (*Meno,* 81c-e).

In *The Republic* (2000) Plato conjures up an imagined utopian state which is ruled by warrior guardians and philosopher kings. It is the education for those who become guardians and philosopher kings that *The Republic* focuses on. In envisaging the form that this education takes it is possible to observe how Plato viewed both children and childhood. Education must begin in early childhood when individuals are most pliable, however children should be protected from certain works as it is presumed that children are not able to distinguish between good and bad:

> Then the first thing will be to establish a censorship of the writers of fiction, and let the censors receive any tale of fiction which is good, and reject the bad; and we will desire mothers and nurses to tell their children the authorized ones only. Let them fashion the mind with such tales, even more fondly than they mould the body with their hands; but most of those which are now in use must be discarded. (*Republic,* Book ii, 377c).

Certain works of poetry must be excluded, as their content does not instil a sense of virtue and children are seen not to have the necessary skills to make the distinction between the symbolic and the 'real':

> For a young person cannot judge what is allegorical and what is literal; anything that he receives into his mind at that age is likely to become indelible and unalterable; and therefore it is most important that the tales which the young first hear should be models of virtuous thoughts. (*Republic,* Book ii, 377c).

The notion of children as imitators is reinforced in the words of Socrates, "Imitations, if they are practiced continually from youth onwards, become established as habits and nature, in body and sounds and in thought." (*Republic,* Book ii, 395d).

Lastly, Plato recognises that children have particular natural talents which are better drawn out of the child rather than coerced, "don't use compulsion in teaching them. Use children's games instead. That will give you a better idea what each of them has a

natural aptitude for" (*Republic,* Book vii, 537a). Ultimately it is the duty of adults, as parents and as teachers, to educate children appropriately in the ways of the state, in order that they may govern effectively:

> And this is clearly seen to be the intention of the law, which is the ally of the whole city; and is seen also in the authority which we exercise over children, and the refusal to let them be free until we have established in them a principle analogous to the constitution of a state, and by cultivation of this higher element have set up in their hearts a guardian and ruler like our own, and when this is done they may go their ways. (*Republic,* Book ix, 590e-591a).

Thus, education of the child is education of the future citizen, with education in virtue being the most appropriate means to produce the citizens of the future. Although reason is our true nature it has to be nurtured from childhood and parents and educators must be careful to keep children from corrupting influences.

Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430) was one of Christianity's greatest theologians. He was influenced by Plato, and in particular his belief that knowledge is based upon recollection from things past, has significant bearing on the ways in which individuals come to know and love God (Rist, 1994; Teske, 2001). With regard to children and childhood, Book 1 of his *Confessions* provides an invalauable account of child development, where his writings on original sin are of particular importance (Peddle, 2001; Shahar, 1990). Put simply Original Sin is the condition which inclines human beings to be selfish and disobedient. In babies original sin is evident in their tantrums, unreasonable anger, and jealousy:

> For in thy sight there is none free from sin, not even the infant that has lived but a day upon this earth…Thus, the infant's innocence lies in the weakness of his body and not in the infant mind. I have myself observed a baby to be jealous, though it could not speak; it was livid as it watched another infant at the breast. (*Confessions*, Book 1, chapter vii: 11).

Infants were seen to react unconsciously and with natural immediacy, this immediacy stemming from both its divine source but also from the institutional order of the family which requires self-sacrifice and the control of one's natural urges (Peddle, 2001). Augustine did not believe that children were innocent; instead he saw them as bearers of Original Sin, and for which they must be baptised. Augustine rejected the belief that

children were innately innocent. Yet at the same time he refuted the idea that infants and children are inherently evil. Instead he consigned infants and young children to a third category of non-innocence, wherein their innocence came from their physical frailty and their lack of language, and being unable to harm others (Stortz, 2001).

The acquisition of language was important to Augustine. Prior to language acquisition Augustine believed that it was not worthwhile to rebuke infants, however as soon as language was acquired children entered the stage of childhood and could be reasoned with (Stortz, 2001). Augustine also makes a distinction between the categories of childhood and adolescence, "But in this time of childhood - which was far less dreaded for me than my adolescence" (*Confessions,* Book 1, chapter xii: 19). The latter is seen as a particularly turbulent time, filled with lust, sexual adventures, mischief, and idleness, and is presented as a distinct period of his life, different from infancy and childhood, and also distinct from adulthood.

Augustine looks to the role of education in childhood in order to make the distinction between nature and reason. He recognises the difficulties of boyhood. On the one hand are the lessons which must be learnt but also on the other hand is a desire to play:

> For this learning which [parents and teachers] wished me to acquire - no matter what their motives were - I might have put to good account afterward. I disobeyed them, not because I had chosen a better way, but from a sheer love of play. I loved the vanity of victory, and I loved to have my ears tickled with lying fables, which made them itch even more ardently, and a similar curiosity glowed more and more in my eyes for the shows and sports of my elders. Yet those who put on such shows are held in such high repute that almost all desire the same for their children. They are therefore willing to have them beaten, if their childhood games keep them from the studies by which their parents desire them to grow up to be able to give such shows. (*Confessions*, Book 1, chapter x: 16).

Although Augustine hated cruelty, and thought that "a free curiosity is more effective in learning than a discipline based on fear" (*Confessions*, Book 1, chapter xiv: 23), in order that children were to learn, he saw that punishment was necessary. Because of original sin, Augustine believed that all pupils were inclined towards evil and thus must be restrained and punished physically when appropriate. He provides a description of his childhood games and behaviours and although one might imagine that these actions are

just childish behaviours, for Augustine, these faults are evidence of, in this case his own, but children's more generally, deep-seated sinfulness. Augustine could not dismiss these as innocent childhood incidents:

> For in thy eyes, what was more infamous than I was already, since I displeased even my own kind and deceived, with endless lies, my tutor, my masters and parents - all from a love of play, a craving for frivolous spectacles, a stage-struck restlessness to imitate what I saw in these shows? I pilfered from my parents' cellar and table, sometimes driven by gluttony, sometimes just to have something to give to other boys in exchange for their baubles, which they were prepared to sell even though they liked them as well as I. Moreover, in this kind of play, I often sought dishonest victories, being myself conquered by the vain desire for pre-eminence. And what was I so unwilling to endure, and what was it that I censured so violently when I caught anyone, except the very things I did to others? And, when I was myself detected and censured, I preferred to quarrel rather than to yield. Is this the innocence of childhood? It is not, O Lord, it is not. I entreat thy mercy, O my God, for these same sins as we grow older are transferred from tutors and masters; they pass from nuts and balls and sparrows, to magistrates and kings, to gold and lands and slaves, just as the rod is succeeded by more severe chastisements. It was, then, the fact of humility in childhood that thou, O our King, didst approve as a symbol of humility when thou saidst, "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." (Confessions, Book 1, chapter xviii: 30).

Within Christian theology, and with this its implications for the history of Western society, when Augustine declared children from the moment of conception to be non-innocent he condemned them to eternal punishment (Stortz, 2001: 99). However his thinking on children was incredibly nuanced and it must be recognised that he rejected the romantic notion that children are born completely innocent and "born with a nature as pure as Adam's before the Fall" (Stortz, 2001: 100). He also refuted the view that infants are miniature devils in need of strict discipline. Furthermore Augustine brought into question the belief that children were miniature adults, and instead saw adults as grown-up children, which may provide insight into the ways in which children are viewed in society today.

Following Plato's philosophy and Augustine's theology, we move to literature in order to explore the pre-classical conceptions of childhood. Geoffrey Chaucer (1343-1400), often said to be the father of English literature, was the author of *The Canterbury Tales*, a

collection of stories which were told by pilgrims, as part of a story-telling competition. Chaucer uses children and reflections on childhood as a means to represent certain ideas within the stories, with one of these being the conflict between the desire for the unknowing and preserving of innocent awareness and the need for a knowledge of evil in order fight that defining ingredient of the adult world (Brockman, 1973: 43;Lampert, 2004). For example in *The Monk's Tale* Chaucer also speaks of the family's sufferings by pointing out the very young age at which the children died, "And with hym been his litel children thre; /The eldest scarsleyfyf yeer was of age" (2411-12). In the same story (2430-2438) Ugolino's starving three year old son addresses his father directly:

> His yonge sone, that thre yeer was of age,
> Unto hym seyde, "Fader, why do ye wepe?
> Whanen wol the gayler bryngen oure potage?
> Is ther no morsel of breed that ye do kepe?
> I am so hungry that I may nat slepe.
> Now wolde God that I myghte slepen evere!
> Thanne sholde nat hunger in my wombe crepe;
> Ther is no thyng, but breed, that me were levere."

Although perhaps overly sentimental such pleading reinforces the childish innocence which confronts the corrupt reality of the adult world (Brockman, 1973). In *The Physician's Tale* (65-71), Virginius mourns the fact that children grow up so quickly and that their innocence is soon lost:

> As is at feestes, revels, and at daunces,
> That been occasions of daliaunces,
> Swich thynges maken children for to be
> To soone rype and boold, as men may se,
> Which is ful perilous and hath been yoore,
> For al to soone may she lerne lore
> Of booldnesse, whan she woxen is a wyf.

In *The Physician's Tale* (218-222) Virginius not only laments the death of his daughter Virgina, but also expresses the joy that he gained from having raised her:

O dere doghter, endere of my lyf,
Which I have fostered up with swich pleasaunce
That thou were nevere out of my remembraunce!
O doghter, which art my laste wo,
And in my lyf my laste joye also,

A mother's love is also witnessed in *The Prioress' Tale* (586-596) when the mother is frantic over the loss of her young son (Cartlidge, 2006; Lampert, 2004):

This poure wydwe awaieth al that nyght,
After hir litel child, but he cam noght;
For which, as soone as it was days lyght,
With face pale of drede and bisy thoght,
She hath at scole and elleswhere hym soght,
Til finally she gan so fer espie
That he last seyn was in the Juerie.

With moodres pitee in hir brest enclosed,
She gooth, as she were half out of hir mynde,
To every place where she hath supposed,
By liklihede hir litel child to fynde;

Lastly in *The Prioress' Tale* (502-517) we also gain an insight into the everyday life of a medieval schoolboy, which on the face of it does not appear too dissimilar from the experiences of children today:

Among thise children was a wydwes sone,
A litel clergeon, seven yeer of age,
That day by day to scole was his wone…
…This litel child, his litel book lernynge,
As he sat in the scole at his prymer,

The last stage on this pre-classical journey, at the cusp of the classical period, we can see that children are evident in the work of William Shakespeare (1564–1616). As characters in plays, children are written about purposefully and bear an important impact on the dramatic realisation of the plays (Chedgzoy *et al*., 2007; Lawhorn, 2007; Partee, 2006). Although when children do appear it is more often than not as objects of

violence. Children have their throats cut, they lose their head, they are kidnapped by their father and apparently murdered, they are abandoned at sea, they are injured by their father's enemies, and they are sent to prison. Furthermore, themes relating to children and childhood are used by Shakespeare to evoke concerns about political stability, threats to authority, the continuation of community values, education, processes of maturation, moral training, pregnancy and childbirth, and employment. Children and family are seen as essential parts of the social fabric holding together domestic, societal and worldly order, consequently the relationship between parents and children is one which is addressed by Shakespeare quite frequently (Lawhorn, 2007).

Innocence is a key quality which Shakespeare associates with child characters. In *The Winter's Tale* children are seen as essentially innocent and uncorrupted. For example, when Polixenes, the King of Bohemia, recalls his childhood with his friend Leontes the King of Sicilia, he speaks of children as being sinless except for original sin, the human guilt inherited from Adam and Eve:

> …What we changed
> Was innocence for innocence. We knew not
> The doctrine of ill-doing, nor dreamed
> That any did. Had we pursued that life,…
> …we should have answered heaven
> Boldly, 'Not guilty', the imposition cleared
> Hereditary ours.
>
> (*The Winter's Tale,* Act 1, scene ii, 70-75).

Adults are called upon to protect children, as innocent beings, for their own sakes, as in *The Winter's Tale* when Antigonus (Act 2, scene iii, 166-167) is prepared to "pawn the little blood that (he) has left / To save the innocent" and in court when Hermione (Act 3, scene ii, 99) stresses her baby's guiltlessness, as well as her own, "The innocent milk in it most innocent mouth." However as well as this generalised appeal for the protection of children, it is important that children are protected from corruption, especially from adults. For example, in *Henry IV, Part 2* there is the question of whether Falstaff's page will survive the corrupting influence of the adult rogues with which he is placed, and

Bardolph jokes with Falstaff "An you do not make him hanged among you, the gallows shall be wronged" (Act 2, scene ii, 89-90) (Lawhorn, 2000, 2007).

As well as the innocence of children being a particularly strong theme in the works of Shakespeare, he also explores the relationships between parents and their children. For example, again in *The Winter's Tale,* Polixenes (Act 4, scene iv, 408-409) says that children are the main source of their parents' happiness, "The father, all whose joy is nothing else / But fair posterity." In particular is her father's identification with a female child, with this identification often occurring after some kind of loss of that child, whether by death or marriage (Fletcher and Novy, 2007).

Shakespeare highlights the good relationship that some parents had with their children, for example in *The Winter's Tale* (Act 1, scene ii) Leontes speaks affectionately about, and to, his boy, and sees himself in his son (Partee, 2006). In addition to this example of the good-natured relationship between parents and their children, in *King John* (Act 3, scene iv, 93-97) Constance is grief stricken by the terrible sense of loss over the apparent death of her son Arthur, and the pain and torture that she feels is clear as she says:

> Grief fills the room up of my absent child,
> Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me,
> Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,
> Remembers me of all his gracious parts,
> Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form;
>
> (*King John,* Act 3, scene iv, 93-97).

Shakespeare demonstrates that people cared deeply for their children, and that they would have felt compassion for Constance in this position, which is in opposition to the belief that higher rates of infant mortality at this time meant that parents had less emotional attachment to their children (Fletcher and Novy, 2007; Partee, 2006; Stone, 1997).

Furthermore, Shakespeare presents the expectation that parents would and should care for their children. This is made explicit in *Macbeth* (Act 1, scene iv, 23-25) when King Duncan thanks Macbeth for his gallant service in battle, and Macbeth replies:

…Your highness' part
Is to receive our duties, and our duties
Are to your throne and state children and servants

(*Macbeth,* Act 1, scene iv, 23-25).

Here Macbeth is expressing a common metaphor at the time in that a king cares for his people as a father cares for his children, with the flip side to this being that the people are supposed to act like obedient children.

Of course children are treated cruelly or even killed (in particular by their parents) in Shakespeare's plays, for example Macbeth kills his own children and his wife in *Macbeth,* the princes in *Richard III* are killed by their uncle, and in *King John* the king plots to murder his son Prince Arthur, which is only thwarted by the mercy of Hubert de Burgh, who cannot go through with the murder (Lawhorn, 2000, 2007; Blake. 1993). Such instances are used as a device by Shakespeare to evoke feelings of horror and disgust, as well as to highlight a particular character's evil nature, which in turn goes against the presumed innocence of children as identified earlier. Additionally, this can be seen in *Macbeth* (Act 4, scene 1, 30-31) when the three witches concoct their evil potion, and one of the ingredients to go into the cauldron is "Finger of birth-strangled babe/ Ditch-delivered by a drab." Whilst some of the ingredients of the witches' brew are almost humorous, this is truly horrifying because parents can be so evil that they will kill and mutilate their own children.

This section has examined the work of early philosophers, thinkers, and cultural commentators, in order to consider children and childhood in pre-Enlightenment times. Education of the child, in particular with regard to the future adult that the child will become, has had significant focus. The essential nature of the child, and the concept of 'original sin' has been shown to have a long history and will be further explored in the following section in which we shall examine the philosophical treatment of children and childhood in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century.

John Locke (1632-1734) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) were early modern contract theorists, promoting reason and freedom as essential components of political societies. Education is important to them both, however differences occur with regard to the way in which they view the relationship between nature and nurture, and the role of an educated person in society. Both thinkers begin their analysis by looking at children and prescribing the conditions necessary for a suitable childhood, consequently this is where our examination will begin.

### 1.2.1 John Locke

Through the ideas expounded in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690/1996) and *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693/1964) Locke presents an account of education, which has had an enduring impact upon the philosophy of education. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* Locke provides the first systematic presentation of a theory of mind which suggests that humans are born without innate ideas, in other words, that children are a *tabula rasa* or 'blank slate'. The child's mind at birth, according to Locke, is like "white paper, void of all characters" (book ii, chapter 1, §2). *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* explains how to educate this mind using three distinct methods; the development of a healthy body; the formation of a virtuous character; and an appropriate academic curriculum. Consequently Archard suggests that Locke provides us with "the earliest manifesto for 'child-centred' education", driven by his idealism and dedication to empirical study (Archard, 1993: 1, in James *et al*., 1998: 16-17).

*Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (TCE) begins by being very prescriptive about the daily life of a child.[2] Amongst other things it carefully details the types of fruit that

[2] This child is a 'young gentleman', nevertheless with the appropriate restructuring Locke did believe that such regulations may be applicable to females – "the principal aim of my discourse is, how a young gentleman should be brought up from his infancy, which in all things will not so perfectly suit the education of daughters; though where the difference of sex requires different treatment, 'twill be no hard matter to distinguish" (TCE, §6).

children should eat, the numbers of hours that they should sleep, and whether hats should be worn:

> And thus I have done with what concerns the body and health, which reduces itself to these few and easy observable rules: plenty of open air, exercise, and sleep, plain diet, no wine or strong drink, and very little or no physic, not too warm and strait clothing, especially the head and feet kept cold, and the feet often used to cold water, and exposed to wet. (TCE, §30).

Parents are obliged in *Two Treatises of Government* (1689/1988) to "take care of their Off-spring, during the imperfect state of Childhood" and must "inform the Mind, and govern the Actions of their yet ignorant Nonage" (chapter VI, §56). It is a parent's duty to raise their children properly, not only is this a natural concern of parents, but also necessary to ensure that their children become educated and virtuous adults:

> The well educating of their children is so much the duty and concern of parents, and the welfare and prosperity of the nation so much depends on it, that I would have every one lay it seriously to heart […] set his helping hand to promote everywhere that way of training up youth, […] which is the easiest, shortest, and likeliest to produce virtuous, useful, and able men in their distinct callings; tho' that most to be taken care of is the gentleman's calling. For if those of that rank are by their education once set right, they will quickly bring all the rest into order. (TCE, dedication).

Locke understands that children are reasoned beings and requires that "children are to be treated as rational creatures" (TCE, §54). As Locke comments, children "understand [reason] as early as they do language; and, if I misobserve not, they love to be treated as rational creatures, sooner than is imagined" (TCE, §81). It is important that parents treat their children as rational human beings, as this guides them towards good actions by means of their education, since, "nine parts out of ten are what they are, good or evil, useful or not, by their education" (TCE, §1). Although not always able to act in a rational way because of their limited language abilities, children will often recognise rationality in others, and parents are encouraged to develop this rationality within their children by helping them to engage with other people, and to learning from doing as well as from observation.

There are two qualities in particular which guide children the most – curiosity and liberty. Curiosity within children should be "as carefully cherished in children, as other appetites suppressed" (TCE, §108). A natural curiosity draws children away from the ignorance with which they are born. Their questions should be answered as appropriate and they should not be scorned at for asking seemingly trivial questions:

> [Children] are travellers newly arrived in a strange country, of which they know nothing; we should therefore make conscience not to mislead them. And though their questions seem sometimes not very material, yet they should be seriously answered; for however they may appear to us (to whom they are long since known) enquiries not worth the making; they are of moment to those who are wholly ignorant. Children are strangers to all we are acquainted with; and all the things they meet with, are at first unknown to them, as they once were to us: and happy are they who meet with civil people, that will comply with their ignorance, and help them to get out of it. (TCE, § 20).

Children, who according to Locke take pleasure in freedom, should also have a certain sense of liberty in their education, since when not compelled to do something, children will often readily enjoy it and be more likely to act in more appropriate manner:

> We naturally, as I said, even from our cradles, love liberty, and have therefore an aversion to many things for no other reason but because they are enjoined us. I have always had a fancy that learning might be made a play and recreation to children: and that they might be brought to desire to be taught, if it were proposed to them as a thing of honour, credit, delight, and recreation, or as a reward for doing something else; and if they were never chid or corrected for the neglect of it. (TCE, §148).

Like Plato, Locke also encourages parents to observe their children in order that they can identify and understand their children's distinctive preferences, since, "there are possibly scarce two children who can be conducted by exactly the same method" (TCE, §217). Once parents are aware of the particular ways of their offspring, it is their duty to direct them down the correct path and to adopt the most suitable methods of education as possible, "For as these are different in him, so are your methods to be different, and your authority must hence take measures to apply itself different ways to him" (TCE, § 102).

Parents should also love their children but at the same time punish and reprimand them as appropriate, in order that they do not become spoilt. Parents should however

avoid beating their children except in the most extreme circumstances. Furthermore, if it is necessary for a parent to physically punish a child, if possible the punishment should be performed by another person, such as a servant, under the command of the parent, "whereby the parent's authority will be preserv'd, and the child's aversion, for the pain it suffers, rather to be turn'd on the person that immediately inflicts" (TCE, §83). What is more appropriate is to recognise that "children (earlier perhaps than we think) are very sensible of *praise* and commendation" and use this to encourage them to behave in a certain way (TCE, §57, italics in original), most importantly however, "The sooner you treat him as a man, the sooner he will begin to be one" (TCE, §95).

### 1.2.2 Jean-Jacques Rousseau

In *Emile, Or On Education* (EM) (1991), first published in 1762, Rousseau provides a treatise on both the nature of education, and the nature of man. It examines the relationship between the individual and society and how in particular, the individual might retain the innate virtues of human goodness whilst remaining a part of the corrupting collectivity. Instead of being guided by societal norms, Rousseau unlike Locke, suggests that reason should be the quality which directs children by the time that they are ready to receive a formal education (around the age of 12). It is not societal expectations that will train children, rather freedom and independence of thought, cultivated by a naturalistic education.

Rousseau's description of early childhood gives primacy to a naturalistic upbringing which unlike Locke's does not rely on societal norms to direct the child. Furthermore, Rousseau views children as unable to reason. Rousseau also repudiates the notion of original sin in suggesting, "There is no original perversity in the human heart" (EM, 92). Naturalism is justified by Rousseau to be the most appropriate guide for education. Education is seen to come from three sources, "from nature, from men, or from things" (EM, 38), since nature cannot be controlled, it must determine the course of the other two in cultivating children. Children are seen as innocent, vulnerable, and weak, however education is believed to counter these deficits:

> We are born weak, we need strength; we are born totally unprovided, we need aid; we are born stupid, we need judgement. Everything we do not have at our birth and which we need when we are grown is given us by education. (EM, 38).

Locke's notion of the rationality of children is scoffed at by Rousseau:

> Locke's great maxim was to reason with children; and it is the most popular method at the present day. Its success does not appear to recommend it; for my own part, I have never seen anyone so silly as those children with whom they have reasoned so much. Of all man's faculties, Reason, which is a combination of the rest, is developed last and with greatest difficulty; yet this is the faculty which we are asked to use for the development of the earlier. It is the climax of a good education to form a man who is capable of reason; and we propose to educate a young child by means of his reason! This is beginning where we ought to end, and making the finished product an instrument in its own manufacture. (EM, 80).

It is not until the age of twelve that children should begin formal education, and until this time children should learn through experience, "Exercise body, senses, powers, but keep the mind inactive as possible. Let childhood ripen children" (EM: 42). This is based upon Rousseau's belief in empiricism:

> Since everything that enters into the human understanding comes through the senses, the first reason of man is a reason of the senses. On this the intellectual reason is based. Our first masters of philosophy are our feet, our hands and our eyes. (EM, 54).

The role of the educator is also very important for Rousseau. He believed that the child should be kept in ignorance of those ideas which are beyond his/her grasp at each particular stage in his/her development, for example, "Restrict, therefore, the child's vocabulary as much as possible. It is a very great disadvantage for him to know how to say more things than he can think" (EM, 74).

Rousseau identifies stages of the life course and prescribes the appropriate activities and education for each stage. These ideas are illustrated through a discussion of the child Emile and the education that he receives in order to be an ideal citizen. The first stage is infancy, which begins at birth and lasts until around two years of age. During this time parents should provide the child with all its physical needs, yet at the same time not give into its every whim. Among others things, appropriate food and clothing

are discussed, as well as the role of nurses, but ultimately a child should be encouraged to self-control over his natural tendencies:

> The only habit the child should be allowed is to contract none... Prepare from afar the reign of his freedom and the use of his forces by leaving natural habit to his body, by putting him in the condition always to be master of himself and in all things to do his will, as soon as he has one. (EM, 63).

The second stage, or 'The Age of Nature', is from around two to twelve years old. During this time the child should develop physical qualities and the senses, but not the mind. As a result of this 'negative education' which includes no verbal learning, nor moral instruction, the child will display the necessary qualities of being both eager and pleasant (EM, 93). Rousseau sums up this period quite succinctly, "Love childhood; promote its games, its pleasures, its amiable instinct" (EM, 79).

The third stage of childhood, that of adolescence, but before puberty, comes next (EM, 165). This lasts from around twelve to fifteen years of age. Now the child has an urgency to learn, and like Locke, Rousseau recognises curiosity as a driving factor, "At first children are only restless; then they are curious; and that, curiosity, well directed is the motive of the age we have now reached" (EM, 167). Importantly it is the tutor or parent who carefully manages this desire for learning in order to "never letting anything but accurate and clear ideas enter the brain" (EM, 171).

With the changes that occur in the physical body during puberty, the child is no more (EM, 211-212). As the boy becomes a man it is as if he is reborn as an adult, "We are, so to speak, born twice: once to exist and once to live; once for our species and once for our sex" (EM, 211). At this time Emile becomes "capable of attachment, he becomes sensitive to that of others", he is able to deal with emotions, as well as moral and religious issues.

Adulthood is attained around the age of twenty, when Emile is introduced to his ideal partner, Sophie. Through Sophie we also learn about the appropriate education for girls. Emile learns about love and his marriage duties, as well as foreign travel. Finally we are brought full circle, in the natural order of things, and Emile is to become a father. Emile is adamant that he will raise the child himself, yet although no longer a child, Emile will

always need his father for education and advice, "Advise us and govern us. We shall be docile. As long as I live, I shall need you. I need you more than ever now that my functions as a man begin" (EM, 480).

In sum, Locke and Rousseau both provide detailed accounts on the natural state of children and the most appropriate ways and means by which to educate children. Although the aims of these accounts differ they are both important in drawing attention to children within Enlightenment thought. A particular type of child emerged during this time, which Jenks (1996: 73) describes as the 'Apollonian Child'. This child is good and happy, innocent, angelic and sweet, and as Locke noted, is a blank slate 'untainted by the world which they have recently entered.' (Jenks, 1996: 73). This is in comparison with the wilful 'Dionysian' child, brimming with potential evil, which had stood before (ibid).[3] Before the seventeenth century children were seen to be evil, self-centred, bearers of sin, and a threat to themselves and society, as they were easily corrupted (Jenks, 1996; Meyer, 2007). A discourse of innocence which emerged with Romanticism saw children close to nature, pure, and innocent, who needed to be protected from adults (Meyer, 2007). Children began to be seen to have specific needs and valued and cared for as persons in their own right, not as the future adult that they would become (Jenks, 1996). The motif of the Apollonian and Dionysian child will be returned to in chapter seven when moderation as a feature of children's consumption practices will be explored.

## 1.3 ARIÈS AND THE ARRIVAL OF MODERNITY

*Centuries of Childhood*[4] (1962) by the French social historian Philippe Ariès, provides an account of the history of childhood from which has been highly influential and as Cunningham (1995: 5) suggests, "launched the debates on the history of children and

[3] The conceptualisation of children as either 'Apollonian' or 'Dionysian' will be returned to in chapter seven when moderation and children's consumer practices are examined.

[4] *Centuries of Childhood* was originally published in French under the title *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (1960), however it is the English version of the text which made Ariès known across Europe and the United States (Hutton, 2004). Furthermore, although Ariès draws upon French culture for the majority of his material "it is conventionally supposed that his thesis is generalisable in relation to the development of the rest of the modern Western world" (Jenks, 1996: 62).

childhood." Ariès lays out a trajectory of the development of childhood from the Middle Ages up to the present day, and although criticised, the idea that concepts surrounding childhood have not always been constant, has had a significant impact upon present day understandings of childhood.

Ariès locates the birth of the modern understanding of childhood, within the changing concept of the family, among the upper classes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. During the long transition period from the fourteenth and fifteenth century medieval family, to the modern family of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, children became the focus of the family's attention:

> The family ceased to be simply an institution for the transmission of a name and an estate – it assumed a moral and spiritual function, it moulded bodies and souls. The care expended on children inspired new feelings, a new emotional attitude, to which the iconography of the seventeenth century gave brilliant and insistent expression: the modern concept of the family. (Ariès, 1962: 396-397).

Focusing on attitudes, Ariès suggests that the ways in which childhood was envisaged in medieval society was fundamentally different to the childhood which emerged during the seventeenth century:

> In medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist; this is not to suggest that children were neglected, forsaken or despised. The idea of childhood is not to be confused with affection for children: it corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult. In medieval society this awareness was lacking. That is why, as soon as the child could live without the constant solicitude of his mother, his nanny, or his cradle-rocker, he belonged to adult society (Ariès, 1962: 125).

This childhood which came about by the end of the seventeenth century was formed of two concepts. The first was that parents began to take pleasure in their child's antics and enjoyed 'coddling' them. The second was, "the realization of the innocence and the weakness of childhood, and consequently of the duty of adults to safeguard the former and strengthen the latter" which arose from the beliefs of lawyers, priests and moralists at the time (Ariès, 1962: 316). Ariès based his conclusions on analysis of different aspects of children's lives from the medieval period onwards, with the portrayal of

childhood in paintings and children's dress gaining the most attention by commentators. During the seventeenth century, suggests Ariès, portraits of children on their own began to appear, and family portraits began to centre around the child, which Ariès uses to demonstrate that in the past conceptions of childhood were distinctively different:

> Medieval art until about the twelfth century did not know childhood or did not attempt to portray it. It is hard to believe that this neglect was due to incompetence or incapacity; it seems more probable that there was no place for childhood in the medieval world. (Ariès, 1962: 310).

With regards to clothing Ariès (1962: 48) suggests, "Nothing in medieval dress distinguished the child from the adult", it was only "At the end of the sixteenth century, custom dictated that childhood, henceforth recognized as a separate entity, should also have its special costume" (Ariès, 1962: 55).

Kinship and blood ties were very important in medieval society, with interdependency necessary for survival, however by the eighteenth century families had become a lot smaller, and there was a focus on immediate blood relatives. Whereas previously the high rate of infant mortality meant that, according to Ariès, parents did not become attached to their children, "People could not allow themselves to become too attached to something that was regarded as a probable loss" (Ariès, 1962: 37). It was not the individual child that was of concern, rather the need to have *some* children, "The general feeling was, and for a long time remained, that one had several children to keep just a few" (Ariès, 1962: 36). However with the greater use of contraception and improved rates of infant mortality, the focus of the family became centred upon a smaller number of children, who required the appropriate training for adulthood; this period of training being childhood.

Education also contributed to the new conception of childhood in family life. By the nineteenth century education of the young had become a public concern. Education became linked to upward mobility and individual wishes for self-improvement took precedence over social obligations to the whole family. Schooling became to be something which was specifically for children, and consequently childhood and adulthood became more distinct and further separated:

> The desire to bring education within the pupil's understanding was in direct opposition not only to the medieval; methods of simultaneity or repetition, but also to humanist pedagogy which made no distinction between child and man and confused schooling (a preparation for life) and culture (an acquisition from life). The separation of the classes therefore revealed a realization of the special nature of childhood or youth and of the idea that within that childhood or youth a variety of categories existed. (Ariès, 1962: 181-182).

Separation also occurred within the family household, which had once been the centre of sociability, it now became a refuge for privacy. As compensation for the diminishing role of the extended family, the nuclear family enjoyed deepening bonds of intimacy. Whereas previously the family had been "a moral and social, rather than a sentimental, reality" (Ariès, 1962: 356), from the seventeenth century onwards, "Everything to do with children and family life has become a matter worthy of attention. Not only the child's future but his presence and his very existence are of concern: the child has taken a central place in the family" (*ibid.*: 130).

To summarise, Ariès suggests that in medieval society the concept of childhood does not exist, however this is not to say that children were abandoned. It was only after the drop in mortality rates, and greater use of contraception, that the nuclearisation of the family around a child's potential could be developed. This encouraged children to be seen as innocent creatures that needed the protection of adults, which along with a more structured and standardised education, provided the right socio-environment to enable a change in attitudes and thus the emergence of new social forms.

There are criticisms of Ariès's work. Many of these criticisms begin by raising questions about his reliance on medieval paintings to explain such huge societal changes (Vann, 1982). Pollock (1983), for example, criticises the reliance on indirect evidence such as letters and paintings, and suggests that diaries, newspaper reports, and autobiographies are more useful in providing evidence of the way in which children and childhood were conceptualised at various points in history. Riché and Alexandre-Bidon (1994), drawing directly from illustrated manuscripts from the time, challenge Ariès' account that before the twelfth century children were not represented in art, for as they comment, "Adults very much like to see children play: that is why hundreds of manuscripts preserve the games and toys of the Middle Ages" (1994: 35, own translation). Beautifully illustrated

manuscripts and artefacts show that there was a place for children in the medieval world:

> Even babies have dishes and adapted furniture… They drink water from a tin bottle, and eat their porridge from a bowl, the most luxurious of which are decorated with letters of the alphabet. They sleep in cradles with a safety belt… They bathe in a little wooden tub, where they are left to splash about, attaching them so they do not risk drowning. (Riché and Alexandre-Bidon, 1994: 18-19, own translation).

Alexandre-Bidon and Lett (1999) in producing an account of the 'everyday life' of a child from the Middle Ages, document the lives of children in the fields, in the streets, in apprenticeships, in castles, and at school by "exploiting all the resources at [their] disposal" (*ibid.*: 2). These resources include a rich variety of written documents including "chronicles, civil and canonical law codes, penitentials, legal proceedings, lives of saints, accounts of miracles, novels" (*ibid.*: 2), as well as "numerous toys - small soldiers, miniature horses and boats, tea sets, dolls, rattles, wooden swords" (*ibid.*: 2-3), and other artefacts such as "baby's bottles, furniture, dishes, clothes, and jewelry" (*ibid.*: 3). Such iconography and examples of material culture demonstrate that an awareness of the particular nature of children was very much alive in the Middle Ages. Importantly, Alexandre-Bidon and Lett remind us that with regard to written documents these must be understood through the lens of the clergy that produced them, up until the thirteenth century at least, and that the child's voice is still very much missing from medieval accounts of childhood. A further criticism of Ariès, with regards to his dependency on children in art to provide substance for his wider claims about the history of childhood, is that it is incorrect "to try to read off attitudes to childhood from images which are relevant to the history of theology or of art, but not of childhood" (Cunningham, 1995: 31).

Lawrence Stone's (1974) review of *Centuries of Childhood*, "The Massacre of the Innocents" in the *New York Review of Books,* which Hutton (2004: 97) suggests is one of the most public criticisms of this work, draws attention to flaws in both Ariès's methods as well as some of his conclusions. For example, Stone criticises Ariès for his lack of attention to detail regarding class differences as well as questioning whether the rise of the child-focused, privatised family occurred in such a unilinear fashion. Consequently,

in *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (Stone, 1977), which focuses much more heavily on child-parent interactions, Stone attends to some of the differences in class which are absent from Ariès's work. Stone notes that from around 1660 to 1800 that there was "a remarkable change in accepted child-rearing theory, in standard child-rearing practices and in affective relations between parents and children" (Stone, 1977: 405). Such changes began in the middle classes, however by 1800, Stone suggests that there were six different modes of child-rearing, which were taken on board by members of the different classes to a lesser and greater extent. However like Ariès, Stone points to a change in sentiment, rather than structure, economics, or social organisation to explain the emergence of a new mentality with regards to children in England (Cunningham, 1995: 12; Hutton, 2004: 96).

Like Stone, de Mause (1975) also presents an alternative history of childhood to that of Ariès by drawing upon parent-child relations. In *The History of Childhood* (de Mause, 1975) de Mause presents a 'psychogenic' interpretation of history, which suggests that parent-child relations are a much greater force for change than even technological or economic changes. De Mause identifies six modes of parent-child relations – infanticidal, abandonment, ambivalent, intrusive, socialisation, helping – which bring us forward from sexual abuse and the murder of young children in the fourth century, to the present day, where parents spend a vast amount of time with their children, accommodating all their desires. It is the dialectical process which results from parents being able to regress back to the psychic age of their children, which helps them to sort through problems, which parents are able do much better second time around. Consequently, although new anxieties may rise, the distance between parent and child is lessened, which in turn brings about improvement. However, to use parent-child interactions to explain the course of human history is rather an ambitious task (Cunningham, 1995: 8).

Shulamith Shahar in *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (1990) provides evidence of both the theory and practice of pregnancy, childbirth, and child-rearing in medieval society, leading her to suggest:

> …that a concept of childhood existed in the Central and Late Middle Ages [1100-1425], that scholarly acknowledgement of the existence of several stages of childhood was not merely theoretical, and that parents invested both material and emotional resources in their offspring. (Shahar, 1990: 1).

This goes against Ariès's belief that there was a distinct change in society regarding attitudes to children and education which brought about this new phenomenon of childhood. Shahar however presents a picture of childhood in the Middle Ages which suggests that although there were some practices, attitudes and behaviours which were particular to the medieval society, there has been a degree of continuity regarding the way in which childhood has been understood. A theory of the continuity of childhood is also presented by Steven Ozment (2001) in *Ancestors: The Loving Family in Old Europe,* in which he criticises the notion of the 'revolution in sentiment' as presented by Ariès and Stone, and also of Shorter (1975). For Ozment the modern sentimental family has existed as far back in time as there are the appropriate sources to document it.

Finally, accusations of anachronism can also be directed at Ariès in that he attempts to explain the present by comparing it with the past, and in fact French society did not lack an awareness of childhood, rather it lacked *our* awareness of childhood (Wilson, 1980). More sympathetically Hutton (2004: 99) suggests that what Ariès actually sought to show was that "privileging the present moment as a historical frame of reference makes one more sensitive to the ways the past differs from it."

In identifying the problems with regards to Ariès's use of evidence, in particular in the light of Alexandre-Bidon and Lett (1997), I am in agreement with Cunningham (1995: 40) that "Ariès's rash assertion that 'in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist' cannot be sustained." Ariès's contention that childhood, as a distinct period in the life course and which only emerged during the Middle Ages, has been refuted. Consequently it has been acknowledged that childhood should be viewed as a continual but ever changing social construction. Overall, as Hutton (2004: 110) suggests *Centuries of Childhood* is "a book to think with", and it provides a starting place for the many theories on the history of childhood.

## 1.4 SUMMARY

This chapter has located children and childhood within an historical context. The classical philosophy of Plato and the teachings of Saint Augustine, as well as literature from Chaucer and Shakespeare, demonstrate that there has long been an interest in understanding the essential nature of children. This is further developed in the work of John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau who both expound on the correct education and training of children and the essential nature of children. Work by all of these authors has had an important impact upon understandings and conceptualisations of children and childhood right up until the present day. However it is the work of Ariès (1962) which had the most significant impact on the way in which modern theorists not only understand historical conceptions of children and childhood, but childhood in general. The work of Ariès for the first time draws into whether childhood has always existed. Although there are criticisms of Ariès' methods, work by Riché and Alexandre-Bidon (1994) and Alexandre- Bidon and Lett (1999) on the depictions of children on iconography from the Middle Ages provides evidence that childhood in a certain form existed in the Middle Ages. Consequently, in understanding the historical dimensions of childhood it is useful to turn to the words of Jenks (1996: 48) who reminds us that, "A history of childhood then, is not regarded as a description of a succession of events, rather it is seen as providing the moral grounds of current speech about the child, and the family, and the unfinished business or unwritten story of the contemporary adult."

In placing the categories of children and childhood within an historical context this serves to assist in achieving one of the aims of the thesis – to understand more about children's lives. By recognising the historical context of understandings of children and childhood this lays the foundations for the contemporary study of these two categories as will be further developed in the following chapter which explores contemporary models of children and childhood. Furthermore the work of Plato and John Locke will be called upon once more in chapter seven in relation to understanding both the essential nature of the child and moderation, as well as the related characteristics of temperance, restraint, and excess.

# CHAPTER 2: CONTEMPORARY MODELS OF CHILDREN AND OF CHILDHOOD

Leading on from the previous chapter which examined children and childhood in their historical context, this chapter seeks to provide an analysis of contemporary models of both children and of childhood. The previous chapter has shown that childhood is an area of contention within sociological inquiry, with studies of childhood "often suffer[ing] from an unclear definition and operationalisation of childhood" (Shanahan, 2007: 423). This chapter aims to identify and examine the concepts of children and of childhood, as well as some of the theoretical frameworks which help to constitute children and childhood. We begin with theoretical approaches from developmental psychology and socialisation theory. Following this, the 'new sociology of childhood' will be explored. Finally, the work of William Corsaro and his theory of 'interpretative reproductionism' will be examined and suggested to be the most appropriate theoretical framework for this research on children's consumption practices. Firstly however, clarification of the categories of both children and of childhood will be provided.

## 2.1 CATEGORISATIONS OF CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD IN EDUCATION AND IN LAW

It is important to understand how both children and childhood are constituted in contemporary models of these very same categories, as it allows us "to distinguish between children as human beings and childhood as a shifting set of ideas" (Cunningham, 1995: 1). The literature has often conflated children - the living, breathing, social actors who inhabit the temporal, social and cultural space of childhood - with childhood itself (Shanahan, 2007). Such conflation tends to lead to children being used as a theoretical means to support and perpetuate particular theoretical models and certain versions of humankind, rather than seeing children as social actors in their own right (James *et al*., 1998; Jenks, 1996; Shanahan, 2007; Wyness, 2006). One reason for this is our familiarity with 'children' and 'childhood':

> The problem with childhood as an analytical term is that it is too familiar. We have all been children; we all know children; some of us have had children, brought them up or taught them. We all 'know' what we mean by child and childhood. (Davin, 1999: 15)

In order to avoid this conflation, this thesis, from the outset, intends to examine and question taken-for-granted assumptions about both children and childhood.

One way by which we can answer 'what is a child?' is by 'age', which involves two interconnected categories, numerical age and developmental age (incorporating physical, emotional, and cognitive development). This in turn informs a third area of definition, that pertaining to the legal (Harden *et al*., 2000). The case of compulsory education serves to illustrate these points.

In Britain compulsory schooling is until the age of sixteen, or more specifically, in England and Wales, "a person is no longer of compulsory school age after the last Friday of June of the school year in which their 16th birthday occurs[5]" (HM Revenue and Customs, 2010a). Thus, from the age of sixteen onwards full-time work is permitted. Such legal definitions help to inform our understandings of childhood and consequently we are presented with the situation in which adults work and those who do not are children. Our understanding of what a child 'is' is dependent upon what a child is not, as Levison (2000: 129) writes, "We have defined work as adult, therefore it is not-child, therefore children who work are violating the boundaries of clearly defined adult/child spheres." As the Rabbi Stephen S. Wise said at the Sixth Annual Conference on Child Labor in 1910, "The term child labor is a paradox, for when labor begins…the child ceases to be" (Wise, 1910: 1 in Zelizer, 1994: 55). Children are seen to go to school, whereas adults go to work. Although the straightforwardness of this process must not be overstated[6], when 'child' and 'adult' become enshrined in law, it serves to create and reproduce the perceived differences of children and adults and thus differentiate who is a child and who is an adult (James and James, 2004).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is often taken as a guarantor of childhood until the age of eighteen (Melchiorre, 2004: 3). Article 1 declares

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[5] The Department for Education and Skills has announced that from 2015 onwards it intends to extend the compulsory school leaving age to eighteen (Directgov, 2007).

[6] For example, although laws exist against child labour in the UK, as Hobbs *et al*. (2007: 418) have pointed out "Work by school-age children is widespread" and also that, "The legislation put in place to protect working children is ineffective."

that, “a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (Article 1, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). The latter part is however a limitation which weakens the convention and provides justification for differing interpretations and practice. It is an acknowledgement that the age of majority, is not the same in all countries (Melchiorre, 2004). For example, even within Great Britain, the age of majority differs; it is eighteen in England and Wales, but only 16 in Scotland (HM Revenue and Customs, 2010b). The ‘age of majority’ refers to the age at which an individual assumes ‘majority control’ over his/her person, decisions and actions. Up until this point a person has had ‘minority control’, with parents or guardians exercising majority control. The age of majority must not be confused with the age of license, which is the age at which one has legal permission from the government to do something, e.g. drive a car or vote. Consequently, although the CRC and the laws around majority suggest that individuals under the age of eighteen are children, the age of license suggests that there are certain instances where individuals are allowed to have and are deemed competent enough to have control over their actions, behaviour and decisions. An example is that of marriageable age, which illustrates that the age of eighteen as the age that one relinquishes childhood and assumes adulthood, can be seen to be arbitrarily constructed. Such an example also serves to illustrate the global and gender differences which are related to the distinction between ‘adult’ and ‘child’, based upon an analysis of the age of majority and acts of licence:

Table 1 Marriageable age according to country and gender.

| Country | Marriageable Age | |
|---|---|---|
| | Females | Males |
| Austria | 15 | 18 |
| Chile | 12 | 14 |
| Kuwait | 15 | 17 |
| Turkey | 14 | 18 |
| Vietnam | 18 | 20 |

(Adapted from Melchiorre, 2004: 9)

However, in the search to recognise the socially constructed nature of childhood, the biological features of children have often been glossed over and ignored. As Shanahan (2007: 414) writes, "Biology has been bracketed. Indeed, biological (natural) aspects of childhood are increasingly framed as unnatural or deviant." James and James (2004: 18) also recognise, the "materiality of the biological base of childhood is a cultural universal" and that there are certain biological characteristics that differentiate children from adults (James, 1998: 62-65; James *et al*., 1998: 59).

Children are also often seen as 'human becomings', that is to say adults in the making, rather than 'human beings', young human beings in their own right (Cross, 2009; Holloway and Valentine, 2000; Lee, 2001; Uprichard, 2008). This notion of the 'becoming' child is fixed in theories concerning both children and childhood (James and Prout, 1997). However by focusing on the 'being' child, the temporality of the 'becoming' child has been lost, as Uprichard (2008: 306) writes:

> 'Looking forward' to what a child 'becomes' is arguably an important part of 'being' a child. By ignoring the future, we are prevented from exploring the ways in which this may itself shape experiences of being children. (Uprichard, 2008: 306).

Furthermore, Qvortrup (2004: 269) reminds us that anticipating adulthood is part of what it means to be a child. Consequently Uprichard (2008: 309) suggests that, "The key is to achieve a working balance between the temporal constructs of 'being' and 'becoming' without diminishing the humanity or the personhood of every human being, child or adult." In recognising children as both 'beings and becomings', characteristics such as dependency or competency, which are usually attributed to adults *or* children, may more explicitly be understood as dualistic constructions which should be deconstructed (James *et al*. 1998; Lee, 2001; Uprichard, 2008).[7] It is more useful to see both adults and children as both 'being and becoming', as it helps to bridge the conceptual gap which sees children as different to adults.

## 2.2 CONCEPTUALISING CHILDHOOD

> Childhood is a cultural concept, being a child is a stage of life rooted in biology. The meaning of childhood is deeply embedded, in a family, a particular culture, and the social conditions of a specific time and place. These multiple vectors of meaning make childhood both a telling social indicator and a peculiarly complex topic. Even within the family the meaning of childhood changes with age, gender, and family size; between families with location, income, and status. (Grew, 2005: 850).

The legacy of Ariès - that childhood is a social construction – means that it is no longer possible to think of childhood as a universal biological stage in the life course. Childhood is a diverse set of cultural ideas, which vary through time and across cultures, and which are made manifest in a variety of cultural settings (James and James, 2004; James *et al*., 1997; James and Prout, 1997; Jenks, 1982, 1996; Qvortrup, 1994; Wyness, 2005). Childhood is not merely a 'natural' temporal space that children occupy on their way to becoming adult but rather a "more or less purely social and cultural phenomenon, marked by its spatial and historical variability" (Prout, 2005: 57). As Jenks (1996: 61) comments:

[7] Issues of child versus adult competence as relating to matters of consumption, as well as the ways in which children negotiate their everyday lives as both beings and becomings, will be discussed further in chapters six and seven.

> Childhood is not a brief physical inhabitation of a Lilliputian world owned and ruled by others, childhood is rather a historical and cultural experience and its meaning, its interpretations and its interests reside within such contexts. (Jenks, 1996: 61).

Childhood, or more specifically childhoods, like children, are constituted through particular discourses – whether this be from specialists in fields such as paediatrics, psychology and sociology, or from more commonsense and everyday meanings (Murphy, 2007: 105). These commonsense understandings of both children and childhood mean that theories and positions are not always contested, and the naturalness of children and of childhood is often taken for granted (Jenks, 1996). Furthermore, since childhood is often seen as a 'social good' it makes both the questioning and conceptualisations of childhood prone to ambiguity (Shanahan, 2007). This ambiguity can be seen in the way in which childhood may be conceptualised through different but connected discourses in contemporary British society, for example the discourses of evil, innocence and rights (James *et al*., 1998). The predominance of different discourses changes over time, with the discourse of evil having substantially given way to the discourse of innocence, and more recently, the discourse of rights has gained momentum (Meyer, 2007). Furthermore, different discourses tend to constitute different social issues. For example in relation to crime, Meyer (2007: 87) suggests that when children are the victims the prevailing discourse is innocence, but when children are the perpetrators of crime the discourse of evil may be invoked.

Childhood can also be made meaningful by recourse to particular types of children, that is to say ideal types or 'motifs' of children, for example the 'Dionysian' and the 'Apollonian' child (Jenks, 1996). Such constructs of the child also invoke discourses surrounding the evil and the innocent child. Briefly, the 'Dionysian' child, Jenks (1996) suggests, is based on the assumption that children are born with an inherent bias towards evil rather than to good. This is linked to the Judaeo-Christian doctrine of original sin, which as we have seen in the previous chapter, sees babies and children as lacking both restraint and an awareness of others' needs. Childhood for the Dionysian child is a time of strict socialisation, with a battle by parents to 'break' the headstrong

and stubborn nature of children, albeit for their own good (Jenks, 1996: 71). The image of the Dionysian child is contrasted with that of the Apollonian child:

> Such infants are angelic, innocent and untainted by the world which they have recently entered. They have a natural goodness and a clarity of vision that we might 'idolize' or even 'worship' as the source of all that is best in human nature. (Jenks, 1996: 73).

Apollonian children are seen to have a natural goodness and self-control which needs to be encouraged, with adults responsible for this, by providing the setting in which individuality and potential can flourish. Apollonian childhood is a time of nurture, protection and enablement, as opposed to the controlled and constricted childhood in the Dionysian model. These motifs are immensely powerful, and may be used as an example of the way in which over time, children and childhood have come to form part of the strategy in Western societies of controlling, socialising, and constraining people in the move towards modernity (Jenks, 1996: 74).

Children are seen to protect against the loneliness of modernity (Shanahan, 2007: 415). Consequently the maintenance of childhood, or particular forms of childhood, is important to adults. This is particularly important as happiness in childhood is seen to secure happiness in adulthood (Jenks, 1996). Consequently, adults place increasing amounts of social and emotional value on children (Beck, 1992; Zelizer, 1994).

Childhood, that is to say particular forms of childhood, may also be used by adults for their own ends, whether it be legal, political, emotional, or cultural, and by individuals, groups of people, companies, or governments, for example. Childhood, for example, may be used to frame the discussion on same-sex marriage (McCreery, 2008), banning smoking in cars (Stephenson, 2009), and the proliferation of CCTV (Waiton, 2009). In doing so, adults also may believe that they are acting in 'the child's' best interests, where 'the child' comes to stand for all 'children'. As James and James (1998: 14) comment, "A singular term, 'the child', is often used to represent an entire category of people – 'children'." Consequently the differences between individual children such as ethnicity, economic background, geographical location are ignored, and the living, breathing child, as a social actor is replaced by the 'child' who conveniently stands in for individual children in theoretical discussions (Cook, 2003a).

Taking into consideration these comments, this thesis aims to move towards a greater understanding of children and consumption, without losing sight of the individual children who as social actors constitute the category 'child'. In keeping with the aims of this chapter, having outlined the most significant contemporary discourses surrounding children and childhood, the following sections will examine some of the significant theoretical frameworks in which these discourses are located. We shall begin with developmental psychology.

## 2.3 DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY AND PIAGET

Developmental psychology is a branch of psychology which looks at progressive psychological changes in humans as they get older, including the development of motor skills, problem solving, language acquisition and identity formation, to name but a few. Developmental psychology focuses not only on development in the early stages of the life course, but also refers to the psychological changes that take place within the individual across the entire lifespan, including adolescence, adulthood, and old age. Jean Piaget (1972: 26) describes developmental psychology as "the study of the development of mental functions."

If one of the aims of this chapter is to place our understandings of children and childhood into a theoretical framework, it may seem strange to look at developmental psychology which has been criticised for "producing explanations of children as potential subjects, whose presence is understood only in terms of their place on a path towards becoming an adult" (Walkerdine, 2004: 96).[8] Developmental psychology can however help us to further understand the discourses and practices in which childhood is produced (Henriques, 1998; Walkerdine, 2004). For example, the specific conditions - historic, social, and economic - in which claims are made about children's development "are not timeless and universal scientific verities but are produced at a specific historical moment as an effect of power" (Walkerdine, 2004: 100).[9]

[8] See, for example, Buckingham, 2000; Prout and James, 1997; Lee, 2001, for criticisms of developmental psychology.

[9] Also see Foucault (1979) for his discussion on 'conditions of possibility'.

It is also important to acknowledge the contribution made by Jean Piaget (1951a, 1951b, 1972, 1999, 2002) whose developmental approach to understanding children, "transformed the field of developmental psychology" and "once psychologists looked at development through Piaget's eyes, they never saw children in quite the same way again" (Miller, 1993: 81). The work of Piaget has "had an immeasurable impact upon the everyday common-sense conceptualization of the child" (Jenks, 1996: 29), and the paradigms that have been produced by developmental psychology, (along with Parson's theory of socialisation), have established and monopolised the child in social theory. Piaget's commitment to the measurement, ranking, monitoring, and grading of children attempted to reconcile the 'naturalness' of Rousseau and Locke's child with the post-Enlightenment concern with empiricism and rationality (James *et al*., 1998). Piagetian influences can also be found later in this thesis in section 4.4, when consumer socialisation theory is explored. Here we see the legacy of the belief that children move in a linear fashion through distinct stages is maintained in the argument that children develop particular consumer skills as they move from incompetent to competent consumer. Furthermore, Piaget's methods were particularly useful in that they encouraged researchers to note down not only children's 'correct' answers but all the responses that they gave in the course of them being observed or questioned (Flavell, 1996; Miller, 1993).

Previous to Piaget our understanding of children's development was dominated by behaviourism and psychoanalysis. Although completely opposed, they share one essential feature, which is that children are seen as passive recipients of their upbringing, with neither approach giving much credit to the child in shaping his or her own development (Slater *et al*., 2003: 42). However Piaget's assimilation-accommodation model of cognitive growth emphasises the active, constructive nature of the child (Flavell, 1996). This model of adaptation through assimilation and accommodation is a gradual, step-by-step process. Assimilation is the process by which human beings take material into their minds from the environment around them, which may mean changing the evidence of their senses to make it fit, and accommodation being the difference made to one's mind or to concepts by the process of assimilation. Although either assimilation or accommodation may predominate at any given time

they are inseparable from each other and form a dialectic relationship - we assimilate the world around us, but at the same time our minds have to adjust to accommodate new information.

Piaget's model of development is based upon the self-regulation of interaction, between the child's physical and social environment, which gives rise to new forms of knowledge. Like natural selection of new species in evolution, where new forms of life arise from pre-existing ones under the influence of pressures from the environment, those species that adapt to the new environment survive. By analogy, new forms of knowledge arise through development because they are better adapted to the environment (Harris and Butterworth, 2002: 25).

Piaget described four main stages in the development of intelligence and thought (Piaget, 1999). These are the sensorimotor period which appears before language, the preoperational which occurs between about two and seven years, the concrete operational stage which is from seven to around twelve years of age, and the formal operational stages of intellectual development which occurs after twelve years of age. The notion of 'stages of development' has had such an impact on the way in which we have come to understand children that parents will claim that it is just a stage that the child is going through (Wyness, 2006). These are clearly definable stages which lead from low status, 'figurative' thought through to the 'operative' intelligence of adults (Jenks, 1996: 23-24):

> The four principal stages of the development of intelligence of the child progress from one stage to the other by the construction of new operational structures, and these structures constitute the fundamental instrument of the intelligence of the adult. (Piaget, 1999: 42).

Once again it is 'the child', the singular child which appears in Piaget's work (Prout and James, 1997). This 'child' stands for all children, and represents all children from infancy to adulthood:

> The history of the child's intellectual development is largely the history of the progressive socialisation of its individual thought, at first resisting adaptation to social conditions. Then becoming increasingly penetrated by surrounding adult influences. (Piaget, 1951a: 28).

Piaget may also be criticised since children often have certain cognitive abilities much earlier than he says that they do, and newborn babies have rich and abstract representations of various aspects of the world (Gopnik, 1996; Siegler and Ellis, 1996). Furthermore, the importance of social interaction and language in cognitive development was underestimated by Piaget. However as Gopnik (1996) reminds us, Piaget was interested in children's development because he wanted to answer epistemological questions about children, and not necessarily explain how children develop. Instead he wanted to see what these changes could tell us about the origins of knowledge. Agreeing with Jenks (1996: 27), Piaget fails to see children's play as anything more than trivial activity, describing it thus, "Play is primarily mere functional or reproductive assimilation" (Piaget, 1951b: 87). This is because Piaget emphasises assimilation over accommodation:

> If every act of intelligence is an equilibrium between assimilation and accommodation, while imitation is a continuation of accommodation for its own sake, it may be said conversely that play is essentially assimilation, or the primacy of assimilation over accommodation. (Piaget, 1951b: 87).

The problem stems from setting children's play against that of the rational adult, Piaget fails to appreciate the importance of the expressive nature of children's play and the insight that it gives into children's worlds (see, for example, Evaldsson and Corsaro, 1998).

To summarise, it is necessary to acknowledge the impact that the work of Jean Piaget has had on the field of developmental psychology, and consequently the impact that this has had on our knowledge of the nature of the child, and how children come to know the world. However in exploring the work of Piaget and developmental psychology we are made aware of the problems associated with this theory, namely its belief in clear, distinct, stages of development, and the over-reliance on 'the child' who comes to stand for all children. Nevertheless these ideas have held some sway in traditional theories of consumer socialisation as will be explored in section 4.4 of this thesis, and where it will also be suggested that commercial enculturation may be a more appropriate theory in which to situate children's engagement with consumer culture. But first we shall explore socialisation theory and the model of the socially developing child provides a

transition, a 'theoretical bridge', from the presociological, naturally developing child, to the sociological models which follow (James *et al*., 1998: 23).

## 2.4 SOCIALISATION THEORY

Socialisation can take two forms, the transmission of culture and also the process of becoming human. It is used to describe the way in which children learn to conform to social norms (Danziger, 1970; Elkin and Handel, 1972; Handel, 2005; White, 1977). Socialisation is seen as the internalisation of social constraints, in which the norms of society become internal to the individual, as a consequence of external regulation. As a result of this, the child's individual personality shares the same characteristics as society itself. As Talcott Parsons, the most influential exponent of socialisation theory explains:

> The term socialization in its current usage in the literature refers primarily to the process of child development… socialization, like learning, goes on throughout life. The case of the development of the child is only the most dramatic because he has so far to go. However, there is another reason for singling out the socialization of the child. There is reason to believe that, among the learned elements of personality in certain respects the stablest and most enduring are the major value-orientation patterns and there is much evidence that these are 'laid down' in childhood and are not on a large scale subject to drastic alteration during adult life. (Parsons, 1951: 207-208).

Theories of socialisation provide understandings of social order, social stability and social integration, and have long been important in sociology. The child is central to socialisation, as society is built upon the premise of established rules and behaviour, with the necessary rules and conditions for this society transmitted to children in order to promote the ongoing continuation of the society:

> All sociologies, in their variety of forms, relate to the childhood experience through theories of socialization, whether in relation to the institutional contexts of the family, the peer group, or the school. These three sites are regarded as the serious arenas wherein the child is most systematically exposed to concerted induction procedures. It is here that the child, within the social system relates as a subordinate to the formalized strategies of constraint, control, inculculation and patterning which will serve to transform his or her status into the tangible and intelligible form of an adult competent being. (Jenks, 2004: 85).

Parsons, drawing upon Freudian theory and Durkheim's earlier formations, was central to socialisation theory which emerged in the 1950s and 1960s (Wyness, 2006: 128). Parsons' ideas on the social system and its subdivisions followed on from Durkheim's belief that everything in society can be explained and understood in terms of social factors. Durkheim (1961) saw that children are socially unformed and that they have primitive instincts which need to be brought under control by the forces of socialisation. Children are seen to be predisposed to socialisation, since imitation and repetition are seen to come naturally to children. However at the same time, children are seen to be unpredictable and unstable. It is this inconsistency and volatility which acts as a pretext for requiring adult intervention, however fortunately, according to Durkheim (1982), this 'wild', irrational behaviour can be channelled and disciplined, since children are viewed as naturally open to the suggestions of others. Although Durkheim (1961: 146) recognised the role that parents play in the socialisation of their children he felt that they were unlikely to instil in children the necessary broad moral framework, and consequently he highlighted the importance of teachers as professional authority figures.

Parsons also follows Freud in constructing his model of children as becomings, and sees the child as made up of primitive 'erotic' instincts (Hamilton, 1983; Jenks, 1996; Parsons, 1964). Physical and emotional dependence means that children start to internalise the dominant culture of the world around them and acquire the capacity for regulated independence. For Parsons the social system and its subsystems are a series of ordered constraints on the individual. His theory of socialisation is a theory of how these constraints, act on individuals. Socialisation can be seen as something which is imposed on children by adults. Parsons sees that individual actors with their idiosyncrasies and wilful action, share similarities across the whole of the social system with other individuals and their particular personalities. Furthermore, there is a presumed and assumed universality in the experience of childhood. There is a generalised understanding of the child in part because he or she only has access to limited ways in which to demonstrate his or her intentionality, which Parsons refers to as 'pattern variables' (Parsons, 1951; Parsons, 1964; Parsons and Shils, 2001). In this way children are determined by structure rather than coming into being through agency:

> Essentially the social system is finally dependent upon the successful capture of total personalities. This capture eclipses the possibility of individual divergence, dissolution, dissent or difference. The system is fed by the compliant personality of its members and must, perforce, consume children. (Jenks, 1996: 18-19).

In other words to be a child is to be socialised and "socialisation is thus a unilateral imposition of the adult world on children" (Wyness, 2006: 128). Within this model however, children and their opinions and experiences are ignored and neglected. As we shall see in the next section, it is only with the 'new sociology of childhood' that children, as social agents, are brought into the analysis.

The concept of socialisation theory will also be returned to in section 4.4 which explores consumer socialisation and presents an alternative to consumer socialisation theory – namely 'commercial enculturation'. Commercial enculturation recognises the aforementioned problems associated with socialisation theory such as the view that children become competent consumers as they pass through a distinct series of linear phases or that children have little influence in shaping their interactions with consumer culture or society in general. Instead commercial enculturation suggests that children are not so much socialised into being a specific kind of consumer rather they develop and maintain social relationships with goods, markets and other consumers, a process which informs childhood and market relations.

## 2.5 THE NEW SOCIOLOGY OF CHILDHOOD

The 'new sociology of childhood' emerged during the mid-1980s as researchers began to take the study of children and childhood seriously (Matthews, 2007) (see for example, Alanen, 1988; Ambert, 1986; James and Prout, 1990, Jenks, 1982; Qvortrup *et al*., 1994). It arose from a growing awareness of the need to take children - their lives and their experiences – seriously, and that it was worthy of sociological analysis.

A 'new' sociology of childhood implies that there already exists a branch of sociology which deals with childhood – that is to say, an '*old* sociology of childhood'.[10] As the

[10] The term the '*new* sociology of childhood' may however be viewed as a misnomer since can something which was developed around twenty-five years ago, in the mid-1980s, still be classified as 'new'? Despite

discussion on socialisation and of developmental approaches has shown, previous conceptualisations of childhood have focused too heavily on the socialisation of children, as they progress in a linear fashion from the pre-social infant to the fully competent adult, with sociologists generally only paying attention to the future adults that children will become (Ambert, 1986). The focus has also been on individual children rather than on the peer groups, familial contexts and social settings in which children are located. The setting up of the 'normal' child, and the stages appropriate to his or her development, presumes that 'the child' can stand for all children and all childhood experiences. Furthermore, in the 'old sociology of childhood' the role which children play in constructing their own lives and the lives of others in the society in which they live, is also not fully recognised (Corsaro, 1997). Consequently, the aforementioned problems associated with the old sociology of childhood will be examined, and the ways in which the new sociology attempts to address these problems will be highlighted.

### 2.5.1 The Plurality of Childhood

Socialisation theory and developmental psychology have presented children as if they are all the same regardless of context and social location. This is particularly so in the case of developmental theories which have promised to find universal truths about 'the child'. Such approaches establish specific, scientific norms, regarding children, in which the individuality of children is ignored. The new sociology of childhood however seeks to emphasise the plurality of childhoods by taking into consideration context, time and place. This serves to reiterate the point that 'child' is not a natural category, and what a child is and how childhood is experienced is a result of adult conceptions and not natural, pre-given, categories (Mayall, 2002). Not only are there numerous childhoods

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this, the 'new sociology of childhood' is still referred to in the literature, for example in the latest volume of the Journal of Childhood, there are three studies which specifically detail the fact that they are conducting research within the vein of the 'new sociology of childhood', (see Bak and von Brömssen, 2010; Rysst, 2010; Sirriyeh, 2010). It would be foolish and erroneous to continue in the same manner just because others do so, however this study continues to refer to the 'new sociology of childhood' in order to make clear that it adheres to the ways of conducting research with children set out by theorists with a clear dedication to understand children and their own social worlds, over two decades ago. Consequently, the quality of 'newness' that the new sociology of childhood refers to, has less to do with novelty and more to do with distancing itself from former practices.

as a result of the different social and geographical contexts in which children are located, but within any given context there will be multiple childhoods. Furthermore, children may experience several different formulations of childhood, throughout their childhood.[11]

### 2.5.2 Children and Power

One way in which the new sociology of childhood attempts to understand children and their worlds is by recognising the power relationships in which children are situated. For instance children are often located in relationships where adults, such as teachers, parents, doctors, and politicians, no matter how compassionate they are, have power over children. This, coupled with the fact children are classified as 'not adult', means that they are consequently locked into a period of dependency and inferiority – 'childhood' (Mayall, 1994). This period of dependency, coupled with a lack of power, may be a better way of understanding childhood, rather than as a period of socialisation (Jenks, 1996: 43).

An understanding of the role that power differentials can play in the lives of children (and adults) contributes to in-depth empirical and theoretical evidence on the lives of children, as well as opening up some of the taken-for-granted assumptions of socialisation and developmental approaches to childhood. It also brings into question the scope of the new sociology of childhood, on the one hand is it sufficient for it to document the relationships of power in which children are embedded, and on the other hand whether it should campaign and actively seek to change the position of children in society (Wyness, 2006).

### 2.5.3 Children's Competence as Social Actors

One of the major concerns surrounding socialisation as a framework for understanding children is that it depicts children as passive recipients of the culture in which they are born (Matthews, 2007: 324). However, children do not simply adopt the culture of the

[11] Research which examines the plurality of childhoods and of childhood experience, covers a wide range of topics, for example caring for parents with mental health problems (Aldridge, 2008), rural and urban childhoods (Nairn *et al*., 2003), and childhood prostitution as abuse or work (Montgomery, 2009).

adults who are socialising them, but use it to create their own peer cultures (Adler and Adler, 1998; Corsaro, 2003). Consequently the new sociology of childhood emphasizes the reflexive capabilities of children in constructing their own social worlds.

It was not a priority of the old sociology of childhood to take into account the voices of children themselves as it was presumed that they were not yet fully socialised, and were not able to adequately describe their own lives. For as Matthews (2007: 327) writes, previously, "Others have been allowed to speak for children, effectively silencing them." Accordingly, the new sociology of childhood has sought the most appropriate methods, which allow children to speak freely and promote the listening to their words, in order to gather data concerning children's experiences of social life. Indeed, a large amount of the literature in the new sociology of childhood focuses on the most appropriate ways in which to collect and interpret data on children's lives (Matthews, 2007: 368) (see for example, Christensen and James, 2000; Davis, 1998; Fraser *et al*., 2004; Greene and Hogan, 2005; Lewis *et al*., 2004; Tisdall *et al*., 2009). A much more detailed account of the methods favoured by the new sociology of childhood will be provided in chapter five, the methods chapter of this thesis. However it is important at this stage, to underline the importance that the new sociology of childhood gives to methods which do not privilege adults' views and give primacy to the points of view, actions, behaviours, and beliefs of children, in the most appropriate way possible. The new sociology of childhood also seeks to make children visible within research on the family, and especially within demographic data (Qvortrup, 2004). Lastly, the new sociology of childhood seeks to address issues that arise from concerns about the extent to which children are (not) able to consent to take part in the research process (Cocks, 2006).

We must however be wary of the 'sentimentalisation' of children's agency (Wyness, 2006: 237). The sociology of childhood has concentrated its efforts on asserting the right of children to be heard in social and sociological terms. In doing so, locating children within the research community may become an end in itself rather than a means to understand children's lives and their relationships with others. Nevertheless, in establishing that the new sociology of childhood hears the voices of children, it does not necessarily mean that children are now taken seriously in others area of social life, or that children have now been emancipated from their relatively powerless position in

society. Consequently, in agreement with Wyness (*ibid*.: 327) the most useful starting point for research on children and childhood will be when "the process of researching with children is normalised."

### 2.5.4 New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood

In an attempt to give a voice to children in the study of childhood Prout and James (1997: 8) set out a new paradigm for the sociology of childhood. This paradigm has six key features:

- Childhood is a social construction, which provides an interpretive framework for contextualising the early years. Childhood is neither natural nor universal.
- Childhood is one unit of sociological analysis, and it cannot be separated from other variables such as race, class, and gender. There is no one single childhood but rather *childhoods.*
- The experiences of children, as well as their relationships and cultures are worthy of analysis in their own right and not in relation to adults' actions or the adults that children will become.
- Children are active participants in the construction and determination of their own lives, the lives of those around them and the societies in which they live, and this must be recognised.
- Ethnography is a particularly useful methodology for the study of childhood.
- Childhood is one example in which the double hermeneutic of the social sciences is particularly apparent, which means that by proclaiming a new paradigm of the sociology of childhood one is also involved in responding to and engaging with the process of constructing childhood in society.

The extent to which there has been a paradigm shift within the current study of childhood is queried by Ryan (2008). Ryan (2008: 555) not only calls into question the use of the term paradigm or epistemology by researchers in the field of childhood studies, but also provides an alternative history of ideas about childhood, and reorders

our present day understanding of children. Although the contributions made by theorists such as Buckingham (2000) and Thorne (1993), who depict children as social actors, and encourage us to think more critically about childhood as a complex set of ideas are recognised, Ryan suggests that one of the central tenets of the new sociology of childhood is to see children as competent social agents. However this is based upon one of the "inescapable frameworks" of the modern worldview, that of the child-adult distinction, and this dualism unhinges the other two tenets of the new sociology of childhood (Ryan, 2008: 556). These other two tenets are that childhood is not a natural phenomenon and should be understood as a political and cultural construction, and second that children are active agents in constructing their own way of being. Seeing children as competent individuals is problematic as Ryan explains:

> …any discussion of individuals in such terms always presupposes the subject-object and politics-nature dualisms of modern thought. Viewed in this light, a field that purports to see children as actively participating in the construction of their own childhood cannot possibly transcend modern dualism. (Ryan, 2008: 556).

Ryan suggests that the modern dualisms (for example, natural vs. political construction) which provide the distinctions between adult and child versions of personhood are crucial to the analysis of modern thought, however in claiming that it attempts to do away with such dualisms, the new sociology of childhood sets itself up for an impossible task. For example, suggests Ryan, James *et al*.'s (1998: 206) "Map of the New Social Study of Childhood" purports to show the "new paradigm" of the study of childhood as opposed to previous "pre-sociological" ways of seeing children. However Ryan views this as problematic as what he describes as the third tenet of the new sociology of childhood, that (competent) personhood emerges through the child-adult distinctions of modernity does not fit with this map. Consequently, Ryan (*ibid*.: 558) draws out four theories (social actor, romantic developmentalism, socialisation, and positive-scientific developmental) and the children which he sees are located within these theories (the political child, the authentic child, the conditioned child, and the developing child). It is appreciated that Ryan brings to our attention some of the problems associated with the new sociology of childhood, and in particular, if we are to view children as social actors who actively construct their own lives, we must also recognise the dualistic

environment, and all the associated complications, in which children construct and live their lives. However this model, which Ryan (2008: 558) describes as, "The Landscape of Modern Childhood", merely serves as a template for Ryan to review the literature on the history of childhood, and not necessarily provide a more nuanced understanding of childhood. Consequently it is his closing comments, that children are located within "a paradoxical position as an object of knowledge and a subject who knows", thus children are studied yet at the same time are deemed capable of informing adults of their thoughts, feelings, and opinions, that has most significance for researchers exploring the paradigm of the new sociology of childhood (Ryan, 2008: 576).

## 2.6 CORSARO AND INTERPRETIVE REPRODUCTIONISM

Having established that a new paradigm for the sociology of childhood emerged during the 1980s, as a consequence of the growing awareness by sociologists of the need to examine children's lives as social actors, as well as the desire to develop understandings and conceptualisations of the categories of children and childhood, we shall now turn to the work of William Corsaro (1985, 1992, 1997, 2003) who achieves this through the synthesis of the theoretical and empirical debate on children and childhood. Corsaro presents 'interpretative reproductionism' as a framework for the study of children's lives, a framework which is the most appropriate for achieving the aims of this thesis - which is to provide a detailed snapshot account of children's engagement with consumer culture. Firstly this means an account which recognises children's agency in co-creating their social words, in that they do not stand outside of culture waiting to be ushered in, rather they are in and of culture and society. Secondly this entails the use of research methods which facilitates children to tell of their thoughts, opinions and experiences.

Corsaro's (1985) *Friendship and Peer Culture in the Early Years* is one of the first studies to examine children's perspectives and to understand the conceptual differences between children's and adults' culture. It is an ethnographic study of peer interactions with particular focus on socialisation and children's language. Corsaro builds upon this commitment to expose and understand the creative aspects of children's peer culture and in *The Sociology of Childhood* (1997) presents interpretive reproduction as a

framework for understanding the innovative and creative aspects of children's participation in society and the way in which children actively contribute to cultural production and change.

Corsaro's starting point is his criticism of the socialisation process, of which he identifies two different models – the deterministic model and the constructivist model. The deterministic model, in which society appropriates the child, has at its core the dilemma which was identified above in the section on socialisation theory – that the way in which individuals relate to society is of crucial importance, yet at the same time society is a powerful determinant of individual behaviour, with the only solution to this conundrum being the appropriation of the child by society. In this case the child is trained to become a competent member of society who contributes to its ongoing well-being. The child here maintains a passive role and consequently the model is known as the deterministic model. However within this deterministic model Corsaro identifies two subset models – the functionalist model and the reproductive model. Briefly, the functionalist model sees order and balance in society with an emphasis on training children to fit into and contribute to that order. On the other hand, the reproductive model looks at the conflicts and inequalities in society and suggests that children have differential access to different types of training and other societal resources (see also Bernstein, 1981).

Although a reproductive theory is useful in acknowledging inequality and conflict in the socialisation of children, both functionalist and reproductive theories focus on children's limits to cultural reproduction and ignores their potential for change. The importance of children's activities are not recognised or are deemed inconsequential and of no use. Furthermore, both subsets of the deterministic model fail to recognise that children do not simply internalise the society in which they are born. However by turning our attention to the constructivist perspective we see children that are conceptualised in a more active role.

The constructivist model sees the child appropriating society. It sees children as active agents and eager learners, with the child actively constructing his/her own social world and place in it. It is heavily influenced by developmental psychology, and especially the

work of Jean Piaget (1972) and Lev Vygotsky (1978) and their analysis of the cognitive development of children. Unfortunately however, the communicative events that children are a part of, their interpersonal relations, and the collectively reproduced cultural patterns which are created, are ignored. Once again the endpoint seems to be adult competence. Such a model is ultimately rather pessimistic, as Corsaro (1997: 17) comments, "Constructivism offers an active but very lonely view of children."

Although sociological perspectives of socialisation place emphasis on the collective and communal aspects of social life, Corsaro suggests that this is not enough to construct a new sociology of childhood (1997: 18). Not only is it necessary to adapt to society and internalise its core features, but an appreciation of the processes of appropriation, reinvention, and reproduction is important, thus Corsaro offers the notion of interpretive reproduction:

> The term 'interpretive' captures innovative and creative aspect of children's participation in society. Children produce and participate in their own unique peer cultures by creatively appropriating information from the adult world to address their own peer concerns. The term 'reproductive' captures the idea that children do not simply internalize society and culture, but also actively contribute to cultural production and change. The term also implies that children are, by their very participation in society, constrained by the existing social structures and by social reproduction. (Corsaro and Fingerson, 2003: 129-130).

Interpretive reproduction sees children as being involved in a reproductive, non-linear, relationship with their cultures. Children do not simply imitate or internalize the world around them, but instead strive to make sense of it and to participate in it. This reiterates the fact that children are always participants in two intricately interwoven cultures – that of children and of adults. Consequently it is necessary to constantly shift between micro and macro levels of children and childhood (Corsro, 1997: 27). Furthermore, childhood is viewed as a social construction which results from the collective actions of children with adults and with each other. Corsaro identifies and acknowledges three types of collective action which make up interpretive reproduction:

- Children's creative appropriation of information and knowledge from the adult world.
- Children's production and participation in a series of peer cultures.
- Children's contribution to the reproduction and extension of adult culture.

(Corsaro, 1997: 41)

Such an approach, which does not merely focus on childhood as a training period for the adults that children will become, helps to reaffirm that childhood is a structural category:

> [childhood] is a category or a part of society, like social class or age groups. In this sense children are members or incumbents of their childhoods. For the children themselves childhood is a temporary period. For society, on the other hand, childhood is a permanent structural form or category that never disappears even though its members change continuously and its nature and conception vary historically. It is somewhat difficult to recognize childhood as a structural form because we tend to think of childhood solely as a period when children are prepared for entry into society. But children are already part of society from their births, as childhood is part and parcel of society. (Corsaro, 1997: 4-5).

Children are already a part of society from birth and their childhoods are a part of a given society, a society which has been affected by historical change, change which children themselves are party to and may even actively bring about. For example, research by the ESRC's Family and Social Capital research group points to the fact that children play a key role in strengthening local communities and making adults feel safer in their neighbourhoods (Weller and Bruegel, 2009).

Language and cultural routines are particularly important to interpretive reproduction. Language is central to children's participation in their culture, as it encodes the necessary social and cultural structures, and at the same time maintains and creates social realities. The habitual, taken-for-granted cultural routines that children participate in, provide children and other social actors the stability and shared understanding of belonging to a common social group. The predictability of cultural routines provides a framework within which "a wide range of sociocultural knowledge can be produced, displayed, and interpreted" (Corsaro, 1997: 19) (see also Corsaro, 1992; Giddens, 1984; Goffman, 1974).

Interpretive reproduction allows us to move beyond "*cognitive* awareness to a deep *emotional* appreciation of children's memberships in their peer cultures" (Corsaro, 1997: 92). Peer culture is defined as "a stable set of activities or routines, artefacts, values and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers" (Corsaro, 2009: 301). Peer culture is very important to Corsaro as he sees this as the arena in which language and cultural routines can be played out, and is the location for one of the three forms of collective action associated with interpretive reproduction. See for example Corsaro and Molinari (1990) and Corsaro (2003) for their analysis of *discussione* and *cantilena* in the routine language exchanges of Italian nursery school children. Vignettes such as 'the kitties and two husbands' and 'the garbage man' provide solid examples of the way in which the framework of interpretive reproduction may be used to both gather information on children's experiences and to understand the way in which this is interpreted and experienced by children themselves (Corsaro, 1985, 2003).[12]

For Corsaro (1997: 44) visualising children within the framework of interpretative reproduction is useful in that it "challenges sociology to take children seriously and to appreciate children's contributions to social reproduction and change." However visualising children in this way is not only beneficial to the sociology of children and childhood but is valuable to children themselves in that their wants and needs are understood more clearly and their participation in social life is appropriately recognised.

The sustained insights brought to us as a consequence of Corsaro's work has had a positive impact on the sociological study of children and childhood. The notion of children as "co-constructors of childhood and society" is particularly important, in that children do not only create and reproduce their own culture, but they contribute to the culture of adults and of society in general. Interpretive reproduction as a theoretical approach has been used by various researchers to explore many aspects of children's lives, as well as the lives of many children. Explicit examples include Poveda and

[12] The particular methods which Corsaro suggests are the most appropriate for an interpretive reproduction approach will be discussed further in chapter five, the methods chapter of this thesis (however see Corsaro and Fingerson, 2003; Gaskins, Miller, and Corsaro, 1996).

Marcos' (2005) analysis of the conflict between a group of Gitano and non-Gitano children in Spain, Hadley and Nenga's (2004) discussion of the way in which Taiwanese children use popular media to enact, refute, and explore traditional Confucian values, and Scott's (2002) discussion of African-American girls' friendships. Lastly, Matthews (2007) reiterates a point made by Jens Qvortrup (1998) in his review of the first edition of Corsaro's (1997) *The Sociology of Childhood*, that the work of Corsaro is particularly useful in that it helps American audiences face up to alternative ideas to socialisation theory, which has been slow to happen in the USA in comparison with Europe.

## 2.7 SUMMARY

'Children' and 'childhood' have been shown to be socially constructed categories, based upon specific cultural, geographical, and historical understandings. This was exemplified through an examination of the law and education. Although the biological differences between children and adults are recognised, developmental psychology and the work of Piaget has been shown to be unsuitable for fully understanding children and childhood. In such an approach all children are seen to develop along the same trajectory based upon biological age, which does not allow for variety in human experience. Furthermore 'the child' is seen to stand for all children. The model of the socially developing child, socialisation theory and the work of Talcott Parsons was also explored. In such an approach the adult social world is imposed upon the child without giving any recognition to the ways in which children are active participants in the co-construction of their social worlds. As highlighted in the introduction to this thesis, one of the aims in conducting this research is to provide an account of children's relationships with consumer culture, in which children's thoughts and experiences are at the fore of the investigation. Consequently the new sociology of childhood which recognises the plurality of childhood experience, the relationships of power in which children are situated, and children's competence as social actors was then explored. Lastly interpretive reproductionism, as introduced by Corsaro, which challenges sociology to take children seriously and to appreciate children's contributions to social reproduction and change, was identified as the theoretical framework of this thesis.

# CHAPTER 3 – CONSUMPTION AND CONSUMER CULTURE

## 3.1 OVERVIEW

The first chapter provides a culture-historical analysis of children and childhood and documents the movement towards modern conceptions of children and childhood. The second chapter provides an analysis of contemporary models of children and childhood. This third chapter covers the work of the major theorists and the key concepts on issues relating to consumption and consumer culture. It is important to introduce the main themes here as they provide the foundations for the discussion of children's consumer practices in later chapters.

The historical development from production to consumption, as seen through the work of Marx, leads the discussion on how consumption has become an inevitable feature of consumer society. From commodity fetishism, through critical theory and the work of Marcuse, to the work by Baudrillard on the sign-value of consumer goods, this chapter demonstrates that it is unsurprising that consumption is a key feature of children's lives since consumption is such a central feature of what it means to be a citizen (Cook, 2010; Pugh, 2009).

The belief that consumption is harmful, to the individual and/or society in general, is also introduced in this chapter in relation to the work of Marcuse and his critical theorist approach to consumer society. As will be explored later in this thesis, but in particular in chapter six, one of the common discourses of children's consumption is that consumption is damaging and exploitative to children. Since the foundations of this belief can be found in the critical theorist approach to consumer society, it is useful to examine this theory, as well as highlighting any shortcomings and problems associated with such an approach.

Veblen's work on conspicuous consumption, as well as the related work by Simmel on fashion, is introduced in this chapter as this provides one of the first discussions on clothing and fashion, recognising that clothing may also be used to distinguish oneself from others or to signal allegiance to a particular social group. As will be demonstrated in chapters six and seven, the children in this research project had a sophisticated

relationship with clothing and fashion and also used this to identify themselves as different or the same as other children. Furthermore the criticisms which are levelled at Veblen, for example that conspicuous consumption is not straightforward emulation, help to lay the foundations for a deeper exploration of children's consumption at a later stage. Children do not just wish to emulate their friends and peers in relation to consumption, other factors such as gender, religion, parental influences, and how children experience their bodies, whether they are differently shaped, sized or abled, all contribute to a child's experience of fashion.

Bourdieu is examined in this chapter as his work on distinction, social capital, and habitus, provides one of the most influential accounts of consumption. His work opens up the question as to whether children's consumption practices are a result of their parents' taste and the role played by habitus in defining children's consumption practices. This paves the way for discussion in chapters four, six and seven whether or not children are born into or are socialised into consumer practices

## 3.2 INTRODUCTION TO CONSUMPTION THEORY

In the 18th century the political economist Adam Smith (1723 – 1790) suggested that consumption is:

> …the sole end and purpose of all production and the interest of the producer ought to be attended to, only so far as it may be necessary for promoting that of the consumer. The maxim is so perfectly self-evident, that it would be absurd to attempt to approve it. (Smith, 1937: 625)

However if we move the debate forward nearly 300 years, consumption is no longer just about the buying and selling of goods and services but also about the desiring and acquiring of these goods and services and the subsequent meanings that they impart, which gives significance to our everyday lives. Consumption is a particular field of practice in everyday sociality, which combines the satisfying of needs with expressions of identity. Consumption covers not only activities of buying but also social relations connected to provision, use and disposition of goods and services. Consumption is seen as an active process, often enjoyable, and also enacts our civic duties as consumers (Baudrillard, 1998; Mackay, 1997). Furthermore, both modern and postmodern

accounts of consumption see that consumer culture is the arena par excellence in which identities are constructed, crafted, and reconstructed (Bourdieu, 1984, 1990; Campbell, 1987; Dunn, 2008; Featherstone; 2007, Giddens, 1991; McCracken, 1988; Miller, 1987; Sassatelli, 2007, among others).

In order to trace this development of the different conceptualisations of consumption, we shall begin with an analysis of consumption with the work of Marx, Veblen and Simmel. This is not to suggest that consumption, in terms of the buying or selling of goods did not exist before the beginning of the 19th century.[13] Instead if consumption was discussed at all, it was in the ways seen in the quotation above from Adam Smith, rather than in relation to the prepurchase, purchase, and postpurchase of commercial objects (McNeal, 2007: 10).

It is important to note that as this chapter develops there will be a movement from 'consumption' taken to mean, and used in such a way as to refer to the antithesis of 'production', through to the everyday acts through which we construct our identity (Mackay, 1997). Consumption is the act that is at the very heart of 'consumer culture', and is seen as a process *and* an endeavour in presenting and maintaining social prestige, status, relations, and the self. As Slater (1997: 29) comments, consumer culture is "the privileged medium for negotiating identity and status within a post-traditional society." Consumer society is deeply interconnected with 'modern' society, and to speak of one, is to incorporate the other (Lury, 1996: 29). Furthermore, consumer society is not just the next logical step in the development of late capitalism, rather consumption has "actively participated in the development of the capitalist system" (Sassatelli, 2007: 13). Consumer society is a cultural response to economic changes in society, however in order to fully appreciate this we first must explore 'consumption':

[13] Sassatelli (2007: 21) for example highlights Sombart's (1928) account of the development of a new type of society which grew up in Italy, and then later Germany, Holland and England, in the 14th century. This society was no longer based on the feudal economy, rather trade with, and exploitation of colonies were crucial to the development of capitalism. Fairchilds (1998) also provides a review of consumption in the pre-industrial period.

> An apparently simple catch-phrase such as 'consumer culture' may be used as a fetish to ignore the contested genealogy of the subject-consumer and the complex economic and cultural processes which underpin consumption. Studies of consumption appear to have reached maturity as to open up and problematize this notion. (Sassatelli, 2007: 198).

## 3.3 FROM COMMODITY FETISHISM TO CONSPICIOUS CONSUMPTION

### 3.3.1 Marx and Commodity Fetishism

In Marx's own words:

> A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. So far as it is a value in use, there is nothing mysterious about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it is capable of satisfying human wants, or from the point that those properties are the product of human labour. It is as clear as noon-day, that man, by his industry, changes the forms of the materials furnished by Nature. The form of wood, for instance, is altered by making a table out of it. Yet, for all that, the table continues to be that common, every-day thing, wood. But, so soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to dance of its own accord. (Marx, 1954: 76).

For Marx, processes of consumption are instrumental in isolating citizens from their own humanity. Under capitalism, goods are not simply consumed according to their use-value, goods are also seen as objects of a desire that goes well beyond use value: Rolex watches or Ugg boots for example. This is what Marx meant when he spoke of other worldly powers that go beyond everyday use for these objects. This is the fetishisation of commodities. The goods themselves are detached from the labour that has gone into making them and the labourer him or herself who has crafted the object, instead the value of these objects lies within its exchange-value, and as later theorists such as Baudrillard develop, its symbolic value.[14]

[14] Marx's recognition of commodity fetishism had earlier roots. McKendrick (1982: 1-2) identifies the 18th century as a period of intense change, suggesting that there was a "consumer revolution in eighteenth-century England" since, for the first time, individuals not only had the desire to consume but

What interested Marx was the fact that a social relation between people became transformed into a relation between things: the things became the reality as labour power disappeared into them, and so objects began to rule our relations with each other (Corrigan, 1997: 35). Commodities thus become examples of the alienated social relations between people, and because of the developmental logic of capitalism and its search for profit at every opportunity, goods are no longer produced for their use-value alone but primarily for their exchange-value.[15] Marx said very little about consumption in itself. He understood consumption in terms of food, shelter, safety, procreation - rather than our understanding of cultural forms and symbolic acts (Mackay, 1997; Paterson, 2006). There might of course never have been a golden-age of endearing use-value relationships between producers and consumers (Gottdiener, 2000a; Paterson, 2006); but Marx assumed that consumption should be at the heart of relations between workers and the things that they produced, and that the 'natural' relationship between the two had been perverted (Paterson, 2006).

Marx's argument is still relevant today (Corrigan, 1997; Gottdiener, 2000a; Paterson, 2006). Goods are fetishised. They are "bought in the belief that they can enhance the purchasers' abilities to attain their desires for sex, success, notoriety, uniqueness, identity or a sense of self" (Gottdiener, 2000a: 4). As Gottdiener goes on to say, "People see themselves and others through the possession of commodities." Furthermore, Marx's work is crucial in that he laid the foundations for "an ontology of consumer

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the ability to do so, which led to the 'birth of the consumer society'. Fashion, and its constantly changing nature, became important as the ability to consume grew, and individuals sought to clothe themselves, decorate their homes, read, and even rear their animals, in the latest and most fashionable way. The line from economic growth to the cultivation of the Romantic ideal of the individual in eighteenth century England is also significant (Campbell, 1987). This distinctively 'modern' attitude towards material culture sees novelty, and hedonistic "imaginative pleasure-seeking" as the reason for the development of new cultures of consumption (Campbell, 1987: 89). Alternatively, the rise of consumer society may also be traced back to late 17th century Holland and the increase in the purchase of commodities despite the decrease in real terms in wages (Sassatelli, 2007). People in the countryside, as well as in the cities, instead of acting 'rationally' and saving and reducing their expenditure, they worked longer hours as producers in order that they could be consumers. Accordingly, monetary exchange became more reliable and freer, which provided the opportunity for birth of the consumer society. Also see Sassatelli (2007: 15-19) for a development of this discussion.

[15] Goods not only have use value and exchange value, but they possess a third value, that of sign value (see the discussion on Baudrillard below). As Gottdiener (2000a) suggests, what is useful in Veblen's work is that this sign value is made explicit.

society and culture by laying bare the fundamental material and social dynamics of this structural transformation" (Dunn, 2008: 24). Marx's critique of commodity fetishism was developed and expanded upon by Georg Lukács (1971) and the concept of 'reification', where reification replaces 'rationalisation' as the central feature of modern development. This concept of reification, and the resultant unchanging and unchangeable social reality, extends the concept of alienation from production to consumption, and highlights the interconnected nature of commodity culture (Dunn, 2008: 28).

### 3.3.2 Veblen and Conspicuous Consumption

Thorstein Veblen (1857–1929) took Marx's notion of fetishisation and examined the associated processes more closely. Like Marx, he looked at the effect of industrial capitalism on social life, and began to produce a theory of consumption. The key concept that Veblen (1970) introduced, in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, was 'conspicuous consumption.'[16]

Consumption provides the perfect platform through which to differentiate ourselves from others. Although the upper classes and labourers are distinguished from each other based upon economic differentiations, it is through their consumption practices that social differentiation becomes visible. For Veblen, conspicuous consumption is characterised by waste. 'Waste' here should not be seen negatively but refers to excessive consumption which goes beyond the everyday usefulness of goods and practices. Waste is seen as emblematic of honour, wealth and social status, waste is a way of life (Veblen, 1970: 78).

What is important is 'emulation'. As Veblen (1970: 35) comments, "The motive that lies at the root of ownership is emulation." The lower classes will see something that is used and celebrated by the upper classes and then seek to obtain these goods or practices for

16 Veblen also identified 'conspicuous leisure', that is being free from the need to work, as well as conspicuous consumption as being another way in which it was possible to demonstrate one's wealth and status within society. However because it was easier to demonstrate conspicuous consumption, especially through the clothes that one would wear, it is the idea of 'conspicuous consumption' that has become so closely associated with Veblen (Gottdiener, 2000a; Paterson, 2006.)

their own use. This perpetuates the circle of conspicuous consumption, as those in the top echelons of society will always be seeking to differentiate themselves from the lower reaches, whilst those lower down in society will be striving to use and obtain those goods that they see those above them using:

> The leisure class stands at the head of the social structure in point of reputability; and its manner of life and its standards of worth therefore afford the norm of reputability for the community. The observance of these standards, in some degree of approximation, becomes incumbent upon all classes lower in the scale. In modern civilized communities the lines of demarcation between social classes have grown vague and transient, and wherever this happens the norm of reputability imposed by the upper class extends its coercive influence with but slight hindrance down through the social structure to the lowest strata. The result is that the members of each stratum accept as their ideal of decency the scheme of life in vogue in the next higher stratum, and bend their energies to live up to that ideal. On pain of forfeiting their good name and their self-respect in case of failure, they must conform to the accepted code, at least in appearance. (Veblen, 1970, 70).

As Veblen (1970: 36) also comments, "possessions then come to be valued not so much as evidence of successful foray, but rather as evidence of the prepotence of the possessor of these goods over other individuals within the community." There is need amongst all classes to demonstrate respectability or "good repute", based upon pecuniary strength. For Veblen public display of possessions serves two roles, firstly it satisfies the psychic need for social acceptance and at the same time provides an important means of displaying class distinction. The goal becomes to reach higher than others, however this is generally impossible since unless you are at the very top rung of society's ladder you never will never be able to reach the top as the markers for this are continuously changing, which leads to a state of "chronic dissatisfaction" (Veblen, 1970: 70). The futile attempt to try and improve one's reputation by using commodities as status markers is a manifestation of the social contradiction which is inherent in 'open' systems of stratification (Sassatelli, 2007). Conspicuous consumption also helps us understand the phenomena of consumption which escapes the rational logic of maximum utility at minimum cost:

> If, as is sometimes assumed, the incentive to accumulation were the want of subsistence or of physical comfort, then the aggregate economic wants of a community might conceivably be satisfied at some point in the advance of consumer efficiency; but since the struggle is substantially a race for reputability on the basis of an invidious comparison, no approach to a definitive attainment is possible. (Veblen, 1970: 39).

Veblen's ideas were developed by Galbraith in *The Affluent Society* (1958), however contrary to Veblen who located the frustration of desire within the process of social comparison, Galbraith saw status competition as self-defeating because as long as production levels rise there will be a continual transformation of the material goods which delineate status. Vance Packard's (1960) *The Status Seekers* examined the growth of new forms of status behaviour in the US. Like Veblen he saw that the visible distinctions between the classes were brought about by the growth in economic affluence. Packard noted, that ironically, the growth and spread of affluence in the 1950s increased anxiety related to one's position in the social hierarchy, and a desire to consume more and in ways which would re-establish this hierarchy.

Veblen's work is important in that it helps to bring together economics and sociology, yet there are criticisms. One criticism of Veblen is that he assumes that everyone is in agreement over which practices or goods are the ones that are worthy of emulating. Furthermore he tends to assume that the lower classes straightforwardly wish to emulate the upper classes (Paterson, 2005). This problem arises as a result of Veblen's lack of empirical research to support his theory of conspicuous consumption (Campbell, 1987, 1995; Mestrovic, 1993; Tilman, 2002, 2006). However Veblen does recognise the hard work that is involved in choosing which consumer goods to emulate, "In order to avoid stultification he [sic] must also cultivate his tastes, for it now becomes incumbent on him to discriminate with some nicety between the noble and the ignoble consumable goods" (Veblen, 1970: 64). Veblen (*ibid*., 81-82) also recognises that the process whereby particular goods or fashion 'trickle down' and become the 'must-haves' for a particular section of society happens slowly and is dependent upon how far a particular social group is from topmost echelons of society. We must also question the relevance of the theory of conspicuous consumption to today's society. For example, since the Second World War there has been a dramatic increase in the availability of mass produced consumer goods as well as an increasing movement towards greater

conformity. The pressure was no longer to keep up with the people in the social classes above you, rather it was 'to fit in' with those from your own class in society (Dunn, 2008: 40; Schor, 1998: 8).

Unfortunately, Veblen focuses upon the fact that certain goods signal difference, rather than what differences are signalled, or how this happens (Campbell, 1987, 1995). As Sassatelli (2007: 68) comments, "it is not only the *existence* of a difference, but also the *nature* and *character* of the difference between cultural categories that fashion signals." Furthermore there is a focus on public acts of consumption, which leads to matters of private consumption being seen as pre-cultural (Sassatelli, 2007). As will be discussed further, Bourdieu (1984) in his refinement of Veblen's thesis, contends that social differences are reproduced and not only affirmed through consumption. Particular tastes which may appear unique to our individual selves can be seen as having shared social origins.

As we will see later in this chapter Veblen's ideas were an important precursor to Baudrillard's (1970) analysis of consumer culture and of Bourdieu's (1984) work on distinction (Gottdiener, 2000a; Paterson, 2005; Schor, 2007). It is also the case that Veblen's work can be connected to that of Georg Simmel. Veblen had suggested that there was a simple trickledown logic to social emulation, but Simmel, in his 1904 essay 'Fashion', takes this point further, discussing both imitation and differentiation (Corrigan, 1997; Paterson, 2005). Simmel explores the tension between consumption as a marker of wealth and status group identity, and consumption as an expression of individuality.

### 3.3.3 Georg Simmel

Georg Simmel (1858 – 1918) provides us with further understanding of emulation, in particular in relation to fashion, the city, the value of things, and of desire for consumer goods. As modernity was established, suggests Simmel, the consumption of luxuries, which had previously been the privilege of the upper-classes, became an area of disciplined practice, under the guise of 'fashion'. Simmel (1971: 299) reiterating Veblen's original insights, suggests that the latest fashion:

> affects only the upper classes. As soon as the lower classes begin to copy their style, thereby crossing the line of the demarcation the upper classes have drawn and destroying the uniformity of their coherence, the upper classes turn away from this style and adopt a new one, which in turn differentiated them from the masses; and thus the game goes merrily on. (Simmel, 1971: 299).

Simmel notes that fashion is particularly suited to the middle classes, rather than the upper-classes who can rely on traditions and long-standing styles, and the less well off who have less time and money with which to create and develop a style (Simmel, 1971, 1997).

The processes involved in taste formation and fashion dissemination are accelerated in the city, where the cycle of display and consumption is more rapid. In *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (1997), Simmel discusses the way in which the city is made and maintained through our social interactions and practices, and in particular through consumption. The abundance of sights, colours, sounds, and people in the city, means that individuals become blasé, that is to say, "A life in boundless pursuit of pleasure makes one blasé because it agitates the nerves to their strongest reactivity for such a long time that they finally cease to react at all" (Simmel, 1997: 178). Consequently, money "with all its colourlessness and indifference, becomes the common denominator of all values; irreparably it hollows out the core of things, their individuality, their specific value, and their incomparability" (Simmel, 1997: 178).

For Simmel, consumption is a culturally ordered field of action, rather than a threat to social order, as Durkheim would suggest (Slater, 1997). It is because of the overcrowded and chaotic nature of the city that people have to dress in certain ways in order to signal their identity to others, as members of a group and as individuals. Fashion is the most appropriate way to achieve this, bringing together two elements of social logic – the need for cohesion and the need for differentiation. Consequently we can express ourselves in a common language which is understood by others, but also in an enjoyable way. Consumers feel as though they belong to a particular group, whilst at the same time distinguishing themselves from others, which provides individuals with the opportunity for self-expression, and thus helps to shape individual identities.

In *The Philosophy of Money* (1990) Simmel discusses the way in which desire originates in separation and distance between subject and object. With increasing objectification, separation of object and subject deepens, widening the desire-producing gap. Because the subject is increasingly alienated from the world of objects, because of the separation of production from consumption, this generates a desire for these objects, a desire which is intensified by the proliferation of commodities and the growth of a system of market exchange:

> We desire objects only if they are not immediately given to us for our use and enjoyment; that is, to the extent that they resist our desire. The content of our desire becomes an object as soon as it is opposed to us, not only in the sense of being impervious to us, but also in terms of its distance as something not-yet-enjoyed. (Simmel, 1990: 66).

The value of things depends on the value that they are given by the subject, rather than any intrinsic value, based upon material properties of the amount of work that has gone into produce it. As a result of the increasing monetary economy an individual is no longer 'enslaved' by particular consumer goods. Everything has become a commodity – everything can be bought and sold.

Importantly, Simmel recognises that the neoclassical economic basis of calculative instrumentality is not appropriate for understanding all consumer behaviour - the valuation of goods is based upon historical and cultural contexts, and although people are able to value things in numeric and monetary terms, to calculate lengthy cost-benefit analyses, the basis of action is not always economically rational. Furthermore, Simmel's ideas on self-recognition within a group as well as distinction from others – which is particularly important in large urban environments, where it is so easy to be lost in the crowd marks the beginnings of the paradoxical construction of individuality (Newholm and Hopkinson, 2009).

## 3.4 FROM MARCUSE TO BAUDRILLARD

Theorists from the Frankfurt School, writing between the two world wars, believed that the expansion of mass production in the twentieth century led to the commodification of culture (Mackay, 1997). Increased consumption served the interests of manufacturers and their desire for greater profits. Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic*

*of Enlightenment* (1997) saw that the predictability and homogenisation of the culture industry encouraged mass culture, where goods are sold and packaged in standardised forms to an unquestioning public. Citizens became the passive victims of advertisers (Packard, 1981). Key to this was the development of processes of standardisation, which developed at the same time as material culture, leading to the creation of commodities that lacked authenticity and purely met 'false' needs (Mackay, 1997). These needs were generated by the strategies of the marketing and advertising industries, which increased the capacity for ideological control and domination. Ritzer's (1993, 1996) McDonaldization thesis, one of the most powerful critiques of consumer society, provides us with one example of the influence of the Frankfurt School on consumer theory.

Herbert Marcuse was one of the first Marxists to offer a theory of consumer society, which was based upon analysis of consumerism, mass culture, advertising, and ideology in formulating the capitalist mode of production (Kellner, 1984: 242). Marcuse, much more than Marx and other Marxists, saw that advanced capitalism is a commodity-producing society, where consumerism plays a very important role in directing social life. In *One Dimensional Man* (1991/1964) Marcuse differentiates between true and false needs:

> "False" are those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice. Their satisfaction might be most gratifying to the individual, but this happiness is not a condition which has to be maintained and protected if it serves to arrest the development of the ability (his own and others) to recognize the disease of the whole and grasp the chances of curing the disease. The result then is euphoria in unhappiness. Most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to this category of false needs" (Marcuse, 1991: 7).

False needs are created through the ideology of consumerism, with the result that individuals desire objects and goods that are not necessary for survival:

> The so-called consumer society and the politics of corporate capitalism have created a second nature of man which ties him libidinally and aggressively to the commodity form. The need for possessing, consuming, handling and constantly renewing the gadgets, devices, instruments, engines, offered to and imposed upon the people, for using these wares even at the danger of one's own destruction, has become a "biological" need. (Marcuse, 1969: 11).

In a one-dimensional society people "recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobiles, hi-fi, split-level home, kitchen equipment. The very mechanism which ties the individual to his society has changed, and social control is anchored in the new needs that it has produced" (Marcuse, 1991: 11). One-dimensional society is a totalitarian society, in which it is almost impossible to differentiate between the mass media as instruments of information and entertainment, and the mass media as instruments of manipulation and indoctrination. By literally buying into this promotion of false needs it works as means of social control (Marcuse, 1991: 10-11). Individuals feel themselves to be free, however this is a *pseudo-freedom*, in which people are locked into a system in which the true repressive nature of their situation is hidden behind the 'choice' of consumerism.

In order to free oneself from these false needs, it is necessary to become aware of one's situation and recognise one's true needs. The liberation from false needs requires the rejection of the previous system of needs and the acceptance of a new set of needs which contradict the previous established needs. These false needs are shared by, and integrated into, the lives of all members of society, however "this assimilation indicates not the disappearance of classes, but the extent to which the needs and satisfactions that serve the preservation of the Establishment are shared by the underlying population" (Marcuse, 1991: 10). Commodities and false needs have integrated all social classes into advanced capitalism, thus the revolutionary working class has been formed into a stabilising and conservative force. Consequently this brings into question Marx's theory of alienation:

> The concept of alienation seems to become questionable when the individuals identify themselves with the existence which is imposed upon them and have it in their own development and satisfaction. This identification is not illusion but reality. However, the reality constitutes a more progressive state of alienation. The latter has become entirely objective; the subject which is alienated is swallowed up by its alienated existence. There is only one dimension, and it is everywhere and in all forms. (Marcuse, 1991: 13).

Marcuse's analysis is a valid attempt to update Marxian theory in light of changes in contemporary society. Marcuse highlights the increasing integration of the working class which stands against Marx's ideas of increasing proletarisation and radicalisation of workers. Marcuse provides a critical analysis of consumer society, and provides a useful insight on the construction of needs in society, as well as highlighting the role played by the media in repressive societies. However, such an approach may be criticised because it does not investigate nor value the meaningful aspects of consumption which are a part of daily life for very many people. However, Marcuse counters this critique and suggests that empirical research is inadequate for the task in hand, as it serves only to provide a description of social facts, rather than critical theory which is the "critique of facts" (Marcuse, 1991: 110). Furthermore empirical research is seen as one of the stabilising features of one-dimensional society. Additionally, Marcuse provides little space for the resistance of mass culture, which contradicts the anti-consumerist movement, for example as seen by the "International Buy Nothing Day which urges us to take a "24 hour detox from consumerism and live without shopping" (www.buynothingday.co.uk).[17]

Marcuse's critique of the Marxist critique of consumer society is developed further by the French theorist Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) who combines semiological studies, Marxian political economy, and the sociology of consumer society, in order to explore the system of objects and signs which form our everyday life (Kellner, 2007). In his earlier works, Baudrillard presents a neo-Marxian critique of capitalist societies and like Lukács (1971) analyses social life and explores the ways in which it has become commodified and how commodities now dominate individual human action and

[17] See Humphrey (2010) for a detailed account of the anti-consumerism movement.

behaviour. In *The System of Objects: For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1968/1996) and *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (1970/1998) Baudrillard formulates a four stage analysis of the value of goods. He begins with a Marxian use-value account, however it is the third and fourth values of objects, that of symbolic and sign-value, that Baudrillard sees as providing us with the greatest insight into the role and value of goods in society. The four values of objects that Baudrillard identified are:

- The *functional* value of an object; its instrumental purpose. A pair of scissors cut and a washing machine washes clothes. This is very similar to Marx's concept of 'use-value'.

- The *exchange* value of the object; its economic value. A pair of scissors may be worth four pencils; and one washing machine may be worth the salary of a month's work.

- The *symbolic* value of an object; a value that is assigned to an object by an individual in relation to another subject. A carriage clock might symbolise an employee's 30 years service with a company and bracelet may symbolise friendship between two people.

- The *sign* value of an object; its value within a *system* of objects. A particular watch may have no additional functional benefit but may signify prestige in relation to another watch; a pair of pearl earrings may have no function at all, but may suggest particular social values such as taste and class.

In this way, like Veblen, Baudrillard recognises that commodities are bought and displayed as much for their sign-value as their use-value. What we consume is the signs, the images, the message, and not the goods themselves. Consumption is a form of language, by which we converse and communicate with one another. Baudrillard (1998: 60, italics in original) describes consumption as a "*process of signification and communication"* and as a *"process of classification and social differentiation."* However in order to be able to consume the signs (messages, images) we must also be able to 'read' the language in order to be able to consume (Kellner, 2007). For Baudrillard consumption is not something which individuals do, and find enjoyment, satisfaction,

and fulfilment from but instead consumption is a structuring force (or a Durkheimian social fact) – and because of this, it is also coercive:

> Consumption is an active, collective behaviour: it is something enforced, a morality, an institution. It is a whole system of values, with all the expression implies in terms of group integration and social control functions. (Baudrillard, 1998: 81).

People have to use that system in order to communicate with others, and individuals are falsely led to believe that they are fulfilled, happy and content. There is an infinite range of difference available and people can never satisfy this need for difference and hence commodities. This insatiability of needs leads to a constant feeling of dissatisfaction for consumers. Conversely consumerism may be seen as a simultaneous and therapeutic response to the crisis of identities which emerge as the result of the pluralisation of communities, knowledge, and values in 'post-traditional' societies (Giddens, 1991; Trentmann, 2004).

Consumption and production are both disciplined and rationalised to favour the reproduction of the economic structure (Baudrillard, 1983). The subject powerlessly faces a system of objects, so much so that all that is left is 'self-referential signs' based on reoccurring 'simulated' differences – a 'hyper-reality' is placed beyond the distinction between the real and the imaginary:

> Consumption is, therefore, a powerful element of social control (by the atomization of consuming individuals), but by the very fact it brings with it a need for greater bureaucratic constraint on the processes of consumption – which will as a consequence be exalted more and more energetically as the realm of freedom. There is no escaping from this circle. (Baudrillard, 1998: 84).

For Baudrillard society is organised around consumption and displays of consumption through which individuals gain identity, power, and prestige for example. In the same way that words take on meaning according to their position within a system of language, signs also take on a meaning according to their place with a differential system of prestige and status. By differentiating ourselves from others, a sense of hierarchy is communicated, "Signs/objects are ordered not now merely as significant differences in a code but as status values in a hierarchy" (Baudrillard, 1998: 60-61). What Baudrillard

suggests is communicated via acts of consumption, within the whole system of commodities and signs, is *distinction*:

> you never consume the object in itself (in its use-value); you are always manipulating objects (in the broadest sense) as signs which distinguish you either by affiliating you to your group taken as an ideal reference or by marking you off from your group by reference to a group of higher status. (Baudrillard, 1998: 61).

The symbolic no longer exists, instead there is continual cross-referencing between signs, between images which no longer symbolise a social reality but refer back to themselves to such a degree that they themselves constitute reality. People do not desire a particular object; rather it is an unending search for difference. You need to identify the smallest thing that makes you different and it becomes yours – you need to personalise your personality. This personalisation governs consumption in that "to differentiate oneself is precisely to affiliate to a model, to label oneself by reference to an abstract model, to a combinatorial pattern of fashion, and therefore to relinquish any real difference, any *singularity*, since these can only arise in concrete, conflictual relations with others and the world" (Baudrillard, 1998: 88). The logic of personalisation, "*abolish[es] the real differences* between human beings, homogenizing persons and products, *simultaneously usher[ing] in the reign of differentiation*" (*ibid*: 89, italics in original).

Baudrillard (1998: 80) also recognises that consumption is "something which is forced upon us, something institutionalized, not as a right or a pleasure, but as the *duty* of the citizen." This has been developed by later writers such as Miller (1993), McGregor (1999) and Trentmann and Bevir (2007), but recently in this more difficult economic climate the Mayor of London Boris Johnson as well as the then Prime Minister Gordon Brown and the Chancellor of the Exchequer Alistair Darling have suggested that it is our civic duty to shop (Johnson, 2008; Martin, 2008).

A further insight that is provided by Baudrillard is that consumption necessitates training:

> The consumer society is also the society of learning to consume, of social training in consumption. That is to say, there is a new and specific mode of *socialization* related to the emergence of new productive forces and the monopoly restructuring of a high-productivity economic system. (Baudrillard, 1998: 81).

As will be suggested in the proceeding chapters, the notion of 'learning to consume' is a contentious issue, which has been developed by Martens (2005) and Evans (2002) and forms one of the main research questions of this thesis.

One of the criticisms which may be directed at Baudrillard, is that he says very little about the way in which objects are used in daily life, since the meanings given to objects are entirely reduced to those attributed to them by advertising executives, working in "the industrial production of differences" (Baudrillard, 1998: 88). Baudrillard ignores the role and physical nature of consumer goods in the consumer process, however as will be seen in chapters six and seven with regard to relationality, physical goods do have an important role to play in children's consumption. Furthermore commodities and their images are not only polysemic (have many meanings) but also multi-accented (can be read in many ways) (Sassatelli, 2007). The importance of social relationships, for example families and subcultures, and social identities such as class, gender and ethnicity, in shaping consumer practices are also ignored (Gottdiener, 2000a). In contrast to Marcuse however, Baudrillard (1998: 91) does recognise the anti-consumerist in some consumers' practices. However he sees this anti-consumerism, as one form of metaconsumption, and resigns anti-consumerist values and actions to an indicator of class.

## 3.5 BOURDIEU'S DISTINCTION

Like Baudrillard, Pierre Bourdieu (1930 – 2002) was a French social theorist. He too was influenced by ideas of social differentiation, which were developed in his highly influential *Distinction* (1984). For Bourdieu, consumption is "a stage in a process of communication, that is, an act of deciphering, decoding, which presupposes practical or explicit mastery of a cipher or code" (1984: 2). Bourdieu's important contribution is that he contextualises significance by merging culture and class within a classificatory system of social distinction. Culture is seen as a system of representations which grows

from a need to express and establish distinct positions within a social system which is structured by classes. Classes are viewed as autonomous spaces whose structure is defined by the distribution of economic and social capital within it, in the different classes this economic and social capital is distributed in different ways. As Bourdieu comments, "the manner of using symbolic goods, especially those regarded as the attributes of excellence, constitutes one of the key markers of 'class' and also the ideal weapon in strategies of distinction" (*ibid*.: 66). Consequently, this brings about particular life-styles which are mediated through the habitus.

Distinction does not happen directly, but is a result of socialisation into a particular 'habitus' which leads to the generation of a particular lifestyle. 'Habitus' can be seen as the underlying system of structural classification. It is written in the body depending upon past experiences, and is established during childhood. It is an unconscious but extremely adaptable mechanism, which provides a framework for exercising judgement and taste on a daily basis. Individuals do not share just one habitus, rather different conditions of existence produce different habitus. In Bourdieu's words:

> The habitus is not only a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalization of the division into social classes. (Bourdieu, 1984: 170).

The habitus is defined by two main forms of capital – economic and cultural capital - and at the same time it helps to reproduce these forms of capital. As a result of one's habitus an individual consumes particular goods based upon a learned 'taste'. In making choices, and identifying oneself with a particular social group and distinguishing oneself from another group, one creates a set of choices which forms a 'lifestyle' (*ibid*.: 175). As Bourdieu (*ibid*.: 172) comments, "Life-styles are thus the systematic products of habitus." Lifestyles are closely linked to Weber's idea of status groups, that is to say, a systematic expression of taste according to class. However whereas Weber distinguishes between class and status group, for Bourdieu these are two aspects of the same phenomenon (Sassatelli, 2007).

The particular habitus that a person embodies, based upon varying amounts of capital, leads a person to have particular 'tastes', where, "Taste is the practical operator of the

transmutation of things into distinct and distinctive signs" and takes the physical differences inscribed on bodies "to the symbolic order of significant distinctions" (Bourdieu, 1984: 174). Taste develops classified practices into classifying practices and acts as a symbolic expression of class position, with class differences constructed through consumption. Tastes are most easily recognised in the "ordinary choices of everyday existence, such as furniture, clothing or cooking, which are particularly revealing of deep-rooted and long-standing dispositions" (*ibid.*: 77). However, taste presupposes absolute freedom of choice:

> Taste is *amor fati,* the choice of destiny, but a forced choice, produced by conditions of existence which rule out all alternatives as mere daydreams and leave no choice but the taste for the necessary. (Bourdieu, 1984: 178).

Taste is a marker of class and of distinction, however when one is demonstrating a certain taste through the consumption of particular commodities, although it may be seen positively within one's own social class, others may see it as distasteful or disgusting, as Bourdieu explains:

> One only has to bear in mind that goods are converted into distinctive signs, which may be signs of distinction but also of vulgarity, as soon as they are perceived relationally, to see that the representation which individuals and groups inevitably project through practices and properties is an integral part of social reality. A class is defined as much by its *being-perceived* as by its *being*, by its consumption – which need not be conspicuous in order to be symbolic - as much by its position in the relations of production. (Bourdieu, 1984: 483).

Habitus develops in early childhood, and as Bourdieu (*ibid*.: 75) explains in relation to bourgeois culture, "they are acquired, pre-verbally, by early immersion in a world of cultivated people, practices and objects."[18] Being exposed to different types and varying amounts of capital in early childhood shapes the habitus. For example, the effect for a child that is brought up hearing live music played within the family, or playing musical

[18] Bourdieu (*ibid*.: 54) also mentions, rather tongue-in-cheek, that "All children start life as baby bourgeois, in a relation of magical power over others and, through them, over the world, but they grow out of it sooner or later."

instruments, “is at least to produce a more familiar relationship to music, which differs from the always somewhat distant, contemplative and often verbose relation of those who have come to music through concerts or even only through records” (*ibid*.: 75). Bourdieu also recognises that a class is defined “not only by its position in the relations of production, as identified through indices such as occupation, income or even educational level” but that also sex, geographical space, ethnicity and other “subsidiary characteristics” which in the form of tacit requirements, act as “real principles of selection or exclusion without ever being formally stated” (*ibid*.: 102).

Bourdieu’s work on distinction is a major contribution to the sociology of consumption. Unlike Baudrillard, Bourdieu proposes a theory of practice in which human action can be constructed as something material, something concrete, not just representation or the exchange of signs and symbols (Sassatelli, 2007). In referring to theory of practice it provides an insight into the ambivalence of consumption by focusing on the relatively organised and situated contexts for action and by addressing agency without giving priority to individual choice. Routines and entrenched consumption practices are part of our everyday lives (Gronow and Warde, 2001; Shove, 2003). However such a deterministic approach “reduces cultural choices to passive reproductions of structural necessities” (Gartman, 1991: 422). People are seen to consume along conventional and predetermined lines. The working class are seen as unreflexively choosing the most pragmatic option as a result of their situation, and the upper classes as seen as unreflexively making choices which promote themselves as cultural superiors. As the work of Douglas and Isherwood (1979) shows, goods not only act as boundaries but can also function as bridges between different consumer groups. Consumption also has the potential to be subversive, can be used to question capitalism and commoditisation (Miller, 1987). Also consumption *within* social groups is seen as unproblematic. Bourdieu does however recognise that consumption is not only an expressive but also performative action - “the consumer helps to produce the product he consumes, by a labor of identification and decoding” (Bourdieu, 1984: 100).

In examining Bourdieu’s work we are presented with further background information which will be used in the proceeding chapters to help answer the research questions of this thesis, in particular the questions relating to the knowledge that children have

regarding consumption practices, and the role played by the family and peer group in constituting children's consumption practices. For example, is children's consumption, and if so to what extent, merely the reproduction of parent's tastes and what role does the habitus plays in this? Likewise, the extent to which distinction is a feature of children's consumption is also examined in chapters six and seven.

## 3.6 SUMMARY

Marx's theory of commodity fetishism and the structural relationship between consumers and producers has laid the foundations for understanding consumption and consumer culture. Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption has been influential in highlighting the issues surrounding emulation, and traces of his theory can be identified throughout consumption theory. Consequently in chapters six and seven the question of whether emulation is a feature of children's consumption practices will be examined.

Theories of emulation as explored by both Veblen and Simmel do not explain why particular items are consumed and the thoughts and opinions of individuals concerning this. The neoclassical model of the consumer is inadequate because it superimposes its model on to reality without understanding the everyday lived effects of this for individuals and for society (Sassatelli, 2007). Therefore by focusing on and paying attention to the thoughts and opinions of children this thesis seeks to thoroughly explore children's engagement with consumer culture.

Marcuse provides a critique of the stultifying nature of the consumer industry, in particular the way that it creates false needs, and blinds individuals from truly recognising their own situation. As will be developed further in chapter four when the contemporary literature on children's consumption is examined and through the empirical evidence for this in chapters six and seven we see that children's consumption in particular, is often viewed as dangerous, stupefying and harmful.

Baudrillard's examination of the value (functional, exchange, symbolic, and sign value) of consumer goods, through which individuals gain identity, power, and prestige, is useful as it positions consumption as a form of language through which meanings and messages are conveyed. Baudrillard suggests that individuals are forced into using

consumption as a means of communication and that individuals are falsely led to believe that they are fulfilled, happy and content. However one of the criticisms that can be levelled at Baudrillard is that he fails to examine the lived experiences of consumption, and the role played by the actual consumer goods in practices of consumption. Commodities often have many meanings and may also be read in many ways. Consequently this thesis aims to address such shortcomings in its exploration of children's consumption practices.

Bourdieu's introduction to lifestyles is however particularly important as it provides both theoretical and empirical insight into the way in which lifestyles perform important communicative functions by giving expression to consumers' cultural dispositions and tastes. The concept of lifestyles is central to the mapping of contemporary consumption practices in general and issues of identity in particular, since a lifestyle is both a vehicle of self-identity by providing resources for the definition of self and a determinant of social and cultural identity by providing outward indications of where one fits in the social and cultural scheme. An examination of Bourdieu's work on habitus, taste, and cultural capital has also opened up the debate on the extent to which children are born into particular patterns of consumption, and the role played by parents and peers in socialising children into specific consumption dispositions.

To summarise, chapter three provides a brief examination of the work of the main theorists of consumption since the early nineteenth century, and in doing so lays the foundation for the examination of children's consumption in the proceeding chapters. Thus consumption is understood to be the exchange of signs, but these meanings can be understood in many different ways and that there is a need to explore the meanings that individuals, including children, attach to their consumption practices. The debate as to whether consumption in an empowering or exploitative practice is also introduced. Finally, the extent to which parents, family background and/or peer group play a role in establishing and developing children's consumer practices is highlighted as worthy of further examination.

# CHAPTER 4 – CHILDREN'S CONSUMPTION

Theories of consumption, and of children and childhood, have been explored in chapters one to three. The most pertinent theoretical issues relating to children, childhood and consumption have thus far been addressed, therefore this fourth chapter will bring together these separate issues and explore the overall theme of children's consumption.

## 4.1 DANIEL COOK AND THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC HISTORY OF CHILDREN'S CONSUMPTION

In *The Commodification of Childhood: The Children's Clothing Industry and the Rise of the Child Consumer* (2004b) Daniel Cook has provided a fundamental contribution to the social and economic history of children's consumer culture.[19] Focusing on the children's clothing industry in the United States during the twentieth century Cook traces the development of children's consumer culture. Crucial to this understanding of children's consumer culture is the "historically situated, socially embedded webs of meaning which shape definitions of both 'the child' and 'childhood' so as to render them more or less confluent with the world of economic consumption" (Cook, 2004b: 10). Cook charts how children's wear became increasingly segmented according to age. Manufacturers and shopkeepers began designing goods and retail spaces with children's wishes and needs in mind, or at least what they imagined them to be. The 1930s marked a dramatic turning point when advertisers, manufacturers, and sellers began to recognise children themselves, rather than their mothers, as the primary consumer market. This new marketing perspective, which Cook labels "pediocularity", for the first time, attempted to view "the world through children's eyes" instead of through the eyes of their mother (*ibid*.: 6).

Work by other theorists will also be used to contribute to a social and economic history of children's consumer culture (see for example, Denisoff, 2008a, 2008b; Hamlin, 2003; Michaels, 2008; Plumb, 1982). Furthermore, as well as providing a chronological guide to the development of consumption by children, this section will highlight the way in

[19] See also Cook (1995, 1999, 2000a, 2000b) for further discussion of the social and economic history of children's consumer culture.

which children and childhood have been constructed within consumer culture, and suggest that the way in which these categories have been envisaged has a direct bearing on our understanding of children within consumer culture, and more widely.

Children's consumption, as a distinct form of consumption separate from adults', began to emerge at the beginning of the twentieth century. Prior to this time children were involved in more or less the same activities as their parents, as the historian William Leach comments, "Before 1890 most American children, wore, ate and played with what their parents made or prepared for them" (Leach, 1993: 85; cited in Cook, 2009a: 333). What occurred at this time was a particular social and cultural shift which envisaged children as individuals with the "social right and wherewithal to be desirous of goods and to act upon those desires" (Cook, 2009a: 334). According to Cook (2004b: 22) there are three interconnected trajectories which came together in the early 1900s which directed this cultural shift and made the "emergence of a nascent commercial world of childhood possible and viable." The first of these trajectories was the recognition of 'the child' as separate from adults, with a distinct and 'special' nature (Cook, 2004b, 2007a, 2009a; Denisoff, 2008b; Michaels, 2008; Plumb, 1982; Schor, 2004; Zelizer, 1994). Zelizer (1994) also highlights that between the 1880s and the 1930s the social value of children underwent a dramatic transformation. She argues that children, in particular urban western children, were no longer valued for their economic contribution to the family but for their emotional worth. Children and childhood became sacred, with this sacralisation due to children's distance from both commercial and monetary interests. The second shift took place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when children began to be located within the sentimentalised, domestic spheres of family life. Here, the home, particularly for the upper and middle classes, came to be recognised as the legitimate place for women and children, where the children of these families were viewed as particularly innocent and vulnerable, in need of protection and nurturance (Cook, 2004b, 2009a; Gillis, 1996; Plumb, 1982). Finally, the third trajectory is related to the rise of women as consumers, particularly in relation to the emergence and development of the department store (Humphery, 1998; Williams, 1982). These three trajectories interweave to form the foundations of children's consumer culture as "a belief in the distinctiveness of the child, a private middle-class home where this child

could be nurtured and kept separate and sacred, and a way to connect the child with the market" (Cook, 2004b: 22-23).

As well as the distinctiveness of the child, and the creation of the home as a private enclave in the middle and upper classes, in which children could be nurtured and protected, helped to instigate a separate and well-defined children's consumer culture. Children in general came to be perceived to have particular needs which require specialised attention and goods. Heininger (1984: 19 in Cook, 2004b: 30) for instance, uses the example of specially manufactured furniture and nursery items which were developed in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, to demonstrate this point. Furthermore, there arose a burgeoning market for children's toys and books beginning in the eighteenth century and accelerating through the nineteenth century (Brewer, 1980; Denisoff, 2008b; Hamlin, 2003; Michaels, 2008; Plumb, 1982). However as was demonstrated in chapter one, furniture and specialised equipment for babies and young children, even books, were being produced in France in the Middle Ages.

As fathers and husbands began to 'go out to work', rather than working on more traditional and directly observable tasks at home, the home became increasingly feminised and became the locus for children and women (Cook, 2004b). This led to the situation that by the 1840s, women, especially married women, were criticised for working, particularly in workplaces such as factories, and abandoning their 'natural' place in the home (Cook, 2004; Cowan, 1983). Focusing on the United States, this 'domestic moralizing' (Cook, 2004b: 30), advocated that the future of the country was in the hands of mothers. In order to uphold the country, mothers had to focus their efforts on rearing their children, as well as self-denial and fulltime dedication to their home. This ideology of domestic virtue meant that American women were expected to set the nation's moral standards and demonstrate this within the home (Witkowski, 1999). Consequently women's consumption choices, particularly those with regard to the home, were increasingly scrutinised and seen as a measure of domestic worth (de Grazia, 1996; Witkowski, 1999). Resultantly, by the 1850s, consumerism had gained respectability, and it was increasingly located within private, feminised, bourgeois domesticity (Slater 1997).

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, women increasingly began to move from the private sphere of the household to the public arena of the newly arising consumer marketplace. This new realm of public consumption centred around the development of the department store (Crossick and Jaumain, 1999; Humphery, 1998; Miller, 1981; Williams, 1982). As both workers and consumers, within the newly built department stores women were afforded a legitimate reason to be present in public spaces (Cook, 2004b). In the 1870s shopping featured as only a small part of women's duty "but by the 1890s it was being decried as a female vice akin to men's drinking and smoking" (*ibid*.: 38). On the one hand, within the trade press, women were seen as the 'purchasing agents' for the whole family and in the consumer-directed advertising of the time, women were spoken to as 'managers' of the family home. Although in charge of the family's budget, on the other hand women were viewed as emotional, impulsive, fickle and irrational. Resultantly, by the early twentieth century women – white, middle-class, urban women – were placed within a collection of tensions. To fulfil her role as a homemaker, a woman had to leave the family home, enter a commercial space which was 'hers', and spend, not only for herself but for her husband and children, both rationally and efficiently, whilst all the time presented as an irrational and impulsive consumer. Consequently, as a result of the merging of the particular social, cultural, political and economic forms, the reality of 'mother as consumer' began to emerge.

Both women and children were gradually brought from the home into the public arenas of consumption. For example in the early 1900s mothers were encouraged to come to stores to purchase a layette for their unborn baby and to think about the future needs of the child – already the child was being positioned as a potential consumer (Cook, 2004b). Consequently this had important implications for the development of the relationship between consumption and motherhood, since for the first time motherhood "becomes expressed and express*able* through consumption – as consumer practice – and thereby commodified, emerging as a value-in-exchange" (Cook, 2004b: 65).

The emergence of manufactured clothes at the end of the nineteenth century, beginning with army supplies, followed by men's and boys' work clothes, then women's clothes and lastly children's clothes, all sold in the burgeoning department stores provides

another example of the way in which children were brought into the marketplace. Separate departments within stores for children's and baby clothes did not exist before 1910, however by the late 1930s multiple departments or even whole floors, organised by age and dedicated to children became regular practice (Cook, 2004b, 2007a). For example Cook (2004b: 49) notes that, "By 1928 the *Journal of Retailing* was recommending that department stored make space for an entire separate 'children's floor." These departments had the appropriate fixtures and fixings which were seen to encourage child consumers, for example mirrors were at child height, as well as being decorated in such a way that children were told that this was their space and that they were entitled to use it.

In the same way that the development of the department store, particularly in Paris, but then spreading across Western Europe and the USA, created a new type of consumer (Williams, 1982), changes in the physical layout of stores, the creation of 'children's departments' and the look of these departments encouraged the persona of the child consumer (Cook, 2004b). This adaptation of the physical surroundings in order to appeal to children did not stop at the fixtures and fittings. During the 1940s and 1950s clothing stores for girls had Coca-Cola dispensing machines, piped music, and fashion shows with local schoolgirls, and consequently by the 1950s the 'youth market' with its protagonist the 'teenager' had appeared (Cook, 2004b). This expansion of consumer spaces specifically for children developed over the years and the first mall exclusively for children, 'Abbotts Kids Village' opened in Georgia, in the USA, in 1996 (Lindström, 2003).

Once children, like their mothers, had been brought from the home into the spheres of consumption, the next key turning point in our understanding of children as consumers occurred during the 1920s and 1930s when advertisers began to market directly to children and not to their parents. For example Cook (2004b: 75) identifies the 1938 publication by E. Evalyn Grumbine *Reaching Juvenile Markets: How to Advertise, Sell and Merchandise through Boys and Girls – age and gendered divisions of boys and girls* which discusses the ways in which an advertiser might best market to children. Furthermore the items that were advertised to children were not the usual toys and confectionery, which had previously been the domain of children, but included a whole variety of

goods (Cook, 2004b). Gradually, no longer was it mothers that were called to in advertisements, but instead advertisements appealed directly to the children themselves (Cook, 2007a).

It was however, not until the 1960s that marketing was aimed at children directly (Cook, 2000a, 2004b, 2007a). Until this point the understanding of children's perspectives, their wants and their desires, were derived from retailers and manufacturers' own observations and cultural understandings of children. This movement towards direct marketing to children coincided with the development from the mid-1960s onwards of research on school-aged children, and the creation of research instruments which were designed to try and elicit children's preferences and opinions (Cook, 2000a). The importance of these developments was not so much the outcomes of this research, but the very fact that children were involved in consumer research at all, and the "acknowledgement that children can and should be treated as knowing, able consumers" (Cook, 2007a: 694). This early research also helped advertisers and marketers to understand that children had a greater influence on household decisions than they had previously imagined, with this influence going beyond children's 'own' toys, clothes and food for example, but also including major household purchases and decisions (Cook, 2004b).[20]

Through the 1980s children's consumer culture became increasingly mediated and childhood was seen to be in even greater danger. This danger arose because of the increasingly ubiquitous environment of electronic media, especially television, with childhood being seen to be disappearing as a result of this (Postman, 1982; Buckingham, 2000, 2009). In *The Disappearance of Childhood* (1982) Neil Postman suggests that because of the immediacy of this electronic media, and television in particular, knowledge is made available to children that was previously unavailable to them, or alternatively was only revealed step-by-step as children got older. This 'total disclosure' of information results from the visual nature of television and the fact that it does not require literacy or education to understand its message.

[20] Children's participation in consumer research which discussed in greater depth in section 4.3.

If we move to the present day, these problems and concerns relating to childhoods which are saturated with consumer and media culture still remain (Cook, 2010; Pugh, 2009). Ceaseless advertising and the sexualisation of young children are seen to be particularly damaging (Linn, 2004; Palmer, 2006; Schor, 2004). On the whole such a childhood is seen as dangerous and particularly harmful to children's social and psychological development (Barber, 2007; Mayo and Nairn, 2009; Schor, 2004). Yet increasingly there are accounts of children's consumer culture influenced by the desire to document children's lives 'as it is' which recognises the capacity of children to be able to tell these stories about their own experiences, and which see children increasingly empowered through their engagement with consumer culture (Chin 2001; Evans, 2002; Pugh, 2004, 2009).

Having charted the history of children's consumer culture from the late nineteenth century, to the present day, we see that the changing political economy of the household, the increasing centrality of children's voices, and the efforts of the market to appeal ever more directly to children, all contributed to the growth of a specific children's market, with childhood itself, in many ways, becoming equated and defined by market meanings and categories (Cook, 2004b, 2007a, 2010). Such movements by advertisers both mirrored and informed the change that came about at this time in the cultural construction of children and childhood. Cook suggests that the greatest change to children's consumption came about not because of the growth in the size of market, nor the increase in children's purchasing power, nor the encouragement by advertisers to children for them to pester their parents to purchase for them what they desired, but adults' belief that children had specific desires that *must* be fulfilled. As will be shown in the next section, the necessity to act upon the desires of children is developed further by Gary Cross (1997, 2004) who uses the concepts of 'wondrous innocence' and children as the valves of adults' desire to explore the changes and developments in children's consumer culture. It became to be seen as a social right of children to take their place as full agents in capitalism, to be in retail spaces and to be desirous of consumer goods. Cook (2004b: 67) terms this privileging of the child's viewpoint, of making it the focus of authority and action as 'pediocularity.' Pediocularity "repeats and reinscribes

childhood innocence in the ways that it encodes children's 'special nature' in their presumed, and presumably unpolluted, gaze" (Cook, 2004b: 68).[21]

It is not marketplaces themselves which create pediocularity, rather through markets children become recognised and treated as desirous persons, on a level with adults. Pediocularity reinforces the notion of childhood innocence and the belief that children have a 'special nature'. However we have to question whether children really have an 'unpolluted gaze' or whether this is itself a cultural construct (Jacobson, 2005: 1102). Furthermore, the sources which Cook relies upon, for example, magazine adverts, parenting magazines, trade journals, and women's magazines, privilege adults' perspectives, rather than looking at children's experiences which Cook calls for in his later work, for example see (Cook, 2007b, 2008, 2009b, 2010).

A further criticism of work on the historical development of children's consumer culture, not only that by Cook (2004b), but also Plumb (1982) and Dennisoff (2008a), is that they have tended to side-step the class dynamics which have helped shape children's consumption, and there is an assumed filtering down through the classes of the processes relating to children's consumer culture. Consequently the development of working class children's consumer culture is an area worthy of further examination (Jacobson, 2005).

It is recognised that there is a heavy focus on the work of Daniel Cook in this chapter, and throughout this thesis in general, however this is not due to the neglect of other writers, rather a testament to the fact that Cook is a prolific writer on children's consumer culture, see for example (Cook 1995,1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2010). There are shortcomings in Cook's work in that there is a lack of his own empirical research on the claims that he has made, despite his recognition of the need for research that explicitly explores children within the consumer culture, consequently as will be discussed further in section 4.4 and demonstrated in chapter six, one of the

[21] Seiter (1993) also identifies an emergent belief in the authority of the child in the middle-class, child-rearing literature which was popular in the 1920s.

contributions to new knowledge provided by this thesis is its empirical exploration of commercial enculturation.

This section has provided a brief overview of the history of children's consumer culture. We have moved from the late nineteenth century through to the present day charting the developments of children's consumer culture, and in particular the distinct middle-class belief that emerged around the beginning of the twentieth century on the authority of the child. Today childhood and consumer culture are interwoven to such an extent that we have to question whether it is possible for the one to exist without the other (Cook, 2004b, 2007b, 2008, 2009b, 2010; Martens *et al.*, 2004; Pugh, 2009). For children, living in contemporary society, it is through consumption that we come to know who they are, as Cook (2009a: 332) explains, "children arise as subjects in and through consumer contexts". To keep consumer culture separate from children and childhood ignores children's lived experiences (Cook, 2005). Furthermore, in keeping with the overall aims of the thesis, in learning about children's consumer culture we discover more about childhood.

## 4.2 GARY CROSS: THE AESTHETICS AND EMOTIONS OF CHILDREN'S CONSUMPTION

In comparison with Daniel Cook's economic and social history of children's consumption, Gary Cross (1997, 2002, 2004) presents a history of children's feelings and emotions with regards to children's consumer culture. Using the concepts of 'wondrous innocence', and that of children as the 'valves of desire' through which adults experience the pleasures of consumption, Cross brings to our attention that adults delight in fulfilling children's desires. However, since children's consumer practices have seemingly slipped from adults' control, adults today feel increasingly frustrated and powerless with regard to children's consumer practices. This has significant meaning for both our understanding of childhood and of children's consumer culture.

'Wondrous innocence' is used to explain the look of wonder on a child's face when he or she receives an item or experience which an adult has drawn delight in gifting upon him or her. As Cross (2004: 15) writes, "One of the greatest pleasures of modern parenting became the act of giving children fresh and unexpected pleasures – handing an ice cream cone to a surprised toddler in the 1900s or taking a youth on an adventure to

Disneyland in the 1950s." The giver experiences delight in giving and "finding, even awakening, wonder and desire in the young" (*ibid.*: 15), since these emotions are said to have been lost in adults' encounters with consumer goods. Coupled with this notion of wondrous innocence is that of children as the valves of adults' desire where adults use consuming for children as a legitimate way to "give expression to material longings" and make sense of children's location within consumer culture (Cross, 2002: 442).

The consumer paradox which was highlighted in chapter three, is also recognised by Cross (2004). On the one hand consumer society perpetually offers new and exciting consumer goods, yet on the other hand there is also boredom and disappointment for once these things have been obtained desires do not cease, instead people are compelled to move on and desire the next lot of consumer goods. However, for adults, when they consume vicariously through children, they enter a particular arena of consumption which is far removed from consumption in their everyday lives since they are able to take joy in children's lack of boredom and tedium in the continuing cycle of consumption. Cross expands upon this point:

> Parents indulged their young with an ever-changing and growing array of toys, dolls, and storybooks, but they also fulfilled their own needs for release from the constraints of work and responsibility by viewing and vicariously enjoying their offspring's carefree play. Through spending on children, parents temporarily entered an imagined world of childhood fantasy free from the fear and tedium of change. They recovered their lost worlds of wonder through the wondrous innocence of their children's encounter with commercial novelty. Adults found refuge in the mystique of childhood, but a very special kind of childhood, defined and experienced through consumer culture. (Cross, 2004: 15).

Like Cook, Cross also calls upon the changing historical conceptions of childhood innocence to document the way in which our conceptualisations of childhood have changed, which has gone on to influence the ways in which children are understood to engage in consumer culture. Furthermore, like Cook, Cross also draws upon the ideas expressed by John Locke in the seventeenth century and Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the eighteenth century, as discussed in-depth in chapter one, which sees children as in need of protection and shelter from the disorder and evil in the adult world, in order that they will grow up to be fully capable and well-rounded adults (Cook, 2004). This belief in the need to shelter and protect the child, and to cultivate his or her way of being, did

not necessarily mean freedom for the child but meant that adults had to manipulate children "in the name of preparing the intellectually malleable, but wilful and vulnerable, child for a morally upright and socially useful adulthood" (Cook, 2004: 22). This is evidenced in the advice given in child-rearing manuals which began to emerge in America in the 1830s. In highlighting the fact that caring parents were duty-bound to keep their children away from the job market, those parents that sent their children away to work were viewed as cruel and heartless (Cross, 2004; Seiter, 1993; Zelizer, 1994).

The literature and paintings of the Victorian period sought to reaffirm wonder as a childish delight, where a romantic view of children emphasised their 'naturalness' as well as their 'natural delight' in all things new (Cross, 2004). Consequently, children were favoured because they were viewed to be beyond desire and to be "free from the obsession and disappointment that comes with the older person's real experience of longing…This was the essence of wondrous innocence'' (*ibid*.: 25). Cross explains further how the discontent experienced by adults as a result of their loss of wonder in the modern world was remedied by seeing things anew through the eyes of children:

> If nineteenth-century romantics needed to see flowers or cascading waterfalls through the fresh eyes of the child, it was because their adult eyes had grown dull. Likewise, twentieth-century consumers needed to consume through the wondrous innocence of the child because their desire for things, even new and improved things, had grown flat. (Cross, 2004: 31).

Ironically however, the more that adults have tried to lessen their own frustrations with the culture of consumption, by buying for children and taking pleasure in children's joy and wonder in the new, the more children themselves have become jaded with the process or obsessed with desiring more suggests Cross (*ibid*.: 16), "Unfortunately, the wide-eyed innocent quickly became the bored and unappreciative brat when repeatedly exposed to the wonders of modern consumption." Furthermore, adults encouraged children to explore and push the boundaries of the routine of everyday life, and took pleasure in the spontaneous yet anarchic aspects of children's play. This was reflected in a new and more subtle understanding of children's development and the complexity of children themselves, as well as giving rise to the 'naughty-but-nice' child. This

naughty-but-nice child coupled with the secret power of its innocence "gave vicarious pleasure to adults while giving kids freedom from adult control" (*ibid.*: 16). Unfortunately however, this innocence as a result of the commercialisation of childhood, has slipped from adults' control to such an extent that they were excluded from children's consumer culture:

> An even more frustrating problem was that wondrous innocence slipped out of the control of parents. The images, goods, and rituals of a commercialized childhood led very subtly to a fantasy culture from which parents were excluded and which appeared to be anything but innocent. In effect kids took over from the secret garden and, with the help of fantasy merchants largely locked their parents out. (Cross: 2004: 17).

Cross (1997, 2004) uses the categories of the 'cute' and the 'cool', as well as examples of different toys and merchandising, to help explain how adults and children have experienced these threats. What had been cute, and thus controlled by parents, became cool – the opposite of the sweet and delightful. Cool appeared in the 1930s among older boys, with the emergence of dark science fiction stories, moving on through history "when the cool look of Barbie and monster figures replaced baby dolls and Tinkertoys" (Cook, 2004: 17), with 'cool' now being one of the most prominent features of children's consumer culture, which follows capitalism's pattern of constant re-invention of the market and of consumer demand.

However, according to Harris (2000) the aesthetics of cute are still an important aspect of consumer culture. Children learn to know what it is liked to be valued as cute and yet at the same time learn to value cute things. We reward children who are co-conspirators in being cute, those who feign helplessness and assume adult responsibility, consequently reinforcing infantilism and precocity at the same time:

> The child is thus taught not only to be cute in himself but to recognize and enjoy cuteness in others, to play the dual roles of actor and audience, cootchy-cooing as much as he is cootchy-cooed. In this way, our culture actively inculcates the aesthetic doctrines of cuteness by giving our children what amounts to a thorough education in the subject, involving extensive and rigorous training in role playing. (Harris, 2000: 13-14).

Harris goes on to suggest that if cuteness is the aesthetic of childhood, quaintness is the aesthetic of old age. Unlike Cross, Harris does not identify a movement towards the cool,

rather he suggests that a new aesthetic has begun to develop – the anti-cute. Cuteness is now subject to satire, for example *The Simpsons* are anti-cute. Cute may even now be seen as evil, for example in the soft-focus photographs of young children walking in meadows and picking flowers, these little children are seen as corrupt, possessed, even satanic.

Nevertheless, that their child 'be cute' is still very much an area of concern for parents, since "cuteness saturates the visual landscape of consumerism with utopian images that cause feelings of inadequacy among parents" (Harris, 2000: 16). Cuteness is a tool, the proverbial rose-tinted spectacles that "color and blur the profound drudgery of child-rearing with soft-focused sentimentality" (*ibid*.: 15). Cuteness is used to allay the fears of failure by parents and to numb them to the irritation of ongoing vigilance of their off-spring who, "despite the anesthetizing ideology of cuteness, are often more in control of us than we are of them" (*ibid*.: 15). Such discussions also refer back to discussion in the previous chapter and the work by Bourdieu (1984) on cultural capital, habitus and taste and the question of how and when children develop their consumer knowledge. Ultimately, whether it has developed into 'cool' or not, 'cute' is used, suggests both Harris and Cook, by adults in order to alleviate fears and anxieties, although perhaps never completely, surrounding the physical and emotional maturation of children.

Further support for an historical examination of the emotions and feelings associated with children's consumer culture, can be seen with Plumb's (1982) analysis of the expansion of the market for toys and the development of new attitudes towards children, in eighteenth century England. Toys did not merely reflect middle class attitudes to childhood innocence but were also "an effort to ritually re-establish the emotional foundations of the family" (Hamlin, 2003: 858). Additionally, in Germany in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, patriarchal authority to shifted from the father to the *Weihnachtsmann* or Santa Claus, which gave fathers the opportunity to engage with their children more directly and without calling patriarchal authority into question (*ibid*.: 861). Furthermore Christmas became a time of spontaneous joy and affection and toys became the means by which parents could provide for the immediate happiness of their children, since children were understood to be desirous beings and adult pleasure emerged from satisfying the longings of children (*ibid*.: 862).

During the twentieth century, adults' response to threats to children and childhood innocence, had been to try and regain some control and influence over children's consumption by regulating aspects of children's consumption, for example toys, food, music, clothing and film. At the same time adults have tried to shelter 'innocent children' from the dangers of other aspects of consumption such as pornography, alcohol and tobacco. Ultimately then, herein lies the contradiction of childhood innocence and consumer practices:

> Wondrous innocence met parents' (and often children's) emotional needs, but ultimately challenged adults' values and control. Adults looked for playmates in young children. But when kids no longer wanted to play their games and tried to be cool, parents saw them as troubled and potential victims of troublemakers. (Cross, 2004: 17).

However, although Cross' work is useful in explaining how and why significant changes in children's and adults' consumer experience have occurred, he neglects to take note of first-hand accounts, by both children and adults, of their experience in desiring, giving, or being on the receiving end of particular consumer goods. For example, although he suggests that nowadays adults do not always take delight in purchasing for children because it has now become mandatory, or the shift from pleasure to obligation that adults might feel when purchasing for other adults, since Cross does not provide any first-hand accounts of adults' experiences we do not know how they 'really' experience this. Importantly the same also goes for children's experiences, which are also missing from Cross' account, for example as will be demonstrated in chapter seven in relation to moderation, children often take delight in consuming for others, and do not always make incessant demands to adults for consumer goods.

To summarise, Cross provides us with a persuasive account of the way in which historical and social developments in our conceptualisations of children and childhood, coupled with the very nature of consumption, gives rise to a particular form of childhood experience in relation to consumption, that of 'wondrous innocence'. Children and adults have experienced both consumption and childhood through the lens of this category, which in turn has gone on to mould children's (and adults') experiences of consumer culture, which in turn has affected how childhood is constructed and experienced.

## 4.3 RESEARCH INTO CHILDREN'S CONSUMPTION AND THE EMPOWERED/EXPLOITED CHILD CONSUMER DICHOTOMY

This section highlights two important issues regarding children's consumption. Firstly, despite the increase and proliferation in research which purports to shed light on children's consumer practices, the majority of this research is often an addendum to children's consumer practices, rather than adding to the epistemology of consumption. Secondly, because the contribution of children and children's practices have often been sidelined, we have been left with the dichotomy of children exploited by consumer culture on the one hand, and on the other hand, the child empowered through its relationship with consumer culture.

Children were viewed as consumers long before any attempt was made to standardise knowledge about their commercial behaviour and desires (Cook, 2009b). However, it was not until the mid-1970s that research on children as consumers began to be identified as a clear body of research (John, 1999). Most of this early research came from the fields of marketing research, with a strong emphasis on exploring children's understanding of advertising content and its intention (John, *ibid*.). Nevertheless, up until this point there had been a few studies that had looked at children and consumer culture, for example in 1955 Guest published a piece on brand loyalty and in 1955 Reisman and Roseborough wrote about children's conspicuous consumption. A few more pieces appeared during the 1960s on children and consumption, with children as a collective group of individuals forming a distinct consumer market. Early examples of research from the 1960s includes work on children's influence on parental purchasing decisions (Berey and Pollay, 1968; Wells and LoSciuto, 1966) and the influence of parents and peers on consumption patterns (Cateora, 1963).

It was in the early 1990s that research on children's consumer culture began to expand, however it was only in the first decade of the twenty-first century that this research could be classed as significant (Cook, 2009b: 277) (for examples, see Buckingham, 2000; Chin, 2001; Cook, 2004b; Cross, 2004; Kline, 1993; Pugh, 2009; Seiter, 1993; Schor, 2004; Zelizer, 1994). In particular, and as will be discussed at length in the next section, research has often focused upon the consumer socialisation of children (Cook, 2009b, 2010; Gunter and Furnham, 1998; John, 1999; McNeal, 1992, 2007; Martens *et al*., 2004;

Ward, 1974; Ward *et al*., 1977). Produced concurrently with this was a wide range of publications which dealt with consumption and consumer culture theoretically, empirically, and commentatory (see Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Gottdiener, 2000; Featherstone, 2007; Lury, 1996; Miller, 1995; Paterson, 2006; Sassatelli, 2007; Slater, 1997). However despite this, according to Martens *et al*. (2004, 162), "children are largely invisible in theories of consumption." Furthermore, research on children's consumption, has "not yet coalesced into anything approaching a body of knowledge or field of study" (Cook, 2008: 221). The studies and publications which have been produced are often linked together because they address *children's* consumption – in spite of the differences in theory, method and approach. Additionally, when research has been conducted on children's consumer practices, it has often been simply viewed as a mere addition to previous research without any engagement with the epistemological concerns of children's engagement with consumption (for exceptions see Martens *et al*. 2004). Furthermore, there still exists a paucity of empirical research on children as consumers (Chin, 2001; Martens *et al*., 2004; Pugh, 2009). Research on children's consumption has often only covered specific areas of children's consumer behaviour such as their relationship with the media, toys, clothing and food (Boden, 2006; Martens *et al*., 2004). Additionally, the research that has taken place has also tended to focus on 'older children' and teenagers (Martens *et al*., 2004). A lot of consumption takes place on behalf of young children and babies, even children that are yet to be born, yet this consumption has been less widely investigated (for exemption see Martens, 2008; Taylor, 2000). Nevertheless, contrary to this, with regards to work on children's understanding of the motives of advertisers and advertising content John (1999) suggests that it is actually with the under 12s that most research has been conducted and that there is actually less information on older children and teenagers.

Although "research and writing about the consumer preferences, culture and practices of children has, since the early 1990s, grown at what seems to be an exponential rate" children are still essentially invisible in theories of consumer society and culture, despite their presence and centrality in everyday life (Cook, 2008: 221). Although there has been a vast amount of empirical and theoretical work produced on consumption, children are still marginalised or absent from research. Consequently, agreeing with

Cook (2008: 222), "children's presence and practices must be acknowledged and investigated as constitutive of – rather than derivative of or exceptional to – commercial, consumer culture generally." By acknowledging and acting upon "the essential and non-negotiable presence of children and childhood throughout social life," both children and childhood can inform and contribute to thinking about consumption (*ibid*.: 222). It is necessary to understand that children are more than little people, constantly demanding the latest toys, or that their consumption only relates to trivial goods, and acknowledge and recognise children as economic actors who are both the objects and subjects of consumption. Children's experiences should form a substantial part of the epistemological understandings of consumption – not merely by adding discussions of children and childhood to the debate, nor by using them to support preconceived ideas and theoretical positions, but by rigorously questioning, unpicking, and problematising children's consumption. Consequently, in examining children's consumption this thesis aims not only to provide a description of the way in which children aged between 6 and 10 years old consume, but contribute to epistemological understandings of the nature of consumption. In particular this will be achieved through a reference to enculturation, which will be discussed further in the next section of this chapter.

One of the major problem with viewing children and childhood as crucial but non-exceptional aspects of consumption arises from the way in which these categories are conceptualised (Cook, 2008). As was discussed in chapter two it is difficult to envisage children as part of everyday life due to the special status that often is conferred upon them and the category childhood (James *et al*., 1998; James and Prout, 1997; Jenks, 1996). This gives rise to the dichotomy of the exploited/empowered child (Cook, 2004a, 2005, 2007, 2008; Strandell, 2002; Tingstad, 2007).

As was shown in the previous chapter with the work of Marcuse and Baudrillard consumption and consumer culture are often viewed critically, with the opinion that consumption is a form of exploitation. Furthermore, since children are often presented as vulnerable, and as seen in the first two chapters of this thesis children are often viewed as being particularly at risk of the dangers of consumption (see, Barber, 2007; Kline, 1993; Linn, 2004; Palmer, 2006; Schor, 2004). Here, childhood innocence and vulnerability are emphasised, often unreflexively. The danger arises from the belief that

children have a naturally inherent malleable nature and are susceptible to the influence of marketers and advertisers (Cook, 2004a). Whereas those who see children as social actors co-constructing their own culture and contributing to the cultures of others tend to provide a more agnostic view of the role and place of consumption and media in children's lives (see, Buckingham, 2000; Cross, 2004; Jacobson, 2005; Martens *et al*., 2004). However there are exceptions, for example Chin (2001), in her ethnography of poor African-American girls, sees that they are both empowered and exploited in their lives as consumers. The girls are empowered through acts of consumption, but at the same time are also exploited as a consequence of racism and poverty. Also Keller and Kalmus (2009), in their discussion of the vulnerability and empowerment Estonian children experience with regard to their media use, demonstrate that the exploited/empowered dichotomy is not clear cut, and often children will experience both exploited and empowerment as a result of their consumer practices. The context within which children consume must not be disconnected from the socio-historical dimensions of the location within which they occur, as it too has an important bearing on the ways in which children experience consumer culture.

As was mentioned in chapter two, the paradigm of the new sociology of childhood seeks to understand and examine children's lives without privileging any particular viewpoint and by also paying attention to the thoughts, opinions, and beliefs of children. However, as Cook (2008: 230, 2009b) notes, there are very few studies conducted within this paradigm which also examine consumption (see, for exceptions, Evans, 2002; Martens *et al*., 2004; Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, 2002; Waerdahl, 2005). Cook suggests that this is because the 'new sociology of childhood', in championing the voices of young people, shares the same rhetoric used by advertisers and marketers, who defend themselves against claims of exploitation by highlighting the ways in which children are empowered through their engagement with consumer goods (Cook, 2005, 2007b, 2008, 2009b; Linn, 2004; Schor, 2004; Tingstad, 2007). Consequently the dichotomy that has arisen between the active, 'empowered' child and the child manipulated and exploited as a result of their engagement with consumer culture can be seen to limit understanding and the production of knowledge with regards to children's consumer practices (Cook, 2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2007b, 2008; Stradwell, 2002; Tingstad, 2007).

This dichotomy between the empowered and the exploited child consumer will be discussed further in chapter seven, where moderation in relation to consumer practices, as experienced by the children in this research project, will be used to help explore both sides of this dichotomy.

## 4.4 CONSUMER SOCIALISATION AND COMMERCIAL ENCULTURATION

Prior to the early 1990s, children's engagement with consumption was generally framed within the discourse of 'consumer socialisation' (Cook, 2009b: 277). 'Consumer socialisation' is defined as the "processes by which young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace" (Ward, 1974: 2). It is for the most part based upon the belief within psychology that children move, stage-by-stage, from unknowing to competent knowing social beings. Like cognitive and social development, consumer socialisation is seen to be a developmental process, which children pass through on their way to becoming adult consumers (Cook, 2009b; John, 1999; Moschis, 1987; Moschis and Moore, 1979; Ward, 1974; Ward *et al*., 1977).

Deborah Roedder John (1999) in her review of consumer socialisation research, *"Consumer Socialization of Children: A Retrospective Look at Twenty-Five Years of Research"* attempts to bring together research on the common themes of children's consumption, and under the banner of cognitive ability and social development attempts to produce a singular narrative of consumer socialisation (Cook, 2010). She shows that consumer socialisation is for the most part based upon the assumption that children move, stage-by-stage, from unknowing to competent knowing social beings (see Piaget, 1954). At different cognitive stages children are seen to have at their disposal different skills in order to enable them to engage with consumer markets. John (1999: 184) gives the example of preschool children who are at the preoperational stage of development distinguishing between commercials and regular programmes by the virtue of perceptual features (e.g. adverts are shorter), whereas older children, those within the concrete operational stage will use features such as motive and intent (e.g. adverts are used to get people to buy particular goods).

As well as cognitive development, social development is also important in contributing to a child's consumer socialisation, with one aspect of social development – the ability to see another's perspective particularly important. Children aged 3-6 years are seen as at the egocentric stage, in which they are unaware of any perspective other than their own. Children aged 6-8 years old enter the social information role taking stage, where they become aware that others may have different opinions or motives, but this is due to others having different information rather than a different perspective on the situation. It is only in the self-reflexive role taking stage (8-10 years) that children understand that others have different viewpoints and also begin to consider this viewpoint. However it is only in the next stage (10-12 years), the mutual role taking stage, that children can simultaneously consider their own and another's point of view. It is in the fifth and final stage, the social and conventional system role taking stage (12-15 years) that children develop the ability to understand another person's perspective as it relates to the social group to which the other person belongs and lives their life.

At each of these particular stages children are seen to have at their disposal a particular set of skills that will allow them to engage in different aspects of consumption in particular ways. Taking negotiation strategies and the ability to influence other people's purchases as an example, John (1999: 204) suggests that at the perceptual stage children have a "limited ability to adapt a strategy to person or situation." Moving on to the next stage, the analytical stage, children are "developing abilities to adapt strategy to persons and situations." In the final reflective stage, children are seen to be "capable of adapting strategies based upon perceived effectiveness for persons or situations" (*ibid.*, 1999: 204). This is supported by Rust (1993) who points out that younger children use very direct strategies such as pointing at products and occasionally grabbing them off the shelves, in order to influence purchasing decisions. Whereas, as children get older and their verbal skills develop children may ask for products by name or by begging or nagging their parents (McNeal, 1992). Palan and Wilkes (1997) comment that children in the reflective stage may use a variety of strategies to influence purchase decisions such as, bargaining, persuasion, request and emotional strategies such as anger, guilt trips and sulking.

Developmental psychology provides the consumer socialisation framework with which to situate children's consumer practices at different stages within the life course, since biological age is taken to be the primary factor driving the transition from one stage to the next" (John, 1999: 205). These stages are understood to have a definite endpoint, that of the competent adult consumer:

> Developmental psychology provided a template with which to organise and interpret children's actions and utterances in reference to an overarching trajectory of a linear movement toward adulthood and thus the increasing acquisition of competence thereby implied in this movement. (Cook, 2009b: 273).

Furthermore, as Cook (2010: 66) suggests, the language used by John, for example 'limited ability', 'developing abilities', and 'capable of':

> …reinforces and reinscribes the epistemology of linear human development whereby the child initially exists in some presocial space, separated from the social world – including the world of consumption – and is subsequently brought into "the consumer role." The occupation of this role is not complete until adulthood, when it is posited that one "matures" into it. (Cook, 2010: 66).

Consequently, consumer socialisation theory can be criticised for two reasons, firstly it does not take into consideration the ongoing consumer socialisation which occurs throughout the lifecourse, and secondly, presumes that adults are fully socialised competent consumers. Furthermore, consumer socialisation research is not sensitive to cultural contexts in which consumer socialisation occurs (Berlisson, 2007). Consumer socialisation does not taken into consideration "the multiplicity of childhoods, economic circumstances or ways of behaving as a consumer" (Cook, 2010: 65), but instead the modernist view of the single trajectory towards competent adulthood leaves no space for children's various understandings of self and place within the socio-commercial realm. The actions of parents, marketers, peer groups, for example are presented as external to the essentialised 'child' and inexorable forces of the developmental process. Lastly, one questions the need to specifically mark out consumer socialisation as a particular form of socialisation, for as Kline (2006) points out, life socialisation and media-consumer socialisation, are for the most part, one and the same. To be socialised

within consumer culture is to be socialised as a regular member of society who is involved in practices of consumption at all stages of the life course (Clarke, 2004).

Despite the problems associated with consumer socialisation theory, it does have some advocates particularly within the literature on market research, advertising and branding, and marketing (Cook, 2009b, 2010) (for example, see, Benmoyal-Bouzaglo and Moschis, 2009; Dotson and Hyatt, 2000, 2005; Roper and La Niece, 2009). Furthermore such research has not been silent in answering its critics, for example, Beyda (2010) in her examination of commercial socialisation of young Brazilian consumers, is sensitive to the cultural context within which these young people consume, and looks at the role grandparents and domestic staff play, as well as the impact of Brazil's emerging economy. The need for an understanding of life-long consumer socialisation is recognised, as well as the need for a more inter-disciplinary approach which encourages ethnographic research methods and socio-cultural methods, in order to produce a pluralistic understanding of consumer socialisation (Ekström, 2006).

However, since the mid 1990s, "a significant epistemological break in the understanding of children and childhood [has taken] hold", with theories of consumer socialisation tending to give way to "the rise of the knowing, active child" (Cook, 2009b: 273). This epistemological break refers to the belief that childhood and children's cultures are worthy of study in their own right and that children are actively involved in the creation of their own worlds and childhood, as was highlighted in chapter two, and can be evidenced in the 'new sociology of childhood' (James *et al*.., 1998; Jenks, 1996; Prout and James, 1990). Consequently, from the 1990s and beyond, qualitative interpretative research has sought to 'know' the consuming child. However, as was mentioned above in section 4.3, such knowledge about the ways in which children consume is for the most part, not established within consumption theory. Therefore, Cook (2010) in *Commercial Enculturation: Moving Beyond Consumer Socialization*, and in a paper of the same name which was presented at the 3rd Child and Teen Consumption conference in Trondheim, Norway, in 2008, suggests that knowledge about children, childhood and children's engagement with consumer goods needs to be situated within the broader themes of consumption theory. There needs to be the recognition of interactions with

peers, parents, siblings and significant others and also taking into account brands, advertising, marketing, and the processes of acquisition. Cook suggests that 'commercial enculturation' is a useful term to describe these processes, as it incorporates an understanding of the market whilst at the same time recognises the social relationships in which children are located. Additionally, unlike consumer socialisation, commercial enculturation does not identify a particular endpoint, a certain level of ability or knowledge, which can be used to identify when a child becomes a "complete" (adult) consumer. Thus, 'commercial enculturation' is defined by Cook as:

> …a means to capture and emphasize the variety of ways in which children come to 'know' and participate in commercial life…Commercial enculturation, rather, places attention on the *culture* in "consumer culture" as multiple, layered and overlapping webs of meaning which precede an individual child. It assumes that consumption and meaning, and thus culture, cannot be separated from each other but arise together through social contexts and processes of parenting and socializing with others. Children, in this view, are not so much socialized into becoming one specific kind of consumer as they are seen as entering into social relationships with and through goods and their associations. This is a variable process that is not necessarily linear or temporally determined, but socially and culturally embedded in understandings of childhood, adulthood and market relations. (Cook: 2010, 70).

Work on commercial enculturation has not yet been fully explored in the literature, but see Cook's (2003b, 2004c) discussion on commercial enculturation and the rituals involved in children's birthday parties. Consequently one of the major contributions of this thesis to new knowledge is that it provides one of the first studies of commercial enculturation based upon empirical research. Bertilsson (2007) in a paper presented at the Nordic Consumer Policy Research Conference, discusses the role of enculturation on the way in which young people make sense of brands and branding, however he does not specifically refer to *commercial* enculturation. Nevertheless the work of Bertilsson is useful in demonstrating the way in which enculturation, and in this instance he means young people's peer interactions, and the reflexive establishment and breaking of particular norms and behaviour with regard to consumption practices, provides a framework for understanding the way in which young people, as individuals and as a peer group, manage brands and branding.

This however raises the question of what is meant by 'enculturation' and in what ways does it differ from socialisation? Like socialisation, enculturation refers to the process by which individuals learn their own culture (Herskovits, 1972). However more than this Herskovits (1955: 326) defines enculturation as:

> the aspects of the learning experience that mark off man from other creatures, and by means of which he achieves competence in his culture. …This is in essence a process of conscious or unconscious conditioning, exercised within the limits sanctioned by a given body of custom. From this process not only is all adjustment to social living achieved, but also all those satisfactions, themselves a part of social experience, that derive from individual expression rather than association with others in the group (Herskovits, 1955: 326).

It is understood to be an unconscious process, which occurs and is perpetuated through the internalisation of cultural symbols, in which individuals conform to particular social patterns and which also acts as a mechanism for the stabilisation of culture (Herskovits, 1955). Herskovits (*ibid*.: 327) notes that enculturation mainly takes place during the first few years of life, however it may also happen in adulthood, in situations that an individual has never encountered before, but in adulthood enculturation is seen to be a conscious and reflexive process, whilst in childhood it is unconscious. Shimahara (1970: 143) refutes this and suggests that there is little evidence to support his argument of two distinct phases as "he rarely attends to the creative process at the preadult level." Furthermore when children are learning about the culture in which they are growing up, not only do they conform to this culture but also test, resist, experiment, and toy with this culture, and do so as part of the process of 'creative becoming' rather than merely conforming to the prevalent cultural patterns. Whilst Herskovits (1955, 1972) may have introduced the debate with regard to enculturation, he does not take into consideration the active, innovative, reflexive aspects of enculturation (Shimahara, 1970). Furthermore, some of the ideas presented by Shimahara (*ibid*.: 148) may be seen as a precursor to the demands made by the 'new sociology' of childhood to recognise that:

> the child undergoing enculturative experience is not an entirely passive learner, unconsciously acquiring cultural tradition, but rather one who can also engage in creative transaction with his culture. (Shimahara, 1970: 148).

Consequently enculturation should be seen as a reflexive process, involving unconscious acquiring of culture as well as "simultaneously reflexively, deliberately, and creatively both forming it and learning it" (Bertilsson, 2007: 7). In adopting the position of commercial enculturation the emphasis is on the kinds of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that children take on board as a result of their social interactions, rather than the linear trajectory of the 'correct' and 'proper' knowledges and skills of consumer socialisation. Commercial enculturation is a perspective which acknowledges the developments that take place in children's early years with regard to their relationship with consumer goods and consumer culture, yet at the same time recognises the multifaceted nature and multiple trajectories of children's engagement with consumer culture. Furthermore what and how children learn about consumption occurs in social contexts in which children are already located within the consumer world. Therefore, as a result of these insights, commercial enculturation will be used to frame the discussion of children's consumption practices within this thesis.

## 4.5 SUMMARY

This chapter has provided a socio-historical overview of the development of children's consumer culture. Through the work of Cook it is suggested that there was a distinct focus on the needs of the child that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century, on the innocent and special nature of children and childhood, which meant that children were began to be viewed as consumers in their own right. Gary Cross's notion of wondrous innocence and children as the valves of adult desire further develops the discourse on the 'special' nature of the child and its influence on conceptualisations of practices of consumption.

It was acknowledged that this thesis does focuses heavily on the work on Daniel Cook, however this is because he is such a prolific writer on the subject of children's consumption. Furthermore there are shortcomings associated with Daniel Cook's work, and that of Gary Cross, in that for the most part they lack the empirical research to support their claims. In the case of Daniel Cook this is particularly ironic as he specifically calls for research that pays attention to children as social actors in practices of consumption (Cook, 2008).

As was discussed in chapter three in relation to Marcuse and Baudrillard, consumption may also be a form of exploitation. Consequently section 4.3 introduces the dichotomy of the empowered and exploited child consumer. It is suggested that there needs to be the appropriate research on children's consumption, which takes into account *children's* thoughts and opinions on consumption. An analysis of the dichotomy of the empowered and exploited child consumer is developed in chapter seven.

In examining consumer socialisation and commercial enculturation, section 4.4 also brings together some of the taken for granted assumptions on the nature of children as identified in chapters one and two, in particular pertaining to the innocence and vulnerability of children, the belief that children are a distinct and separate group from adults who need protection from the dangerous aspects of the adult world, or due to perceived differences due to biological age, are in need of the appropriate instruction in order to be able to function fully as 'competent' adults. Consumer socialisation sees children developing along generalisable predetermined paths in which development is based upon chronological age. Whilst recognising that there are proponents of a consumer socialisation approach to children's engagement with consumer culture, particular within the marketing literature, consumer socialisation theory can be criticised for not taking into consideration the ongoing consumer socialisation which occurs throughout the lifecourse, and secondly, presumes that adults are fully socialised competent consumers. Furthermore, consumer socialisation research is not sensitive to cultural contexts in which consumer socialisation occurs. Consequently, commercial enculturation is suggested by Cook (2010) as a more appropriate way of understanding the ways in which children consume. Commerical enculturation is a reflexive process, in which the multilayered webs of meaning of society and culture precede children and cannot be separated from social and cultural contexts. Children are not socialised into consumption per se but engage in consumption practices that are socially and culturally embedded in understandings of childhood, family, and the market. However since commercial enculturation is a relative new concept there is little empirical research on this topic, consequently one of the most important contributions of this thesis to the study of children's consumption is that it provides one of the first empirical studies of commercial enculturation.

Through an analysis of the literature pertaining to children and childhood, consumption and children's consumption in chapters one to four the scene has been set to use this as a spring board for my own explorations into children's consumption. Consequently chapters six and seven provide an empirical exploration of the consumption practices of six to ten years old, seek to understand the knowledge that children have about consumption practices and develop an understanding of how this knowledge is gained, look at the role played by the children's family, peer group, and the market in constituting children's consumption practices and finally discover some of the creative features of children's consumption activities. However first of all an exploration of the methods and methodological concerns of the research project are discussed in chapter five.

# CHAPTER 5 – CHILD-FOCUSED METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS

The previous chapters have examined the literature regarding children, childhood and consumption. The proceeding chapters will discuss the findings of this research project, with the aim of contextualising the data on children's engagement with consumer culture. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to examine the methodological issues pertinent to this research project, as well as outlining and critiquing the research methods used.

The chapter is divided into two, with the first part examining child-focused research as an approach to conducting research with children which puts the thoughts, beliefs and opinions of children at the centre of the research project. The ethical issues involved with research with children, are particularly important, and consequently specific attention is paid to the issues related to power, confidentiality and consent in the research process. The second half of the chapter looks at the methods that were used in this study and explores the way in which the data was analysed. Throughout I reflect upon my role of researcher within the project.

## 5.1 CHILD-FOCUSED METHODOLOGY

This research project takes interpretive reproductionism as its theoretical framework (Cosaro, 1985, 1997, 2003) (see chapter two). Such an approach recognises that children creatively appropriate information and knowledge from the adult environment in order to construct and participate in the world around them, and that children also contribute to the reproduction and extension of their own and adult culture (Corsaro, 1997: 41). Such an understanding of the ways in which children are active members of society requires an appropriate methodology in order to make explicit how children create meaning and interact with others in order to co-construct their social worlds. Consequently the child-focused methodology advocated by the 'new sociology of childhood', is recognised as the most appropriate methodology with which to give children's thoughts, beliefs, and opinions the attention that they both require and deserve (Christensen and James, 2000; Harden *et al*., 2000; Morrow, 2008; Pole, 2007; Pole *et al.,* 1999; Prout, 2000).

Traditionally research has been *on* children rather than *with* children (Darbyshire *et al*., 2005; Greig *et al*., 2007; O'Kane, 2000; Qvortrup, 1994; Tisdall *et al*., 2009). There have been many arguments put forward which go against taking children's participation in social research seriously. Reasons for this include the belief that children are too immature to contribute their own opinions about their experiences and values (Christensen and James, 2000). In particular this is linked to the discourses about developmentalism which still hold some sway in the discussions regarding research with children (James *et al*., 1998; Mayall, 2002). Children may be seen to lack abstract thinking or other such cognitive skills which prevents them from talking part in research. So instead of talking to children directly, significant adults such as parents, doctors, retailers, and teachers may be brought in to speak as a 'proxy' for children (Darbyshire *et al*., 2005; Mahon *et al*., 1996). Furthermore, adults may feel that they know what it is to be a child and take these unquestioned assumptions about children with them into the research project (Punch, 2002). Consequently, in refusing to recognise that children are best placed to be the experts of their own subjective experiences, this has implications for the validity of the research and is also unfair to children on both an individual and a group level (Greig *et al.,* 2007). Thus the new sociology of childhood advocates a movement away from traditional approaches to researching the lives of children to a child-focused methodology which has at its core:

- a commitment to recognising the competence of children in being able to participate in the research project
- an understanding of the appropriate research methods in order to ensure children's maximum engagement in the research project
- an awareness of the complexities of ethics, including issues relating to consent, confidentiality and power, with regard to research with children

Proponents of child-focused research methodology do not however form one coherent body of researchers, and opinions differ with regard to the most appropriate methods for undertaking research with children (Fraser, 2004; Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008; James *et al*., 1998; Punch, 2002). One area of contention is the paradox highlighted by Punch:

> It is somewhat paradoxical that within the new sociology of childhood many of those who call for the use of innovative or adapted research techniques with children, are also those who emphasise the competence of children. If children are competent social actors, why are special 'child-friendly' methods needed to communicate with them? (Punch, 2002; 321).

The 'child-friendly' research methods that Punch refers to include diaries, photographs, drawings and focus groups, which emphasise the 'fun' nature of research. This is because adults often presume that children prefer fun methods, and are naturally more competent and at ease in using them, and that children have short attention spans and therefore need something to keep them engaged in the research project (Punch, 2002: 329). For example drawing is often used as a research tool as it is seen as an activity that is not unusual to children, and is generally seen as enjoyable (Hill, 2006). 'Child-friendly' methods are also used by adults in a concerted effort to even out the balance of power between children and adults in the research process and to encourage responses from children who may lack confidence and experience in communicating with strange adults (Morrow, 2008; Punch, 2002). Lastly methods such as drawing, pictures, writing stories and completing worksheets may be chosen because they are familiar to children due to their experiences of school (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008; Punch, 2002). However as Gallacher and Gallagher (2008: 506) note, "In doing so, researchers are expressly taking advantage of children's schooled docility towards such activities. This is somewhat at odds with claims that such activities promote children's participation on the basis of active, informed decisions."

So then, if we are to see children as proficient social actors, are such 'special' research methods really necessary? Agreeing with Fraser (2004) I would suggest that there is nothing inherently 'child-friendly' in such research methods, rather that they are 'participant-friendly' and what is more important is to negotiate and develop the research methods appropriate for the group being studied. 'Child-friendly' research methods are not friendly because they are relevant to people at a particular developmental stage, but because they have been negotiated between the researcher and the research, and are relevant to the field of study:

> it is important not to see research as an arbitrary array of data collection techniques but as a careful selection of methods on the basis of a particular epistemology appropriate to the object of study. (Pole *et al.*, 1999: 41).

There are also other issues that need to be raised regarding child-focused research methodology. Firstly Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) question the assumption that engagement in social research is the most appropriate means through which children can be empowered. Secondly, despite the fact that children are ever increasingly involved in generating data, children are still much less likely to be involved in the data analysis stage of the research (Coad and Evans, 2008; Mayall, 1994). Furthermore when children are involved in the analysis of data often children will not be equal to the adult participants – for example they may only be asked to verify adults' perceptions of a particular event (Coad and Evans, 2008). However children can successfully be equal players in the analysis of data, as the young researchers in Kellett *et al.* (2004) demonstrate. Further excellent examples of children's involvement in the research process from inception to dissemination can be seen at the Children's Research Centre at the Open University (www.childrens-research-centre.open.ac.uk/research.cfm).

### 5.1.1 Ethical Considerations for Research with Children

Ethical concerns underpin approaches to conducting 'good' research (Alderson, 2004). Such considerations try to ensure that research is respectful, non-discriminatory, that it does no harm, and that it protects the vulnerable. Such principles can be conceptualised as a set of rights "to self-determination, privacy, dignity anonymity, confidentiality, fair treatment and protection from discomfort or harm" (Hill, 2006: 65; Alderson and Morrow, 2004).

Ethics are salient for many researchers, not just those working with children, however when it comes to research with children such issues seem to be more pertinent (Alderson, 2005; Morrow, 2008; Morrow and Richards, 1996; Thomas and O'Kane, 1998). This is because the ethical debates around children tend to centre on the extent to which children are perceived as being vulnerable or incompetent beings (Gallagher, 2009b; Morrow and Richards, 1996). Once again this raises difficult questions as to whether research with children is the same as that with adults, for example whether the

same criteria for ethical research should be used, or if children and adults possess different skills and qualities which necessitates a different ethical approach (Alderson, 2004; Harden *et al*., 2000; Punch, 2002). Thus, agreeing with Harden *et al*. (2000, paragraph 2.24) the 'special care' that should be afforded to research with children does not stem from the inherent vulnerabilities of children as opposed to adults, rather a concerted effort to take into account children's positioning in the social world:

> The main ethical issues should not revolve around children's innate difference but relate to children's social location as subordinate to adults. For example, 'informed consent' is problematic not primarily because of children's lack of understanding of research, but because their participation in any research project is dependent on adult gatekeepers. (Harden *et al*., 2000: paragraph 2.24)

#### 5.1.1.1 Power in the Research Process

As with all research, but especially with research which involves marginalised groups, there is the issue of power imbalance (Robinson and Kellett, 2004). As an adult researcher the balance of power will be more greatly weighted in my favour. As Mayall (2000: 121) notes, children are aware that "a central characteristic of adults is that they have power over children." Power however "is not just about force but involves the creation of knowledge" (Robinson and Kellet, 2004: 81). Power should be understood to be embedded in the processes of doing research rather than something that is inherent to being an adult or a child, as Christensen (2004: 166) explains, "Power is not, as such, nested in categorical positions, such as 'adult' or 'child', but rather in the social representations of these that we make, negotiate, work out and work with in social life." Furthermore, as well as their status as children, features such as gender, (dis)ability, geographical, and class differences also impinge upon a child's position in society.

Encouraging children's participation in research is a useful way of addressing issues relating to power imbalances and the construction of knowledge by one (more powerful) group about another (less powerful) group. This could be at any stage of the research project collection from identifying the research questions, deciding upon the research methods, conducting the research, analysing the data and writing up the research, to the dissemination of the research. However children's participation is often confined to collecting the research data (Alderson, 2004; Hill, 2005; Morrow and Richards, 1996).

Clark (2004) for example, questions how much theory is adult-researcher produced and how much is child-researcher generated. Additionally, involving children in the research process does not necessarily mean that the research will be 'good', both in terms of its benefit to children and its academic calibre. Furthermore, involving children in the research project will not automatically solve the imbalances of power between children and adults (Morrow and Richards, 1996).

The role of 'least-adult' may be adopted in order to engage the trust of children whilst conducting research with them (Corsaro, 1985; Jabeen, 2009; Mandell, 1998; Punch, 2002; Thomas and O'Kane, 1998). The adoption of such a position means "blending in to the social world of children, not siding with adults, operating physically and metaphorically on the children's level in their social worlds" (Mayall, 2000: 121). However it is not necessary to pretend to be children in order to understand them (James *et al*., 1998). Furthermore such an approach focuses on the meanings of being a child or being and adult which forgets the physical practicalities of doing research, as well as serving to reinforce the well-worn stereotypes of 'child' and 'adult' (Christensen, 2004; Harden *et al.,* 2000). Therefore I focused on ensuring respect, fairness and no harm by making certain that the children consented to the research, by listening actively to what the children had to say, thinking carefully about the questions that were asked, and reimbursing the children for taking part in the research.[22] The success of this can be demonstrated from the comments from the children themselves. For example Samuel in the café after his shopping trip told me that he was going to go away and do some research of his own making tally charts based upon the music preferences of people he was going to interview, Dilianda, Bravo B and Alpha Chicken begged me to stay for tea with them after their interviews had finished, and Markus after his

[22] At the interview stage of the research the participants were given a £5 gift voucher for taking part in the research On the one hand it may be viewed as bribery to offer money or gifts to participants in research, yet on the other hand it may be seen as a fair reward (Gallagher, 2009b; Scott, 2000). One way to overcome this may be to offer the reward after the research had been completed (Mahon *et al*., 1996). However I wanted to be up front from the beginning about what the research project would entail, so from the start, the children were informed that they would receive a voucher after taking part in the interviews.

interview commented, “That was cool. Can I do it again? I don’t usually get the chance to talk to my mum because she’s busy.”

5.1.1.2 Consent

Participants have a right to be fully informed about the research process, in order that they can make informed decisions about whether or not to take part in the research. Hill (2005: 69) identifies five areas that participants need to be informed about:

1. the aims of the research
2. what time and commitment is required
3. who will know the results
4. whether there will be feedback
5. whether confidentiality is promised

In order to ensure that I fulfilled these directives an information pack was given to families containing an introductory letter covering these issues as well as an information sheet giving some examples of the sort of questions that I would be asking. This was useful in providing both the parents and children with an idea of what would be involved in the research, however as Ben’s mother happily told me, “We’ve been practising the questions. Hopefully they’ll be good for you.” One has to weigh up the benefits of ‘prepared answers’ over ‘prepared participants’. Nevertheless in this instance because the children were talking in length, for on average thirty minutes, this gave them the opportunity to provide their own point of view on a range of topics and not just pre-prepared answers. There was also a sheet which detailed the principles of the research. These principles were:

- Nobody had to answer questions that they did not want to or could not answer.
- Participants could stop at anytime.
- The interviews were not tests and that there were no right or wrong answers.
- I would be using what the children told me to help me ‘write a book for university’ and that no-one would be able to identify who had said what. However if they told me something and I thought that they or some other children were in danger I would have to tell their parents or teachers.

A further copy of these guidelines was introduced at the beginning of the interviews where I read through them and then asked the children and their parents to sign to say that they agreed to take part in the research. In the case of the accompanied shopping trips I discussed these things at the start of the trip, without getting written consent, but used the fact that both parents and children had turned up to show that they had assented to take part in the research (Cocks, 2006; Gallagher, 2009b). The same was true of the journals, I took the fact that they were returned to me as a sign of the children's assent. Informed consent must be viewed as an 'ongoing process' and at varying stages within the research project participants must be reminded that they can withdraw their consent at any time, or consent must be renegotiated (Greig et al., 2007; Lewis, 2010; Morrow, 2008; Wiles et al., 2007). In the interviews this occurred most commonly when children appeared to be struggling to provide an answer, in particular in reference to the vignette about Ben, and suggesting what other people e.g. grandparents and friends may say about his consumption choices, and I reminded them that if they did not know or could not answer that that was ok.

Nevertheless, putting the principles of informed consent into practice is often difficult (Gallagher, 2009b). Since when researching with children not only is it necessary that consent is gained from the children themselves, but permission must also be sought from parents/carers in order that their children be involved in the research. At least this tends to be the case until a child reaches around the age of 13, when some researchers drawing on the notion of ' Gillick competence' desist from gaining consent from the children's parents or carers (Coyne, 2009; Gallagher, 2009b; Masson, 2004; Wiles *et al*., 2007). Once again this stems from the way in which children are often viewed as vulnerable in society as to whether they are capable to give their consent to take part, as well as children's legal status as the dependents of adults (Hill, 2005; Masson, 2004). Lastly researchers must question whether children, especially within institutional settings such as schools, are ever able to refuse consent (Morrow and Richards, 1992).

5.1.1.3 Confidentiality

The issue of confidentiality is an important aspect of social research (Greig *et al*., 2007; Hill, 2005; Williamson *et al*., 2005). Hill (2005: 75) identifies three aspects of confidentiality:

1. Public confidentiality – not identifying research participants in research reports, presentation and so forth;
2. Social network confidentiality – not passing on information to family members, friends or others known to the child;
3. Third-party breach of privacy – where a group or household member reveals something personal about another.

Public confidentiality was ensured by changing the names of participants, the names of any friends or relatives that were mentioned, and the names of any towns and cities. In changing the names of the participants one has to pay attention to the fact that names are a marker of class, gender, ethnicity, and age. Consequently a participant's name signifies a lot about them. Therefore I asked the children to suggest a name which could be used as a pseudonym or 'secret code name so that no one will know who I am writing about.' I saw this as one way of the children contributing to the research project in a very direct and meaningful way. In a few instances the children were not able to provide a pseudonym and said I could use their real name. In these cases, I selected names from the Office for National Statistics lists of the top baby names for boys and girls for 2008 (Office for National Statistics, 2008a, 2008b).

Social network confidentiality was harder to maintain. Although I did not tell parents what the children had said, a few parents did overhear what their children were saying. For example when Jade mentioned in a world weary voice "Some of the things in Tescos are just a bit crap!" I heard stifled laughter from her mum in the next room. Also after the interview in which Phoebe commented that there were, "millions of black kids at the Christmas party, me and Alfie were the only white kids there," Phoebe's mother took the opportunity to inform me apologetically that, "Phoebe is very interested in where people come from these days." Unfortunately I could not do too much about these instances, however if parents had asked me directly what their children had said,

following Hill (2005) I would have reminded them of the issues of confidentiality as raised in the consent form.

The issue of the breach of confidentiality by a third-party was only relevant in the three cases where children were interviewed together. Here one child may have mentioned something which was then exposed by the other child. Unfortunately this was one area that I had not really considered before commencing the research project. As Alderson (2004) notes often ethical considerations are an after-thought as was the case in this instance. Fortunately no issues were raised that caused concern however this is definitely one area to consider when conducting future research.

It is understood that what is said will be kept confidential and not shared with others. Nevertheless there is an assumed duty of care that if a researcher is presented with information about potential abuse or harm to a participant that he or she will report it to a third party, however there is not a legal compulsion to do so (Williamson *et al.*, 2005). In informing the children about the research I refrained from telling them that the research was confidential, rather that their answers would be made anonymous, and nobody would be able to identify that they said, however if they did tell me something about them or other people being hurt in any way, that I would have to tell their parents or teachers (Davies, 2008; Duncan *et al.*, 2009; Hill, 2005; Kendrick *et al.*, 2008). This follows Williamson *et al.*'s (2005) call to much clearer about the limitations of confidentiality in research with children and young people. During the course of one of the pilot interviews this was tested when one of the participants told me that he was being bullied. I advised him to speak to his mum about the situation, to which he said that she already knew. Since he told the story about him being bullied rather matter-of-factly (as though he was telling me a story about himself rather than asking for help) and that his mother already knew about the situation, I decided not to take that the issue any further.

### 5.1.2 Summary of child-focused research methodology

Child-focused research methodology has its origins in the 'new sociology of childhood.' It takes on board the commitment to think beyond the stereotypes that view children as vulnerable or lacking, and applies this to a child-focused research methodology. It

recognises that appropriate methods should be used when conducting research with children, but whether specific 'child friendly' methods should be used is open to discussion. Lastly ethics are an important component of child-focused research methodology. Thus ethical issues relating to power, consent and confidentiality were explored in relation to child-focused research in general, with examples taken from this research project to highlight key points.

The next section will further explore how a child-focused research methodology was put into practice through an examination of the research methods used in this thesis.

## 5.2 RESEARCH METHODS

### 5.2.1 Participants

The research, on which this thesis is based, stems from semi-structured interviews with 25 children aged between 6 and 10 years old. There were responses from 8 girls and 17 boys. Four of the children lived in households headed by a single parent (in these cases it was the mother), and one child lived with both his mother and his grandmother. One child lived in a step-family and one child with his mother and her boyfriend. The remaining 18 children lived with both their mother and father. Three of the children identified themselves as Malaysian, having been born in Malaysia and living temporarily in the UK, due to their father's work. One of the children identified himself as Bulgarian, and as having Bulgarian parents, although he was born in the UK. Five children were only children, and two children were living in families where they were the only child at the present moment, but had step- and half-siblings living away. There were three brother and sister pairs, and one grouping of two brothers and a sister.[23] All the

[23] Although it is recognised that siblings within families are likely to have similar experiences of consumption due to shared familial practices of consumption (Martens *et al.*, 2004), the siblings that were interviewed also expressed differences in experiences and attitudes. For example whilst brother and sister Alfie and Phoebe lamented the fact that were only allowed to watch television at the weekends, Alfie appreciated the fact that his parents were trying to limit his exposure to "electronic gadgets", "because they did all those things but regretted it" whereas Phoebe focused on her "bad Mummy" who prevented her from having toys and Nestle chocolate. Alpha Chicken hated going shopping whereas his brother Bravo B expressed the converse opinion. They both shared stories with me regarding consumption practices at the Muslim festival of Eid Ul-Fitr. Consequently this research recognises that there may be some similarities in siblings' responses but that there was also a variety and range of responses within sibling groups.

children lived in the north-east of England, with six children living in villages, six children living in a small city, four children living in a rural town, eight children living in a more urbanised town, and one child living in a large city. Two of the children (Samuel and Thomas) went to private schools, whilst the other twenty-three children attended state schools. Information was also gathered regarding the occupation of the children's parents.[24]

In addition to these twenty-five interviews, shopping trips were undertaken with eight of the children along with 'the person you normally go shopping with', in these cases it resulted in trips with five mothers, one father, a grandmother, and one mother and grandmother together.[25] To complement the shopping trips these eight children were also asked to complete a journal which asked them to answer either pictorially or in a written format various questions regarding their consumption practices.

The children were recruited to the study by means of convenience sampling, where convenience sampling is defined as "a non-probability sampling technique where subjects are selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher" (Castillo, 2009). That is to say participants are selected because of the convenience for the researcher (Ferber, 1977; Greig *et al.,* 2007). This convenience may be in terms of economic costs or because a researcher is already working with a specific group, or any other reason which means that it is preferable for the researcher to conduct their research with that group, such as language proficiency or geographical location. Furthermore convenience samples are often used in research with children since the heightened sensitivity of issues relating to access may mean that convenience samples are more readily used (Grieg *et al.* 2007). However, although such samples are convenient for the researcher there are disadvantages of using such an approach, since convenience sampling involves non-probability sampling which means that the population as a whole does not have an equal chance being included in the research.

[24] For a further breakdown of these details see table 1.1 in the Appendix.

[25] For further details of who went on the shopping trips, the location, and the shopping environment, please see table 1.2 in the Appendix.

Therefore the findings of the research cannot be made generalisable to the wider population (Castillo, 2009). Nevertheless the objective of this research is to provide an in-depth snapshot of children's consumption practices based upon interviews, shopping trips, and journals of a small group of children, rather than to produce a statistically valid account of children's consumption which may not provide much detail on how children consume. Consequently since these methods provided detailed snapshots of the consumer experiences of a small group of children this objective has been achieved.

Originally I had wanted to conduct research with children who knew me or at least their parents did, through mutual friends and acquaintances. At the time I believed that there were two reasons for this. The first reason being that because I wanted to conduct research with children it would involve spending time in close proximity with children, and secondly because I wanted to conduct shopping trips with the participants and knew that it was important to develop a good rapport between the parties, I felt that it would be only possible if someone else could vouch for my trustworthiness. In conducting research with children there is a sense that the researcher has to establish his or her credibility as person who is suitable to spend time with children by emphasising that they have gained clearance from the Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) or by emphasising previous experience with children (Pole, 2007). Whilst recognising that these thoughts contributed to my decision to use convenience sampling, in retrospect it was also my lack of confidence, dislike of asking demands of other people and my fear that I would be wasting the participants' time, that I looked to a third party to smooth the way. The idiosyncrasies of the researcher must not be forgotten in the research process![26]

[26] The experience that I have gained however from conducting this piece of research has shown me that the participants were often very keen to participate in research. They enjoyed the process and relished in the opportunity to provide an extended account of their lives, as seen in the examples above, which gave me the confidence to understand that the children (and their parents) were gaining a valuable experience by taking part in the research, and that it was not a one-sided gain on my part. Generally people will say no in the first instance if they do not wish to take part in the proposed research, and consequently I learned not to be afraid to be more direct in contacting participants. Nevertheless it still may be appropriate to use convenience and snowball sampling in research with children, as the need to present oneself as trustworthy when conducting research with children still stands.

### 5.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

In adherence to the tenets of child-focused methodology, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary research method as they encourage participants to talk freely on a given subject, and to gain an understanding of the participants thoughts, beliefs and opinions. This is not to say that other research methods, and in particular quantitative methods, cannot be used in research with children (see for example, Gaskins *et al.,* 2002; Greig *et al.*, 2007; Morrow and Richards, 1996; Scott, 2000). However semi-structured interviews were used since they employ a variety of open-ended questions based around particular pre-defined topics, which are amenable to change throughout the research process and thus allow "researchers access to how children perceive their actions and their worlds" (Corsaro and Fingerson, 2003: 132).

Semi-structured interviews entail a high level of planning and preparation (Punch, 2005). Consequently, prior to entering into the interview setting and in conjunction with the review of the literature, specific topic areas were identified as being important and necessary to be covered. Questions which led into these topic areas were then formulated, however a strict adherence to these questions was not upheld, as long as the pre-determined topic areas were covered. A pilot study was employed to test out these topic areas to ensure the clarity of the questions, that the language was appropriate, that the concepts being discussed were relevant to the children's lives, and that the length of the interviews was appropriate. As well as testing the content of the interviews, the pilot study was also useful in making the choice between paired or individual interviews, and calming my own anxieties regarding my skills as a researcher.

#### 5.2.2.1 Pilot study

Six children were interviewed during the course of the pilot study. Jade and Markus were interviewed individually, whereas Emily was interviewed together with her friend Rebecca, and two other friends Jack and Ben, were interviewed together. [27] Most of the

[27] Although these children were involved in the pilot stage of the research I shall be using their comments in this research as the data is valid and of good quality, and the final questions and topic areas did not change significantly from the pilot study.

literature on research with children suggests that it is better to interview children in pairs or small groups in order that the children do not feel intimidated by the interview process (see Einarsdóttir, 2007; Fraser *et al*., 2004; Greig *et al*., 2007; Mayall, 2000). However I was interested in interviewing the children individually in order to explore whether this was the case, because I wanted the children to talk freely about *their* experiences, *their* ideas and *their* practices and was unsure whether this would occur when other people were present. As it turned out, the responses from the children were free-flowing and the children were keen to discuss a range of topics. Whilst in the paired interviews the children did not appear to be intimidated when asked to speak about their lives, when one child was talking, the other child's mind began to visibly wander, they got fidgety, and the children began to get bored. Consequently I decided that I would interview the children individually in order to give them the greatest opportunity to speak and provide their opinions without getting bored. However it would be no problem if two children really wanted to do the interview together as was the case with brothers Alpha Chicken and Bravo B.

The research questions held as valid areas of study, however the pilot interviews led to the introduction of birthdays and birthday parties as a specific area of conversation within the interview schedule. This was because this was one area in which the children spontaneously told me of their consumption practices and also talked at great length. Furthermore the pilot study showed that both the language and the content was generally appropriate for the children involved in the research and if participants were unsure they would ask for clarification. Ben for example asked me to define what I meant by the question, "Do you go to any clubs?" and in relation to food choices Emily asked, "Do you want me say *all* my favourites?"

5.2.2.2 Conducting the semi-structured interviews

The interviews were recorded with the use of a small voice recorder. The voice recorder was shown to the participants and it was asked if it was ok for me to tape the interviews. No-one objected to the interviews being voice recorded. The participants were often quite interested in the recorder and would ask to look at it or hold it, for instance Thomas enjoyed holding it and speaking into it directly, and Phoebe liked to press the

stop and start buttons. Furthermore Jade, Samuel, and Ethan mentioned that it looked like a mobile phone, which led on to a discussion of their mobiles, and Samuel even produced his out of his blazer pocket for me to inspect. Here because of the advances in technology a small, discrete recording device is not as intrusive or off-putting as the tape recorders of old. I also found the recording device beneficial in protecting myself from claims of wrong doing (Pole, 2007). For example, in one interview, which took place in one of the colleges of the University, the person being interviewed was alone with me for the interview whilst his mother waited downstairs. Towards the end of the interview the boy's mother came to find her son and to my horror the latch on the door had come down and effectively her son and I had been locked together in the room. Immediately I felt concerned and anxious about this and felt that I could be accused of acting inappropriately. Luckily in this instance the mother thought nothing more about the door being locked, I however on the other hand was immensely glad that the tape recorder had been running, which not only recorded the conversation for further analysis but would provide back-up against claims of abuse.

The settings for this research included the living rooms, kitchens, and dining rooms in the children's homes, as well as university offices and cafes. The interviews lasted between 25 and 55 minutes, with 35 minutes the average length of the interviews. In the majority of instances the children and their parents had talked to each other about the interview process before meeting with me and had decided that the child would be interviewed alone, with the parent and/or other family members in an adjacent room. In only one instance did a parent (James Bond's mother) directly sit in on the interview. Although potentially James Bond may not have responded in a full and candid manner as his mother was listening to his answers, I felt that it was more important that as a guest in the house that I fulfilled James Bond's mother's wishes (Kerrane and Hogg, 2007).

When conducting the interview it is important to listen carefully to what the interviewees are saying in order not to interrupt or disrupt the flow of the conversation (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009). However at times it was tricky to keep the children on topic, for example Alfie told me a very exciting story about a girl in his class who had gone to Egypt "but she came back alive" and Mikey told me about the serious intestinal

problems that his grandmother had been suffering with. Although I tried to keep these tangents to a minimum as I was concerned that too much time would be spent off-topic, I also found it beneficial to share in these moments as the children enjoyed taking on the role of story teller and having a captive audience, which went some way in balancing out the power differentials between myself as adult interviewer and the children as interviewees. Furthermore I tried hard to keep my comments to a minimum and avoid starting to analyse the interviewees as they were taking place. Piaget (1951: 9) nicely sums up the thin line that the researcher has to tread between questioning and actively listening:

> It is hard not to talk too much when questioning a child, especially for a pedagogue! It is so hard not to be suggestive! And above all, it is so hard to find the middle course between systemisation due to preconceived ideas and incoherence due to the absence of any directing hypothesis! The good experimenter must, in fact, unite two often incompatible qualities; he must know how to observe, that is to say, to let the child talk freely, without ever checking or side-tracking his utterance, and at the same time he must constantly be alert for something definitive, at every moment he must have some working hypothesis, some theory, true or false, which he is seeking to check. (Piaget, 1951: 9).

As well as open-ended questions, vignettes were also a feature of the interviews and were used to draw out the children's opinions on various topics. Vignettes can be described as, "short stories about hypothetical characters in specified circumstances, to whose situation the interviewee is invited to respond" (Finch, 1987: 105). When using vignettes the researcher may provide the participants with a range of responses from which to pick what they believe to be the most appropriate answer, or alternatively, allow the participants to talk freely on the topic in question. The participants in this study were encouraged to answer at length in response to the scenarios that had been presented in the vignettes, in order that a detailed understanding of the children's thoughts and opinions could be obtained.

One advantage of vignettes over direct questioning is that it provides a context within which to situate the questions, "so that the respondent is being invited to make normative statements about a set of social circumstances, rather than to express his or her 'beliefs' or 'values' in a vacuum" (Finch, 1987: 105-106). The use of vignettes is also particularly useful when dealing with sensitive topics, as they allow respondents to

distance their judgement about the situation from their own personal circumstances (Barter and Renold, 2000; Finch, 1987; Jenkins *et al.,* 2010). I followed this approach in the vignette with 'Sarah' for example where it is suggested that she is a happy 9 year old, but because her mum does not work there is not much money available to the family, and the participants are asked to think about how Sarah might feel, and also to comment on what they think others might think about Sarah. A further advantage of using vignettes, also noted by Barter and Renold (2000), was that they were very popular with the participants and generated a lot of discussion, as shown in the extract from the interview with Phoebe:

> **Phoebe:** Are they real or did they die?
> **Liz:** They are real people. I took their pictures from the internet but I made up the story about them.
> **Phoebe:** So they might not be poor?
> **Liz:** Yeah. This is just a story I made up about them.
> **Phoebe:** It's a good story. I like it. Where's her dad? He might have died… So these are real children and they haven't died?
> **Liz:** Yes that's right.
> **Phoebe**: They still exist but the story's made up. They may be poor or they may not be poor.
> **Liz:** The reasons why I made these was so that I could ask you questions about how you think girls like Sarah feel because they haven't got much money in the family.
> **Phoebe:** Can you read that one again? I like that story the best.

When creating vignettes it is important to think about the language that is used, and to ensure that the description flows coherently. Furthermore, the characters and the storyline must also be believable, leaving enough scope for the participants to fill in the gaps of the story (Barter and Renold, 2000; Finch, 1987). There is also a difference between asking people what they think might happen in a particular situation or believe about a certain scenario and this actually occurring (Jenkins *et al*., 2010). However by incorporating questions that were raised in the vignette at other points during the interview and in the journals, it was possible to draw general conclusions on the children's engagement with consumer culture, based upon the vignettes and

interviews/journals, rather than on single statements generated by the vignettes (Finch, 1987).

### 5.2.4 Accompanied shopping trips

Consumption should not necessarily be equated with shopping (see chapter three), however shopping is one of the primary means through which individuals are involved in practices of consumption (Lury, 1996; Miller, 1997; Zukin, 2004). Therefore shopping was chosen as a key area in which to further investigate children's consumption practices.

Accompanied shopping trips, or 'shopping with consumers' is a research method which involves accompanying individuals as they shop, in order to generate detailed data concerning individuals' consumption practices (Lowrey *et al*., 2005; Otnes *et al*., 1995).[28] It is important to distinguish between the passive act of merely observing people as they shop, and the participatory nature of accompanied shopping trips, whereby the researcher interacts with consumers, asking for clarification on various points (Otnes *et al*., 1995). Shopping trips were undertaken with eight of the children who had previously been interviewed, along with 'the person you normally go shopping with.'[29] Accompanied shopping trips are an advantageous method of generating data as they provide consumers with the opportunity to record accurately and in detail the consumers' motives, opinions, and actions in the retail setting. As well as providing detailed data, accompanied shopping trips may also bring to light certain practices which may have been forgotten or glossed over in the interviews. Furthermore, accompanied shopping trips allow the researcher to act in close proximity to the participants (Otnes *et al*., 1995). For example on the shopping trips with Chloe and Rebecca I was able to accompany them right up to the changing room curtain, and I was able to queue up with the children and the adults as they paid for their goods, which may not have been possible with simply observing the participants shopping.

[28] See Otnes *et al*. (1995) for an overview of the way in which accompanied shopping trips have been used in consumer behaviour research from 1960 to 1992, as well as providing a comparison between this method and other interpretive methods such as interviewing and observation.

[29] From the interviews I had discovered that none of the children went shopping on their own.

Accompanied shopping trips also allow the participants to introduce the researcher to their own shopping agenda (Otnes *et al*., 1995). Consequently, participants are able to wield more control over the research process, and to a greater extent dictate the direction of the research.

As it turned out, there was often a lot of slippage between the role of passive observer, active and questioning participant, and instances of the children and adults volunteering unsolicited information. For instance on the shopping trip with Oliver and his mother I took the opportunity to discuss with him directly about his opinion on clothes whilst his mother was trying on a pair of trousers, but later on I merely observed as they debated over which kind of biscuits were suitable for a seven year old boy, and towards the end of the shopping trip when Oliver was allowed to select a present for 'being good' Oliver excitedly told me about the Shrek figures he had received the previous week. This fragmentary nature of accompanied shopping trips, whilst replicating real-life, means that it is useful to combine shopping trips with other research methods, in particular interviews (Lowrey *et al*., 2005; Otnes *et al*., 1995). This allows the researcher to gain a thoroughly in-depth understanding of consumer behaviour.

It may be suggested that whilst taking part in the shopping trips participants may feel as though they have to act and present themselves in a way which they think is most socially acceptable (Otnes *et al*., 1995). However, as happened in Otnes *et al*.'s (ibid) study, the participants began with nervousness and apprehension, as well as an air of 'doing the right thing', however this quickly dissipated. Interestingly it was the parents/grandparents who were more apprehensive than the children seeking to demonstrate an air of respectability, for example Samuel's mother apologised to me that the shopping trip would not be very interesting and that I should have gone with them the previous week when they were clothes shopping, and James Bond's mother urged me to "tell me if I am doing it right." The children also tended to be quite quiet at the beginning of the trips but by the end of the shopping trip Lucie, Chloe, Rebecca, Samuel and James Bond had all been told off by their parents for either being too talkative or 'showing off.' Phoebe and her mother were however very confident throughout the trip

and had quickly grasped the importance of 'acting normally' as the following excerpt shows:

> **Mother**: You know how your uncle wrote a big book for university…
> **Phoebe**: (interrupting) And they put it in the library?
> **Mother**: Yes it's in the library.
> **Phoebe**: And he plays the piano….
> **Mother**: Yes that's right, and Liz is doing one of those and watching us when we go shopping. So you just have to come shopping with Mummy, and Liz will ask you some questions, and watch what we do. Is that ok with you?

At the beginning of the trips the adults were often keen to tell me their thoughts and opinions on children's consumption or life in general, whilst the children, in general, observed the social norm of 'good behaviour' and waited patiently whilst the adults were speaking. Since the purpose of the research is to understand the ways in which *children* engage in consumer culture, whilst recognising that adults have an important role to play in this, I wanted to concentrate my questions and observations on the children and took every opportunity to bring the children into the conversation, or to speak to them directly. For example when Chloe's grandmother was paying for her shopping I took the opportunity to speak to Chloe about the necklace she had bought, and whilst Samuel's mother went upstairs in the book shop to get a particular item I stayed downstairs and listened to Samuel talk about High School Musical. When James Bond asked to go off and look at the toy section by himself I went with him rather than his mother as she carried on with the weekly shop.

The eight children who were chosen to take part in the accompanied shopping trips (and complete journals) were selected because I felt that I had built up the best rapport with them and their families. Unfortunately this meant that the sample of children who took part in the shopping trips and journals was not necessarily representative of the overall group of children, which as was discussed previously, is not representative of children in Britain as a whole. Furthermore the number of accompanied shopping trips was limited to just eight, which also has implications for the reliability and generalisabilty of the research. The reason for this was that accompanied shopping trips are a very researcher intensive method (Otnes *et al*., 1995), and for this reason I was more concerned with producing detailed accounts of a fewer number of shopping

trips rather than less detailed accounts of a greater number of trips. Furthermore if we maintain that the purpose of this research is to provide a snapshot of children's experience as consumers and engagement with consumer culture in Britain today, then this target is achieved. Additionally, a good rapport between researcher and participants is beneficial to accompanied shopping trips as it leads to a greater sense of openness and candour between the parties (Otnes *et al*., 1995). Conversely then, by choosing participants that I felt a greater sense of rapport with, meant that the data held greater validity than if I had gone shopping with children and parents where the relationship was more strained.

Accompanied shopping trips with children also raise particular issues relating to consent and children's participation in the research process. The participation of the children in the shopping trip was dependent upon the agreement of their parents (Morgan *et al*., 2002). This was evident in the case of William and his mother who had been very keen to take part in the shopping trip and completing the journal. William completed the journal but in the gap between this and arranging a date for the shopping trip Williams' father had unfortunately been made redundant. Consequently William's mother was very upset and decided that they would not go on the shopping trip, which meant that because William's participation was also based upon his mother's consent, it meant that William was not able to take part in the accompanied shopping trip. I was also aware that the children may not have wanted to take part in further research but were going along with it because their parents had said so. There was no clear way around this except by underlining the fact that both the children and adults had to want to take part in the research whilst I explained the shopping trips to them. Fortunately however all the children were keen to take part in the research and even Oliver who was upset because his father had wanted him to leave his DS at home whilst he took part in the shopping trip, livened up and was eager to talk after ten or so minutes.

A further difficulty which is associated with accompanied shopping trips is the recording of the data. Agreeing with Otnes *et al*. (1995) it felt too intrusive to use a tape recorder whilst conducting the shopping trips as it may provoke unintended interest from others. There were also practical considerations to think of, for example, the difficulty of pushing trolleys, trying on clothes and carrying bags whilst trying to speak

into a tape recorder. Consequently short handwritten notes recording which shops we went to, the things that we were looking at, my feelings, the emotions and attitudes of the children were noted down. Where possible comments were recorded verbatim, but I also supported this with active listening and made a mental note to myself to remember specific events. Comprehensive fieldnotes were produced as soon as possible after the shopping trip had taken place. It is acknowledged that not tape-recording the shopping trips may have reduced the reliability of the method (Otnes *et al*., 1995), however at the end of the shopping trip I offered to take the participants to a café and buy them refreshments, this was both to say thank you for taking part in the shopping trips and also gave me the opportunity to go over any issues that had arisen during the course of the shopping trip.[30]

Overall the accompanied shopping trips were an enjoyable if not tiring way in which to understand children's consumption in action. By using accompanied shopping trips it was possible to gain a greater insight into the ways in which children engaged in practices of consumption. From Chloe's dashing into the charity shop in order not to be seen by her friends, or the way in which Phoebe was encouraged to learn numeracy skills whilst in the supermarket, to James Bond's excitement over the latest video game release, accompanied shopping trips provided rich and invaluable data on the topic of children's consumption.

### 5.2.5 Journals

Journals were also completed by eight children, who had all taken part in interviews, with seven of these children also taking part in accompanied shopping trips. For the reason mentioned above William did not take part in the shopping trip but did complete a journal, and Samuel who took part in the shopping trip never returned his journal, even after two reminder emails to his mother. The fact that I had to email Samuel's

[30] I was unable to talk with Oliver after the shopping trip as he had to go home to bed, and the conversation with Rebecca did not take place in a café but in the back of her mother's car with crisps and drinks bought by Rebecca's grandmother as she did not want me to waste my money on the snacks.

mother, rather than going directly to Samuel, is another example of parental gate-keeping in the research process.

The journals included thirteen separate activities were produced in a booklet format and were given to the informants in a 'pack' which included a folder to keep everything together, some felt tip pens, pencils, and a rubber, as well as a prepaid envelope addressed to me in order that when completed the participants could post the journals back. The journals included a variety of writing and drawing tasks. Drawing provides an opportunity to understand what is important to children and their lives (Malchiodi, 1998). However since children's limitations in their ability to draw may at times limit what they were able to say or express through their artwork, written tasks were also included (Beckett and Alexander, 1991). As has been mentioned earlier, often research methods which involve children focus on the visual, and journals should not be used because they are more fun, but rather they set out to answer a specific research question (Punch, 2002; Thomson, 2008).

Journals are a visual research method (Thomson, 2008). Regardless of whether they are called 'diaries', 'scrapbooks', or 'workbooks', they have been used effectively in research with children (Bragg and Buckingham, 2008). For example, McNeal (1992) asked children to draw what came to mind when they thought about going shopping and many children by the time that they were nine or ten years old could provide detailed layouts of stores, information about the products and even characteristics of some of the people who work in the stores. Bragg and Buckingham (2008) used diaries to learn more about young peoples' opinions of the media. Whereas Dryden *et al*. (2009) used children's drawings as a tool to discover the 'dream' and 'nightmarish' elements of children's packed lunches.

The journals were used to give these eight participants a further opportunity to talk about and provide information on their consumption beliefs, practices and behaviour (Thomson, 2008). The rationale for this was to provide the children with another means through which to express their opinions as well as the fact that the journals could also be completed in the participants' own time (Bragg and Buckingham, 2008). By utilising more than one research method it allowed for cross-referencing between the responses

from the three research methods (Darbyshire *et al*., 2005). However in employing a multi-method approach it does not automatically mean that the research is 'better' or that "there is a reality to which one can come closer by combining multiple perspectives" (Greene and Hill, 2005: 16). Instead journals were used, alongside interviews and accompanied shopping trips, to fully explore the realities of consumption of a small group of children.

### 5.2.6 Analysis of the Data

The process of analysing the data began before the fieldwork had even started, by reading theoretical accounts and previous research (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Jackson and Holbrook, 1995). In doing so I was able to choose the most appropriate research methods and ask the most appropriate questions in order to fulfil the aims of the research. The interviews were transcribed, by me, as soon as possible after the interviews had taken place. Likewise, as soon as possible after the accompanied shopping trips the field notes were written up. This was important as it allowed non-verbal communication to be recollected and recorded, whilst it was still fresh in the mind (Bazeley, 2007). It is beneficial to the research process that the researcher is involved in all stages of the research process, including the transcription of the data.

Although recognising the advantages of using computer aided qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo, particularly when undertaking group work, I wanted to get hold of the data in my hands, to see the emerging themes and make links between them, and not be limited to what could be shown on a computer screen at a time (Davis and Meyer, 2009; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). When interpreting the data it is often best to take a pragmatist approach which advocates "the right tool for the right job" (Saldaña, 2009: 2). Following such an approach I opted to code the data by hand.

The transcripts of the interviews, the field notes and verbatim extracts from the accompanied shopping trips, and the journals were read through to provide an understanding on the details and the stories that were told. The data was then read through again and coded. Coding is important as it breaks the data down into more manageable pieces (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). "A theme is an *outcome* of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection, not something that is, in itself, coded" (Saladana,

2009: 13). Coding is also often a judgement call, where there are no right or wrong answers and we must also recognise that we bring our own subjectivities and experiences to the coding process (Saldaña, 2009).

It must remembered of course that when analysing the data the researcher puts his or her own interpretation of an event or situation into what has been written or said. Consequently I have tried to take as many direct quotations from the children as possible in order to make sure that the voices of the children are heard in the research (Silverman, 2001).

## 5.3 SUMMARY

This chapter has discussed both the methodological concerns of this research project, as well as the research methods that were employed in this study. Developing the ideas which were presented in chapter two, in relation to the 'new sociology of childhood' and interpretative reproductionism, it has been demonstrated that an approach which gives primacy to the voices of children is most appropriate. Ethical issues relating to power, consent and confidentiality in the research process were all discussed, both in terms of best practice, as well as the ways in which these issues were a feature of the research project. The second section of this chapter provided a detailed examination of the particular research methods that were used in this study. A general overview of the advantages and disadvantages of semi-structured interviews, accompanied shopping trips, and journals was provided, as well as a more specific discussion on the ways in which these methods were employed within the study.

Ultimately it was shown that a child-focused research methodology is crucial when undertaking research about children's lives, nevertheless the issues pertaining to power, consent and confidentiality must not be ignored in any research project. Although recognising that certain research methods may be more suitable for research with children, the most important task is to ensure that the research methods are the most appropriate to fulfil the aims of the research and to answer the research questions.

The appropriateness of the research methods for this study will be demonstrated in the next two chapters, in which the findings of the research will be discussed.

# CHAPTER 6 –FAMILY, FRIENDS AND PEERS, THE MARKET, AND COMMERCIAL ENCULTURATION

## 6.1 OVERVIEW

As illustrated in the preceding chapter, previous research on children's consumption has tended to view the realities of children's experience as mere add-ons to generalised understandings of adults' consumption and provide little to the theoretical debates concerning consumption and consumer culture. Furthermore, as was shown in chapter four, children have generally been seen to be incomplete consumers on the path to adult competence by means of consumer socialisation. Following Cook the concept of commercial enculturation will be used as a framework to "to capture and emphasize the variety of ways in which children come to 'know' and participate in commercial life" (2010: 70). In line with the research questions of this thesis, as identified in the introduction, by focusing on the family (including parents, siblings and grandparents), friends and peers, and the market, it will be shown that children experience and come to know consumption through the processes of commercial enculturation.

Firstly, Match Attax trading cards and the collectable Gogo Crazy Bones figurines will be used as an example of the ways in which children engage in consumer culture, particularly with regard to elements of creativity in children's consumption practices, and to show how seemingly innocuous aspects of children's consumption can be used to tell detailed stories about these children's engagement with consumer culture. Following this clothing will be used as an example to explore the way in which the three categories of family, friends and peers, and the market, coalesce, inform and are informed by commercial life. Thirdly, commercial life will be the focus, and through the examination of consumption as a metaphor for care, it will be shown how family, friends, and peers, and the market come together to produce a dialogue of care relating to consumption. This section also provides the backdrop for introducing the notion of children's consumption as a relational practice. This is evidenced in the responses to a vignette in which 'Holly' returns a dress made bought for her by her grandmother, and which is then developed further in chapter seven.

As has been stated previously, in providing an empirical exploration of commercial enculturation this thesis contributes new knowledge to the growing body of literature on children's consumption. Furthermore, by taking children's consumption seriously, this will inform wider consumption theory and contribute to understandings of children and childhood within consumer culture. However first we shall begin with an overview of what is meant by 'family', 'friends and peers' and 'markets', followed by a brief introduction to relationality. Continuing on from this we will then move to section 6.2 which will provide a general summary of the children in this research project's engagement with consumer culture.

### 6.1.1 Family

Typically 'family' may be used to describe a group of people living together joined by blood or marriage (Hill and Tisdall, 1997). However a family is much more than a group of people living together, it is a social unit which both structures and is structured by society. In general 'the family' is greatly revered by society, and yet at the same time there are strong calls to 'save' it from the potential dangers of the evils of consumption, divorce, poverty, and feminism, among others (see Silva and Smart, 1999). 'Family' however should not be seen as a 'thing' or an 'object' but as an ongoing process (Morgan, 1996, 1999; Silva and Smart, 1999). As De Vault (1991: 13) writes, "we quite literally produce family life from day to day", the family is created and co-constructed on a daily basis, by the individuals within a particular family and by various mechanisms within society at large.

Distinctions are often made between the nuclear family incorporating parents and siblings, and the broader extended family taken to include grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles. This broader understanding of family will be used in this research as well as incorporating step-parents, half-siblings, parents' partners and mothers' boyfriends, as these were the familial relations that were spoken about by the children during the course of the research. Following Charles and Davies (2008) I would also like to suggest that pets were also viewed as family members. Many of the children when asked who was in their family included pets, for example Rebecca answered "Me, my sister, my mam, my dad, my two dogs, five fish, and my hamster" and Emily replied, "My mam, my

dad, my brother, my hamster, my rabbit but it died." Emily's response seems to support Mason and Tipper's (2008) argument that even pets that have died are often viewed as family members. The following excerpt from Samuel's interview demonstrates his close relationship with his pet cat, a valued family member who even gives him gifts for his birthday, which as will be explored further in the section 6.5 illustrates the way in which consumption can be used as a metaphor for care:

> My cat has to be Eddie because he's very relaxing and he's a pride and joy, and he turns over to get his tummy tickled when he sees me, when he seems my parents he doesn't do that. And he gave me, there was a card with a ginger cat with sunglasses 'For a really cool kid from a really cool cat'. And I gave him a big hug and a kiss when I saw the card that he gave me for my birthday which was really nice. **Samuel**

Nevertheless for some children, pets were consumption goods and ear-marked as future acquisitions:

> **Bravo B:** I'm gonna save up for a hamster.
>
> **Phoebe:** I think my cat's fast asleep! When he's died we're going to get two kittens! I was hoping that I'd call it Ginger and I think Alfie is going to call his Black Knight. A cute little black one.

Furthermore, in the same way that Simon and Marco in Pugh's (2009) account of children's desire to belong, put a positive twist on their lack of costume for the Halloween parade, Mikey deflects the fact that he does not have any of the high status 15+ computer games at his dad's house, with the fact that he has a pet "I haven't got any of those games at my dad's house. I've got a rabbit at my dad's house!"

Families are not just based upon the categories of familial relationship, families are also based upon love, trust, mutual care, and support (Mason and Tipper, 2008; Morrow, 1998; Smart *et al*., 2001). However for a family to be understood to be a 'real' family, particularly by younger children, it is seen as necessary to include children (Brannen and O'Brien, 1996; Morrow, 1998). Furthermore, children are specifically located within the family as a consequence of public policy and the law, and children who stand outside of 'normal' family relations are often deemed to be at risk (Morgan, 1996, 1999). It must also be remembered that there is no single 'true' understanding of family, and

any reference to the family is to an archetypal form, rather than an actual 'family'. Furthermore family does not just include family practices but incorporates practices of class, gender, and ethnicity for example. Since children are such a key feature of the family, coupled with the fact that the majority of children's early consumption is located within the family, family will be one of the lenses through which we shall understand more about children's engagement with consumer culture (Martens *et al*., 2004).

### 6.1.2 Friends and Peers

'Peers' are generally understood to be non-related children, who are roughly the same age. Friends are differentiated from peers by the fact that friendships are based upon mutual liking, whereas there may not be any mutual attraction among peers (Hill and Tisdall, 1997).[31] Friendships are very important for children (and adults) and very strong relationships develop between individuals and groups (Aapola *et al*., 2005; Adler and Adler, 1998). Friendship is also an ongoing activity, which requires constant reworking and reconfirming in order to maintain its survival (Hey, 1997).

For young children it is their parents' economic capital that has the greatest impact in providing access to consumption networks however as children grow older friends and peers, along with more distant family members and other institutions such as schools and the market, influence the direction of children's consumption (Martens *et al*., 2004: 166). There is a strong belief that children are particularly susceptible to 'peer pressure' and the need to gain acceptance to social groups, and consequently consume in particular ways in order to distinguish themselves from other social groups (Elliot and Leonard, 2004; Tanner *et al*., 2008). As a result, parents, in particular mothers, may go to great lengths to ensure that their children are able to consume in the same way as other children (Kempson, 1996; Middleton *et al*., 1994; Pugh, 2009).

[31] In Western societies children's interactions and friendship groups tend to be based upon age-gradings as a result of the year group cohorts which schools and nurseries are divided into. There is also often a sense of unease when friendships span a too large an age gap, as younger children are seen as vulnerable to the undesirable influences of older children, and older children who spend their time with younger children are viewed as immature (Hill and Tisdall, 1997: 94-95).

The evidence so far seems to suggests that having the same consumer goods as friends and classmates becomes particularly important at the cross-over from primary school to secondary school (Evans and Chandler, 2004; Jackson and Warin, 2000). Additionally Martens *et al*. (2004: 176) in a footnote to their research comment that, "For younger children, such battles for acceptance and distinction through consumption would seem less significant," they also suggest that if the 'death of childhood' thesis were true children would be gripped by the pressure to consume as their peers at an ever earlier age. Thus the majority of research on peer pressure and consumption is focused on teenagers and older children's experiences. Consequently, this research which focuses on children aged from six to ten years old seeks to shed some light on the role of friends and peers and engagement with consumer culture with a younger age group.

### 6.1.3 Markets

Markets are institutions which are embedded within social life (Fligstein, 1996, 2001; Fligstein and Dauter, 2007; Granovetter, 1985; Smelser and Swedberg, 2005). Markets "refer to situations in which some good or service is sold to customers for a price which is paid for with money (a generalized medium of exchange)" (Fligstein, 1996: 658). Fligstein (2001) and Fligstein and Dauter (2007) call for the distinction to be made between the sociology of markets and the broader theme of economic sociology, where economic sociology is the study of the conditions of the production and reproduction of social life. By focusing on an economic sociology approach to markets it allows for the examination of theories of consumption and the family, as well as the links between governmental policy and individual households, the commercial locations of consumption including shops, supermarkets, and shopping centres, as well as the relationships between buyers, producers, and sellers (Smelser and Swedberg, 2005). Of particular importance is the notion of embeddedness which refers to "the argument that the behavior and institutions to be analyzed are so constrained by ongoing social relations that to construe them as independent is a grievous misunderstanding" (Granovetter, 1985: 481-482). That is to say, within economic sociology "markets are inevitably, constantly and richly shaped by people's meaning systems and variable social relations" (Zelizer, 1994: xi).

The reason why markets have been chosen to be one of the categories for the exploration of the ways in which children come to know and take part in commercial life is two-fold. Firstly markets are a fundamental aspect of our engagement with consumer culture and secondly and yet also conversely, the market is often seen to stand outside of children's everyday experience but ready to threaten and invade children's lives at any given moment (Barber, 2007; Cook, 2005, 2007b, 2009c, 2009d; Cross, 2004; Schor, 2004). Agreeing with Zelizer (1994: xiii) we need to "finally [break] the Victorian fiction that preserves the sacred separateness of private life."

### 6.1.4 Relationality

Examining children's consumption practices as well as social networks, such as family, peer groups, friends, and the market, provides further understanding of the mutually constitutive and coevolving theory of relationality (Emirbayer, 1997; Mansvelt, 2009; Pachucki and Breiger, 2010). In examining children's consumption practices we see that children's being in the world is not distinct or separate from their interactions with others. Furthermore these social ties are developed further and made stronger through practices of consumption. In other words our being in the world is linked to our identities and shared practices with others. Consequently the concept of relationality, which counters the view that people act in isolation and strictly autonomous ways, may be best used to explain some of the relations and social ties which form an integral part of children's practices of consumption (Crewe and Collins, 2006; Cook, 2004b; Martens *et al.*, 2004). Pachucki and Breiger (2010: 207) define relationality as "an emphasis on dynamic processes of connections and transactions, as opposed to substances and isolated individuals."

Understanding children as consumers involves addressing familial, household, peer and market relationships, therefore as will be shown in this chapter when we consider the vignette of Holly and 'returning the dress', relationality is a feature of children's consumption practices. Likewise it will be discussed further in chapter seven in relation to mothers' consumption practices and also with regard to both parents' and children's use of games consoles.

There is a need for empirical research to understand the nature of social ties as related to consumption practices, particularly across time and space (Epp and Price, 2008; Mansvelt, 2009). However the relational perspective can privilege connectivity, and at times fails to take into account the range of social meanings through which individuals construct their social world, or the variety and full range of materials, resources and information which is used to build connections (Pachucki and Brieger, 2010). Consequently this research recognises that relationality is a feature of children's consumer practice yet at the same time cautions against taking for granted this connectedness. Furthermore, acknowledging this discrepancy helps to identify a gap in Bourdieu's work on taste preferences and the transmission of cultural capital, in that Bourdieu's notion of the habitus, that is to say the complex system of dispositions, propensities, and structures which come together to guide practice, is "unable to adequately handle the heterogeneity and subtlety of human lives," (Atkinson, 2010: 5; see also Anheier *et al.*, 1995; Lahire, 2003; Pachucki and Brieger, 2010). Consequently in examining the relational aspects of the complex network of social ties that link children's practices of consumption to their parents, other family members, peer group and the market, the connected nature of consumption practice is recognised yet at the same time there is an awareness of the nuances related to these links. For example, there is not merely a downward link between parents and children in the transmission of cultural capital, children can influence parents' consumption practices and there may be horizontal bands of connectedness between children and their peer group members. Children may actively seek out relations of connectedness with the market, and connections may change over time and space. As Boden (2006: para. 1.7) comments:

> Of course, like that of adults, children's identity formation (whether heavily consumption reliant or not) is thoroughly relational - that is, structured to varying extents in varying contexts by the opinion and conduct of others (such as the 'concerns' of parents)… …children not only now clearly use their status as savvy consumers to influence the consumer behaviour of their parents, but employ a number of strategies in interactions with parents in an attempt to positively influence decision outcomes.

## 6.2 CHILDREN'S CONSUMPTION PRACTICES

Children consume; that is to say children in modern, wealthy, societies consume. However children do not "enter life independent of the world of commerce and subsequently 'become' consumers through a process of socialization" rather they are key participants in consumer culture (Cook, 2009a: 342). Through the processes of appropriating and making use of the material and symbolic resources available to them, children are active contributors to the co-construction of consumer culture (Buckingham and Bragg, 2009: 181). Children "are born into regimes of consumption" and although consumption may or may not be the defining feature of self or of significant social relations, and we may struggle or take pleasure in understanding the consumer we may be or become, "not [to] consume at all and not participate in that world is a virtual impossibility" (Cook, 2007: 41). When we speak of children's consumption we are not only referring to the buying and selling of goods and services, but also to the desiring and acquiring of these goods and services by children. Furthermore, children like adults, make meaningful engagement with the social world through their practices of consumption, with consumer culture an organising feature of children's everyday lives.

As would be expected from the comments above, and in previous chapters, consumption was a predominant feature of the lives of the twenty-five children that were interviewed during the course of this research project. For example, as can be seen in table 1, in response to the question "What do you like doing in your free time?" the children provided many varied answers, the majority of which can be classed as consumer activities or consumer behaviour. The children provided on average 2.7 examples of the things that they liked doing, with only two children (Dilianda and Ben) not providing at least one answer which could be defined as a consumption activity.

Table 2 "What do you like doing in your free time?"

| ACTIVITY | FREQUENCY |
|---|---|
| Games consoles/computer games | 10 |
| Football | 8 |
| Playing out | 7 |
| Watching TV | 7 |
| Playing with siblings | 5 |
| Staying at home | 3 |
| Reading | 3 |
| Going to a friend's house | 2 |
| Pets | 2 |
| Shopping | 2 |
| Swimming | 2 |
| Others[32] | 16 |

Nicosia and Mayer (1976: 68) suggest that 'consumption activity' should be taken to mean anything which involves the buying, using or disposing of consumer goods, and McNeal (2007: 10) describes consumer behaviour "as *prepurchase, purchase, and postpurchase actions towards a commercial object*" (original emphasis). Consequently the definition of consumer activity is kept broad in order to capture the fact that engagement with consumer activities pervades all aspects of social life (McNeal, 2007).

[32]Art, bike riding, bowling, cinema, dancing, digging at the allotment, eating sweets, fencing, lying in bed, mini motocross, seeing dad, singing, surfing, texting, tidying room, trampolining – each of these activities were nominated by one person.

Therefore, agreeing with Belk (2007: 740) that "Culture has become commoditized to such a degree that we experience it as consumption, by consumption, and through consumption" it is very difficult, if not impossible to separate individual acts of consumption by children from the wider social environment in which both children and consumer acts are located (Cook, 2010).

The activities that the children liked to take part in during their leisure time are only one example from the overall picture of the forms of consumption that make up the everyday lives of children. The children also spoke about birthday parties, mobile phones and games consoles, and their television viewing habits, all of which will be explored further in the next chapter. Christmas presents, pets, school uniforms, favourite foods, foreign holidays, and many more, were also discussed in the interviews. Consequently, it is not just the pervasiveness of consumer culture which is evident but also the *variety* of different aspects of consumption that the children were engaged in which must be recognised (Evans, 2002).

The children had strong opinions on the places that they liked to shop as Markus and Thomas explained:

> Yes. Well I can't actually say because some shops might be big and have lots of stuff, and the way that they present it. So I'd say yes and big shops like Sainsbury and Tescos are better at presenting than Lidl and Aldi but the food you can't really say. Aldi probably has better food than Tescos and Lidl has better than Sainsbury but you can't say, but in presentation yes. **Markus**

> Aldi and the conservatory one. And I think erm, Woolworths' a bit… Err Woolworths have toys but they're a bit for babies. Aldi has no toys. And they just have stuff for washing up. And the conservatory place they just sell conservatories! Boring, boring, old man's snoring! **Thomas**.

Furthermore the children could provide detailed information regarding the toys they liked to play with. For example Josh when asked which games console was his favourite was quick to proclaim his Playstation "Cos the games are cheaper and better. There's this really good game on the Playstation which I really really really really really really really really really like." The kids were knowledgeable and spoke freely and confidently

about the aspects of consumption which appealed to them, as the quotation from Harry shows when he is talking about his computer game:

> On this game you can be a dragon and shoot other dragons and on the bottom there's little people shooting you in the air. And the little people on the bottom you have to shoot them on the ground. You have to shoot at the ground and keep shooting. And some of them shoot cannon balls at you. And you have to shoot them to kill them. And some of them are on a church. And if you break that they die. And there's a big dragon at the end that you have to kill. I've never got up there but my daddy has. And he did. And he finished it! And there'd another one on my pirate game, there's a shark game but I haven't done it. I don't know what to do but I think that the sharks jump up and you have to move but I dunno what to do though. **Harry**

One of the features of the accompanied shopping trips that stood out the most was the various emotions that were displayed by the children during the course of the shopping trip. Sulking, tears, and general grumpiness was common as well as laughter, smiles, and skipping with joy in the street. The speed with which these emotions changed also caught my eye as I recorded in my fieldnotes on the shopping trip with Lucie and her father:

> Lucie wanted to go to Primark but her dad didn't want to. Lucie was complaining that her mum shopped there so why shouldn't they, and Lucie reasoned they were cheap. Her dad replied 'I know it's cheap but all the clothes are made by poor little kids working in factories the all day long. They have to work really hard and only get like 10p for working the whole day!' Lucie is not satisfied with her dad's answer that his and her mum's thoughts about this are 'just different!' and she walks slowly two paces behind us with her arms crossed defensively against her chest. It feels a bit awkward but also I'm secretly a bit thrilled sociologically because I'm intrigued to see what's going to happen next. As we walk along the precinct (precinct-does that word even exist anymore???) we come to Next. Dad stops, takes hold of Lucie by the shoulder and says 'Oh come on let's have a look in here'. Lucie immediately brightens up. She enters the shop, appears to know the layout. Heads straight to the children's section and looks at the coats and begins to laugh at her dad's jokes regarding the woollen coats smelling like 'wet dogs' if it rains. The interaction changed so quickly. It's amazing. Lucie is very happy now and wanders off to look at brightly coloured tops, putting them up against herself to show her dad. He 'indulges' her in this for a while.

The speed and variety of emotion as seen with the 'thank you kiss/hug' was also an important display of emotion during the shopping trip, which was seen six times out of the eight shopping trips. Samuel, Lucie, and Chloe spontaneously gave their parent/grandparent a kiss after having been bought something, Rebecca kissed her grandmother after having been told to do so by her mother as a thank you for having been bought a new outfit, and James Bond and Oliver whilst talking excitedly about the purchases that they had made, had moved in closer to their mothers who then quickly planted a kiss on the top of their son's head. Stillerman (2008) also records in her field notes from her observations on mothers' shopping trips in Chile, how mothers kiss their children after purchasing items for them, speculating that such actions reframe such economic transactions as intimate relations.

Such anecdotes provide only a limited overview of children's consumption and it is useful to provide a more detailed snapshot of children's consumption as the following sections in this chapter demonstrate.

## 6.3 CHILDREN'S CONSUMPTION – THE CASE OF MATCH ATTAX AND GOGOS

Children's consumption has often been thought of frivolous and trivial, and children have often been criticised for their love of kitsch (Cross, 1997; Seiter, 1995; see also chapter four). Children's consumption of 'trading cards' such as baseball cards, football cards or Pokemon has been seen as particularly problematic, to such an extent that a moral panic has ensued because the sacred values pertaining to childhood, such as innocence and distance from the market, are said to be threatened (Cook, 2001; Tobin, 2004).[33] However football trading cards (Match Attax) as well as Gogos (collectible

[33] It is not just Pokemon which is seen and picked upon as a particularly dangerous brand in relation to children's consumption. The same can be said to be true of the Playboy brand and its bunny logo (see Bell, 2005; Dryden et al, 2009; Mayo and Nairn, 2009; Renold, 2006). This was made clear from my field notes on the accompanied shopping trip with Chole and her grandma:

> In the pedestrianised shopping area there were about five market stalls in a row. We walk towards them. It appears that Chloe's grandmother knows the stallholder. They share a warm greeting with each other. We browse for a few moments looking at the jewellery for sale and then her grandma says "Have you seen anything that you like? What d'ya

figurines with stickers) were mentioned by the children as popular items that they liked to collect and play with.[34] They were second only to games consoles (Wii, Xbox, DS, Playstation 1 and 2) in the frequency with which they were mentioned by the children.[35] Despite the alarm surrounding children's use and engagement with such goods, there also exists research which has explored the educational benefits of children's use of trading cards in encouraging children's development of literacy skills as well as encouraging children's engagement with education more generally (Buchanan and Burts, 2006; Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 2003; Vasquez, 2003). In this section however, we will be using the case of Match Attax and Gogos to help tell the story of the ways in which the children in the research project consumed.

As Moshenska (2008) notes in his study of the pieces of shrapnel collected by children during the Second World War, children are frequently involved in the collecting, sorting and admiring of certain treasured objects (Baker and Gentry, 1996; Cook, 2001). In this research, for example, Thomas collected 'money', Ben collected cars, Phoebe collected Bratz dolls and stickers, Markus collected the little balls out of cartridge pens and Daniel collected coins:

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> want? You can have up to £8." Quietly and tentatively Chloe suggests "That silver necklace with the rabbit on it." I guess that they must have been here previously. Chloe, her grandma, the stallholder, and me search the display in order to find the necklace in question. In my mind we are looking for a cute bunny necklace. Suddenly the stallholder clocks it. He picks up a necklace and drapes it gently from his hands letting the pendant swing freely. As he does so he gives a sideways glance to me and wryly asks "Is this it? Is this one?" Indeed it is the necklace in question and it is promptly bought for Chloe by her grandmother. However there is not a cute rabbit dangling from the chain, instead – shock, horror – it is the perennial favourite of children's consumer research, the Playboy Bunny.

[34] Adults' fondness for the collection and trading of footballer stickers is also recognised (Crace, 2010).

[35] Similar findings are also recorded by Nairn (2010).

> I collect coins. I've a book full of coins. I've got coins from Cyprus, coins from Ireland, coins from the Queen's Jubilee, and coins that don't even exist anymore. First my nana had it at her house because she's still got lots and lots of coins form when she was still young. That's how I got my favourite coins. **Daniel**

However the collecting of Match Attax cards and Gogo figurines was popular, in particular for the fact that large numbers could be amassed relatively easily, as Jack explained, although no doubt with a little bit of exaggeration, "I started to collect like Match Attax football cards. I've got more than a thousand packs!" They were often received as treats or rewards for 'being good' or 'doing well', for example James Bond received them for a reduction in the number of 'consequence' notices he received from school and Samuel received them for trying hard at swimming club. For William they were something that was permissible from 'Daddy's shop' and very much in demand. 'Daddy's shop' refers to a stall under the stairs where William's father would sell small items such as Gogos, stickers, and kitkat biscuits. This example of 'Daddy's shop' serves to demonstrate that commercial enculturation rather than consumer socialisation is a more appropriate way of understanding children's engagement with practices of consumption. William and his brother come to 'know' and participate in commercial life through the social context of his family's consumption practices. A consumer socialisation perspective may see such a shop as a 'pretend' situation in which a child is socialised by his/her parent into the 'correct' patterns of consumption behaviour. However for William and his brother, it was not a pretend situation, but a very real aspect of the consumer *culture* of which they were a part.

As well the trading and collecting element Match Attax and Ggos were viewed as toys in their own right as Samuel explained:

> Normally I make arenas for my Gogo Crazy Bones. I have this bedside table that I can put on a bunkbed and I use my DVDs, like I put a few DVDs flat then stacks of them around to make it look like an arena. **Samuel**

Moreover, as well as promoting pleasure and fun, the acquisition of such items allowed a way for James Bond who was perceived as 'poor' to join in with his classmates:

> Because everyone at school says that I'm poor, and because I'm always either left out or they say that I'm poor, with no money and that's why I bought these. Because when they didn't have any Match Attax I decided to get some Gogos and when I brought them in they said 'aye you're not poor.' So every time *they* get some, like the Match Attax and everything, I get the stuff as well. **James Bond**

Nevertheless there were some downsides associated with these items as Josh, who used to enjoy football cards, noted "but they're not in fashion anymore." When asked to expand he commented:

> Because they've all got banned from school and everything and that's the only time my friends meet up so we don't really have them. The teachers banned them cos everyone was fighting over them. **Josh**

Mikey too recognised the problems associated with trading cards:

> I used to collect football cards but they're a waste of money. I had like a couple of hundred, all together, but I had like three of the same person. And they're 35p a packet, and it's a lot money about £40 in total. Like loads of them. It's about £100 for the amount that I've got. My mam says 'You're not allowed to buy any more cards cos you just stick them in the album and put it in the cupboard.' Now I agree with my mam that's like a waste of money. **Mikey**

Whilst recognising the pleasures that Match Attax and Gogos brought him, James Bond also noted the fact that *the* favourite brand of trading cards, *the* ones to collect, changed frequently:

> Except now it's Gogos. Because it used to be Yu-Gi-Ohs, then the Match Attax came out. Yeah then the football cards were out and everyone was into football, and then the Gogos came out. Then it was Gogos. **James Bond**

James Bond also had to face this problem of the quickly changing crazes and his own desire to complete his collections:

> **Mother**: It's hard being a little boy these days at school, when there are different things that are trendy aren't they. And you come in every week with something different that people are collecting.
> **Liz**: Is it hard to keep up with what everyone's collecting?
> **James Bond**: Yes! I've nearly finish my multi-card collection which nobody else has. And I had a Premier League album but the Premier League album didn't finish.

**Mother**: And the thing is James Bond likes to finish his collection as well, which not all children do. He likes to complete his set.

This provides us with another example of the way in which children's consumer practices ought to be viewed as commercial *enculturation* rather than consumer socialisation. Here we see James Bond, purchasing Gogos and keeping up-to-date with the latest crazes and thus impressing his peers, negotiating the multi layered webs of meaning and culture that already pre-exist surrounding consumer culture. Here we see that James Bond is quite adept at negotiating these relationships, and although within a consumer socialisation context adults such as his teachers and his mother, may suggest that he is a flawed consumer – wasting time and money for example on frivolous things – James Bond is actively coming to know and participate in consumer life though these very processes of commercial enculturation (Cook, 2010).

Trading cards were also particularly popular with Bravo B. He had spent the previous Saturday searching with his mother, for shops which sold the sticker album:

I like to go to places where they sell Match Attax. Because I need a book because my mum likes me taking care of the Match Attax. Cos I haven't lost one before so my mam… so I went with my mam to find Match Attax books. **Bravo B**

Discussions with friends had led him to WH Smith and ASDA but still he had not been able to find the album, so in lieu of a 'proper' album Bravo B had creatively constructed a card holder from pieces of A4 paper which he was very happy to show me, explaining that "Steven Gerrard is the popularest."

Through the discussion of the trading cards it is also possible to gain a greater understanding of Bravo B's personal values as they relate to consumption (not showing off) as well as the attitudes towards trading cards amongst the children in his school:

**Liz**: And do you like having different things as your friends or the same?
**Alpha Chicken and Bravo B**: The same.
**Bravo B**: I don't show off.
**Liz**: What do you mean you don't show off?
**Bravo B**: Well I don't want to buy new stuff and tell my friends because they might get jealous on me. Or get angry of me. I just don't want to bring my new toys to school. I'll bring these [Match Attax trading cards] cos everyone's got them.

Through the example of Match Attax trading cards and Gogos we have shown that children negotiate and attach a variety of meanings to consumer goods. Through these meanings, which are embedded in culture, children enter into pre-existing, multiple, overlapping webs of understanding through which they actively create and re-create their own consumer practices. There is not a linear trajectory, through which children must pass, learning the 'correct' consumer skills and knowledge as they go, rather they are fully engaged in practices of consumer culture since they are participating in cultural life.

## 6.4 CLOTHING

As explored in chapter three through the work of Veblen and the concept of 'conspicuous consumption', clothing and dress have long been examined as one of the key ways in which an individual can consume. However it is only in recent years that greater attention has been paid to the socio-cultural contexts in which children are clothed (Boden, 2006; Piacentini, 2010; Pilcher, 2009, Rysst, 2010). This greater focus on children's consumption as it relates to clothing has been brought about through the rise of the 'tweenager' and the growing market in children's clothing (Cook and Kaiser, 2002; Pilcher, 2009; Russell and Tyler, 2002).

Clothes are central to the ways bodies are experienced, presented and understood within consumer culture, and consumer culture is predominantly couched in terms of choice and the exercise of agency. In particular, clothing has been seen to be an explicit means through which to express individual identity:

> Clothes mediate between the naked body and the social world, the self and society, presenting a means whereby social expectations in relation to age act upon and are made manifest in the body. (Twigg, 2007: 285).

Nevertheless, these choices and acts of agency take place within specific contexts and economic situations which both shape and constrain them (Twigg, 2007; Pilcher, 2009).

Clothing will be used as one example of consumption in order to illustrate the ways in which children come to 'know' and take part in commercial life.[36] That is to say how commercial enculturation features in the lives of the children. As suggested earlier, the categories of family, friends and peers, and the market will be explored in order to address this issue.

To be enculturated into commercial life means that one constructs his/her identity from practices of consumption:

> Consumption is the articulation of a sense of identity. Our identity is made up by our consumption of goods – and their consumption and display constitutes our expression of taste. So display - to ourselves and to others – is largely for symbolic significance, indicating our membership of a particular culture. (Mackay, 1997: 4).

Consequently, reference will also be made to the individual identities that children forge for themselves and the broader contexts in which this is located namely constructions of child and of childhood. The categories of family, friends and peers, and the market are not the only aspects of consumer life which come together to inform children's engagement with consumer culture, in fact there are many different factors which do this:

> It is not just families and kinship groups, friendship networks, or the places and spaces of consumption that come together to inform children's consumer culture but also "institutions (the market and schooling), cultural discourses on 'good hoods' (which includes understandings and constructions of good parenthood, motherhood, fatherhood and childhood), household contextual issues (such as whether the household contains one or two parents and whether adults engage in paid work outside the home) and individual biographies (of adults and children). (Martens, 2005: 350).

Nevertheless these three categories have been explicitly chosen since families are *the* place in which children are located, secondly there is a lot of anxiety surrounding the

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[36] Classical writing on clothing and dress has in actual fact focused on 'fashion', where fashion is identified as the production and consumption of elite styles and cycles of dress (Fine and Leopold, 1993, Twigg, 2007). Consequently this thesis will concentrate on clothing which is taken to mean the everyday practices of dress, which also incorporates fashion.

differences between a child's consumption practices and his or her friends and peers, and thirdly the market is chosen because it is often seen as dangerous entity, standing outside of children's experience but ready to invade children's lives at any moment.

### 6.4.1 Boys, Girls, and Being Comfy

As with all the issues that were discussed throughout the course of the interviews and were then picked again in the accompanied shopping trips and journals (for example favourite television programmes, pocket money, attitudes towards eating sweets, and preferred shops), clothing was more of an important issue to some children rather than others. For example, Oliver and Jade in response to what kind of clothes they liked to wear were direct and to the point, "Spiderman. Spiderman T-shirts. (Oliver)" and "pink skirts (Jade)" whereas Samuel spoke at length about his favourite kinds of clothes:

> Yes. I really like jackets, shoes. I love some scarves and some err…I've got a nice pair of slippers that have got some fur inside them which are very comfortable and I like… I've got a nice Bart Simpson T-shirt that's got kind of brown stuff on so I wear that with my brown trousers. And I like shopping for… well I like a white jacket, a white soft jacket with a hood and with err some stripes on and I like… My favourite clothing has got to be a jumper, my favourite jumper which is a blue, light blue and dark blue, and I think that that's a really nice jumper. **Samuel.**

Both boys and girls spoke about the clothes that they liked to wear, the reasons for this, who chose their clothes, factors related to prices and the sorts of shops that sold clothes.[37] As has been recognised by Pilcher (2009) that although there has been limited

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[37] Clothing was also useful in the course of the research, for example some of the children picked up on my clothing and commented upon it, demonstrating that the children felt at ease talking to me to during the interviews, yet at the same time a researcher might want to think about the impact his or her dress may have on the interview process:

> The hardest thing for me to find are those basket ball sneakers shoes, that you've got on right now like that. There the hardest to find the ones for kids. The only pair that I've found were from Clarks. I like Clarks. They're a good shoe shop. They're the only place that I found some of those sneaker shoes that you've got on right now. **Samuel**

research on girls' consumer engagement with clothing, the ways in which younger boys' engage with clothing is even less well documented (see Boden *et al*., 2004; Swain, 2002, for exceptions). This research however explores both girls' and boys' engagement with clothing, not necessarily to mark the differences or similarities between the two, but as a means to demonstrate the ways in which fashion contributes to and informs cultural life, which in turn is experienced by children through the processes of enculturation. Nevertheless it was noted that the children did use clothing to mark themselves and their peers as gendered persons through the use of clothing. Gender specific styles of clothing were identified:

> Girls are more prettier and boys are more handsome. And girls wear dresses and skirts *and trousers and shorts!* But boys only wear trousers and shorts. But girls can wear all of them so that's the difference. **Phoebe**

As Lucie explained whilst on the shopping trip, she used the fact that she was a 'surfer girl' to her advantage to avoid wearing typically female clothes:

> Cos like I'm a surfer girl and I go surfing my daddy takes me to those surfer girl shops. And I get those, those loose trousers with the Velcro thingy. I think that they're waterproof ones so you can wear them on the beach. Cos I like climbing on rocks so I don't usually wear skirts and girl things. But I still like pink! **Lucie**

The colour of clothes was also identified as gender specific, as Ethan noted "I like black. I've got a black Clone Wars hoodie. I think that boys wear more kind of black." Thomas' distaste for the colour pink was also quite clear, "Yuck! Pink! Girly, girly pink!" Once again snapshots of the children's consumer practices can be used to reinforce the fact

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> **Phoebe:** I like your socks! They're a bit like my tights.
> **Liz:** Have you got spotty tights?
> **Phoebe:** Yeah. They're like my tights they're brown and got pink dots over.
> **Liz:** I think that these ones are from Next.
> **Phoebe:** So are mine! My big tights – they're also from Next.
> **Liz:** So where do you get your clothes from?
> **Phoebe:** We don't go clothes shopping.

that the cultural milieu in which children's consumption practices are embedded precedes individual children. As these examples show, the children in this research project grappled with, took on board and disputed pre-existing cultural meanings associated with gender and consumer culture.

Alternatively, Samuel recognised himself as a 'different kind of boy', one who likes colours and takes care of his appearance:

> I like matching clothes like at swimming when I go I have red Crocs and a red tracksuit jacket and brown trousers so I've got two reds. And the thing that I *hate* about some boys is sometimes that they don't care *anything,* like sometimes they wear a total red t-shirt, some blue jeans and some greeny-yellow shoes, I just think that it looks like you hate fashion and you don't care about how you look, I seriously care about how I look sometimes. **Samuel**

Samuel also called upon his peers to provide examples of the way in which he looks and dresses in order to differentiate himself from others and to establish himself as a person who is conscious of fashion:

> A girl called Amy at my school says she doesn't care how she looks. A girl called Victoria she likes to act like Amy's twin, when she's 10 times taller! She says that she doesn't really care about fashion. The twins, there are some twins which don't go to this school anymore, they are twin boys and they have these… they don't care about fashion without even saying it! Because one wears like a green t-shirt the other wears a red shirt, both wearing jeans and total other colour shoes! And some other girl called Sarah, she sometimes is always coming to my house dressed all fashion, dressed all matched and I said to her that you don't normally dress like that and she said my mum made me wear these I don't normally care how I look. **Samuel**

Chloe and Alfie also cared about the types of clothes that they wore:

> **Chloe:** Depends on what I'm doing. Well if I'm going out shopping or something I like to be smart. If I'm just playing in the street I don't really care.
> **Liz:** Why do you like to look smart when you go shopping?
> **Chloe:** Cos there's a lot of people around that'll see you. You don't want to be going out in your playing out clothes.

> I sometimes get a bit fussy about the clothes that I wear… Well there's some England tops that I do like to wear and some England tops that I don't like to wear. But sometimes my dad picks the wrong one and that's a bit of a problem. **Alfie**

Furthermore, as in Swain's (2002) study of 10 and 11 year olds, sports clothing and footwear was important to the boys in this study in particular. For example Josh commented "I like to wear tracksuit bottoms and football tops… [I have got] about ten. Sunderland, England, Barcelona, Brazil, Chelsea, Manchester United and some more but I've forgotten," and Mikey talking about his recent trip to Mexico commented, "And I bought a Mexico strip. I think my mam guessed that soon as I saw a sports' shop I'd want to go in." In Swain's analysis, by wearing sportswear the boys in his study were able to present a 'cool' and sporty bodily style, of looking and being tough by looking and having a *masculine* bodily style (2002: 58). The wearing of sports clothing, did not present itself as a specific masculine form of dress for the boys in this research as they did not attend schools in such clearly demarcated working-class locales as the school in Swain's study. Consequently, the wearing of sportswear by the children in this research was not seen as a marker of a masculine identity rather it was a way to be comfortable in order to play and move one's body freely:

> I like posh [clothes]. But not for playing out like. Cos I get mucky like. Across the field there's a massive water pipe burst, and it was all flooded and me and my best friend were playing football on it, and I was skidding about all over the place, cos I didn't have my boots on cos they don't fit yet. **Jack**

The practicality of clothes was also important to Grace, "I don't really want these on today, and I wanted a different pair on cos it's quite freezing and I wanted a different pair on. I wanted my black ones cos they're really warm." Therefore it can be said that the children cared about how they looked, and the presentation they offered to others however this was at least partially mediated by a desire to be comfortable, as summed up by Daniel and Mikey:

> I don't really know, I just like wearing nice clothes. If they're comfy. **Daniel**

> It doesn't matter what kinds of clothes you wear. Just suits. I don't like wearing suits. **Mikey**

However the extent to which the children had total freedom to chose their own clothes, or even desired to do so also varied between the children. There was also discussion between parents and children:

> Say if my mam picks a T-shirt and I don't like it, I say "Mam I don't like it, can I have a different one." Even if it costs a little bit more, she still gets me it. **Rebecca**

> Sometimes. For my school clothes she does. I'm not allowed to choose because she's being kind and nice, because she doesn't want to get me upset. I get upset if I'm not allowed what I want, and start crying. **Emily**

### 6.4.2 Fitting In: Headscarves and School Uniforms[38]

Clothes, and talking about them, was of interest to Dilianda. Having spoken about her 'Groovy Chick' bedroom Dilianda suggested that she would put on her princess outfit to show me what she looked like as a princess[39]. After spinning round quickly to show me how the dress stuck out when she twirled, she sat down to answer more questions, but she quickly got up again and said that she would change and come back and wear her 'best clothes.'[40] This time Dilianda appeared wearing a boy's navy blue England cotton T-shirt with the three lions on and England emblazoned across it in red. I complimented her on it and she told me, "I like it, it's mine. I play out in it *and* I use it for PE." It is interesting to note that Dilianda specifically mentioned that the t-shirt was hers, since in the previous interview her brothers had told me that they passed down their old clothes

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[38] This sub-section in particular draws upon the interview with Dilianda, a 6 year old Muslim girl who was born in Malaysia and who had been living in the UK for 2 years. Like Pilcher (2009), who at times specifically focused on one participant (Hayley), in order to draw out particularly enlightening insights, by focusing on Dilianda I do not intend to generalise her experiences to all the children in the project or children and childhoods in general. Rather Dilianda's experiences are used as a means to explore the ways in which children may creatively construct their own consumer cultures in relation to peers.

[39] When Dilianda emerged in her princess outfit with its strappy top which was slightly too big for her and showed her bare chest, or when Phoebe was spinning on the coffee table and flashing her knickers as she did so, I too, like Pole (2007), felt uncomfortable and acutely aware of my role as an outsider, as a researcher, and felt awkward in being in such close proximity to the children's bodies. Fortunately, since the children were not embarrassed or disturbed by my presence I tried to quickly put my insecurities to the back of my mind.

[40] Phoebe and Grace had also dressed up especially for the interview; Phoebe had worn her 'special dress' and Grace and worn her favourite Bratz T-shirt.

to their younger sister. Dilianda then offered to go and get her school photos. She was very proud of the portraits which included her baby sister. In the photographs Dilianda was wearing a headscarf, and when I entered the house she was wearing it but then she took it off for the interview, so I decided to ask her about it:

> **Liz:** So on the picture you're wearing a scarf…
> **Dilianda:** Headscarf. Because I need to wear them.
> **Bravo B:** (he was bringing me his hamster to show me during the interview and interrupted): You don't have to wear them in the house but at school it's compulsory.
> **Dilianda:** The babies have one, but when they wear it they can just take it off.
> **Liz:** Oh no! They just try and pull it off?!
> **Dilianda:** (laughs) But my baby takes it off backwards!
> **Liz:** Do you like wearing the headscarf?
> **Dilianda:** (she takes her scarf puts it on) Yeah. And when I get hot I can just open the… (lifts the front part). Not outside though.

Dilianda's brothers, Alpha Chicken and Bravo B, also mentioned the special kind of clothes that they wore for religious holidays. Important was the fact that they were not just Muslims but Malaysian Muslims, as Bravo B explained, "Yeah and we wear these special clothes. Only Malaysians wear the special clothes the Arabs don't have them."

Returning to her school photographs Dilianda was able to demonstrate that she fitted in with the other children in her class and she was not 'new'. Dilianda pointed to her school jumper and said, "We always have to wear this one. The new people, if you don't have any, the new people, you have to wear different clothes."

Samuel also mentioned school uniforms and his desire to fit in:

> And I hate the uniform. I don't think that the uniform looks very nice. I think it looks a bit posh. It looks like you're from a very posh school and you are very… and you care about… I'd like just a normal jumper sometimes with the writing with school on and some trousers. It takes me ages to get changed with my shirt and tie, my jumper, blazer, trousers, socks and shoes. When some people just put on a white polo shirt, a jumper and some shoes and some trousers. **Samuel**.

Later in the interview Dilanda told me, "If *you* want to be a Muslim *you* can wear a headscarf." If *I* wanted to be a Muslim, Dilianda was inviting me, I could become one through the act of wearing a headscarf.[41] The evidence so far suggests that children seek out particular styles in order to be cool and fit in with others, yet here was Dilianda inverting this, and suggesting that I adopt her particular style and become like her. This may be partly due to the fact that at six years old Dilianda, had a different awareness and understanding of the symbols and meanings attached to clothes and the ways in which these are expressed than the older children or tweenagers who are generally the focus of the current literature (for example, Elliott and Leonard, 2004; Grant and Stephen, 2005; Manninen *et al*., 2010; Rysst, 2010). Agreeing with Piacentini (2010) this demonstrates the need for further research at different ages since 12-13 years olds are likely to be different from 8-9 years old, who are likely to have different reference points and priorities to children at 6 years old. This example also shows that the bonds of children's consumer culture do not just flow downwards from adults to children, but children, may also seek to influence the consumer practices of adults.

### 6.4.3 Big Kids and Small Clothes

The main purpose of the shopping trip with Rebecca, and her sister Ellie, mother Christine, and grandmother Lynne, was to go to the local ASDA Living store and for Lynne to buy special Christmas outfits for the girls. The idea was to get the girls matching outfits as Lynne explained, "I like to get them alike. Well not alike alike. But matching outfits. It's nice. It's Christmassy. I used to do it for my girls and I've sort of carried it on with my grandkids.[42]" The 'problem' was that Rebecca was a tall, well-built girl, with a large tummy, and at 9 years old she did not fit into the clothes that had been predetermined for her age by the manufacturers, as Rebecca explained to me whilst holding a hanger in her hand "It says that I'm age 13 to 14 but I'm not, I'm only 9."

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[41] Dilianda also referred back to her Muslim identity when I asked her about her the kind of sweets that she liked to eat "[My mum] needs to read [the packet] cos it has gelatine in it. We are Muslims."

[42] As has been highlighted from the outset of this thesis, the thoughts and opinions of children themselves are the focus of this research project, nevertheless at times comments and opinions from parents and grandparents are included, usually stemming from the accompanied shopping trips. This is in order to reinforce a point or because the interaction demonstrates a significant issue relating to consumption.

Like the girls in Rysst's (2010) study Rebecca (and her mother) did not want to wear necessarily 'sexy' or revealing clothes, rather Rebecca just wanted to look good, as the following field notes show:

> Rebecca had gone to the changing rooms to try on a loose purple chiffony top. The sort that you wear over leggings. Rebecca came sheepishly out of the changing rooms. Lynne and I were waiting further away chatting about her holiday to Portgual. Christine was sorting out Ellie. Rebecca shuffled out slowly and self-consciously. I kept quiet I didn't know what to say. In my opinion it was too loose around the neck and kept slipping off her shoulders, and was inappropriate for a 9 year old girl. But I didn't want to say that because they might have really loved it.
>
> Rebecca had gone up in clothing sizes in order to get the clothes to fit over her tummy, but she did not have the breast development to 'fill' the larger sized clothes and consequently there was a lot of spare material around the top half. Christine asked Rebecca whether she liked it. Rebecca liked the colour but "I don't like all this bit up here" fingering the material around her neck and deliberately yanking the material off her shoulders. Christine came over and 'righted' it and suggested that she could wear a black vest underneath but Rebecca quickly retorted "No Mam! That's weird!" and went back into the changing room to try on the velvet dress that she eventually bought.[43]

As discussed in chapter two, childhood is often viewed as a period of innocence, especially sexual innocence. Consequently when children, and by this I mean girls, expose flesh it is viewed as troublesome and inappropriate (Boden *et al*., 2004; Pilcher, 2009; Rysst, 2010). However as Boden *et al.* (2004) point out, this display of flesh is often a consequence of the fashion of 'smallness' identified by Wright (1993), which sees clothes being deliberately designed in order to be small in order that they display flesh. Although Wright focuses on women over the age of sixteen Boden *et al*. suggest that it can be argued that when children wear deliberately small clothing it 'ages up' children which is incongruent with our expectations of childhood (sexual) innocence (Hockey and James, 1993).

[43] It would be interesting to begin to enquire how parents cope with questions of body size and shape. However this was not pursued since this research focuses on children's consumption, rather than parents' consumption on behalf of their children.

However in the case of Rebecca it was not revealing clothes that was really the problem rather that it was just that the clothes were too small. James Bond also faced difficulties in getting clothes to fit, however his mother helped him understand that his body was growing and not always at an even rate which suited clothing manufacturers:

> **Mother:** [Your trousers] are usually too long now because you're quite grown-up.
>
> **James Bond:** Cos they're usually down there and I'm standing on my thing.
>
> **Mother:** Cos we have to get a bigger size for your waist.
>
> **James Bond:** It's the same with my shoes because my mam says that I've got wide feet.

Without judging them James Bond and Rebecca were overweight, and as has been documented to a limited extent in the media (Donnelly, 2009), the retail press (McConnon, 2008), and the academic literature (Jackson *et al*., 2005) this means that it is often very difficult for increasing numbers of children to find the appropriate sized clothing.[44] Consequently we can see this as an example of the ways in which the market moulds children's experience of clothing which in turn shapes how children come to know and partake in commercial life. Furthermore, the age-grading of clothing can be seen as a further way to reinforce the biologically determined approach to understanding children and childhood (Cook, 200b, 2004b). [45]

## 6.5 CONSUMPTION AS CARE

If consumption is one means by which individuals communicate with each other, one of the meanings that it can convey is that of care (Pugh, 2009: 14-16). Miller (1998) has demonstrated that shopping for others can be seen as an act of love, and Zukin (2004: 30) notes that "the things that we need to buy are framed by our love for the significant others we buy for." Shopping is not just the means by which we 'get stuff' but is also an activity which is integral to family life. Shopping is one way by which we can communicate our love to others, define family boundaries, as well as mark ourselves out

[44] See Colls (2006) for a discussion of the problems and difficulties faced by large women when purchasing clothes.

[45] Here however we note that it is clothing manufacturers who are adapting to the increasing height and girth of children, which further demonstrates the way in which children contribute to the dialectic relationship between themselves and the market.

as individuals (Chen, 2008). The recognition of consumption as relational practice, that is to say negotiated, lived practices of connectedness, and experienced as a form of care impacts upon adult-children relations, relations not only with each other but also with the market. Furthermore consumption as care is not just emblematic of the adult-child relationship, but is also a constitutive element of the relations between children themselves (Pugh, 2009).

The categories that were introduced in section 6.2 (family, friends and peers, and the market) will be drawn upon further in this section in order to demonstrate the ways in which children come to know and take part in commercial life.

### 6.5.1 Family Favourites

Within contemporary households there appears to be a need or desire to create 'family time', time in which a family takes part in certain practices which serve to reinforce particular actions and activities as 'family practices' (Finch, 2007; Martens, 2004; Morgan, 1996; Southerton, 2003). Such practices serve to allow individuals to co-construct a family identity, that is to say, "the family's subjective sense of its own continuity over time, its present situation, and its character. It is the gestalt of qualities and attributes that make it a particular family and that differentiate it from other families" (Bennett *et al*., 1988: 212 in Epp and Price, 2008: 52). Consumption practices are relational and very often serve to create and perpetuate a sense of family identity (Boden, 2006; DeVault, 1991; Epp and Price, 2008; Mansvelt, 2009; Moisio *et al*., 2004).

The making of family time is particularly important because the social ties of connectedness are often seen to have been damaged by the market. For example, household tasks such as ironing, cleaning and the preparation of meals have increasingly been 'outsourced'. This has meant, for American families at least, that a 'commodity frontier' has been built up which encroaches upon home and family life, serving as a barrier to relational practices (Cook, 2009d; Hochschild, 2003). However within this study one important way in which family identity was established and re-established was through the recall of certain consumer goods or activities being particularly favoured or disfavoured by a certain members of the family. This was particularly evident on the accompanied shopping trips where there was greater

opportunity for interaction between two or more members of a family however it was also recognised in the interviews, for example Grace told me that her dad liked reading and Alfie spoke about his family's favourite foods, "Fish and chips from the chippy! That's my favourite. But my mum doesn't like that. She's vegetarian. My dad likes mushy peas." When on the accompanied shopping trip with Alfie's sister Phoebe and her mother we proceeded to by-pass the alcohol section, when Phoebe pointed down the aisle and exclaimed excitedly "Daddy beer! Daddy beer!" Phoebe's mother agreed that Daddy did enjoy the bottles of brown ale but that she wasn't going to get any today because they were not on her list. Here we see an acknowledgement being made to individual preferences and although purchase requests could not always be met they still contributed to an ongoing sense of family, for as Pettersson *et al*. (2004: 319) comment, "When family members go shopping for food, ordinary family life is thus relocated to a public place." Furthermore as when Oliver's mother said to him "Don't forget we need some of those muffins that Daddy likes" we see that family members and in particular fathers, were very much a part of the consumption process even though they were not physically present (Charles and Kerr, 1988; Miller, 1998).

Furthermore families used their understanding of each others' dislikes, as well as preferences, in order to contribute to the construction of a family. This can be evidenced through the conversation that Samuel and his mother had in HMV whilst looking at a box set of Top Gear DVDs:

> **Mother:** Hey we should get this for Daddy (smiling and picking up the box)
> **Samuel:** Yes he'd really like that (smiling). Has it got that man in it…?
> **Mother**: Yes you mean Jeremy Clarkson… We should get him that for Christmas, what do you think?
> **Samuel**: Oh yes! Daddy would love that! (Both laughing).
> **Mother**: (To me) He hates it really! (More laughter).

An important aspect of the family identity was to reproduce the generational order, by taking note of individual preferences:

> **Mother**: Come on why don't you get some biscuits for the cupboard?
> Oliver surveys the shelves for a while.
> **Oliver**: I want some like Grandad.
> **Mother**: Oh no! Not those! (Laughs). (To me) He means fig rolls! They're not for little boys. (Laughs). (To me) I don't know where he gets these ideas from…
> Don't you want to try any of these? These look nice… (picks up mini packs of shortbread biscuits with the movie Cars branding).
> **Oliver**: Yeah Cars! (puts fig rolls down.)

Similarly, in response to the question 'which are your favourite snacks or sweets?' Thomas replied "Actually the man's sweets are my best. They're my favourite things. My favourite things are chocolates." In doing so Thomas pointed to a box of After Eight chocolates on the sideboard.

However it would be a mistake to paint too rosy a picture about family life and consumption as a relational practice, for example in families where access to monetary funds is limited consumption may be an area of stress and tension (Chin, 2001; Kempson, 1996; Middleton *et al*., 1994; Pugh, 2009). We must be careful not to suggest that the relational aspects of consumption may always be experienced positively nor the extent to which consumption can promote connectedness (Cook, 2009d; Pugh, 2005, 2009; Zelizer, 2005). As Grace explained:

> I watch [High School Musical] with my mam and my brother but my dad's not really into it. It's really sad because when we're watching it he doesn't come to see it. I want him to because I know there's something funny that'll be coming on. He just walked home. **Grace**

For Grace family consumption practices may not be experienced as positive relational practice. Nevertheless consumption still exists as a relational practice in that it serves to reinforce particular forms of connectedness (or lack of) with various family members. It also serves to support the criticism of Bourdieu's (1984) work that a child may not have the same consumer dispositions as their parents due to a straightforward transmission of the parents' cultural capital to their children through the milieu of the habitus, rather stronger or weaker ties may develop based upon the social contexts in which consumer practices occur (Cook, 2010; Epp and Price, 2008; Mansvelt, 2009; Martens *et al.*, 2005).

### 6.5.2 Consumption Rituals and Gift-giving

Alongside the everyday mundane consumption practices involved in grocery shopping for example, the children were also aware of the particular times set aside times for consumption rituals and gift-giving. Otnes (2007:753) suggests that "Consumption rituals can be defined as holidays, special occasions, and other sacred events characterised by the intensive (and sometimes excessive) consumption of goods, service, and experiences." As will be discussed further in the next chapter, the children all identified birthdays as a particular time when they received cards and gifts. The same was true for Christmas which was mentioned by all of the children, apart from Alpha Chicken, Bravo B, and Dilianda who spoke about the Muslim festival of Eid Ul-Fitr, and the gifts of money and new clothes that they received at this time. Examples of other occasions for gift-giving were provided by Emily who was very animated on the subject of Easter eggs, Josh who had received some presents for being brave when he broke his arm, and Markus who talked about receiving some special chocolates:

> Because my gran died my mum had to collect my grandma from the crematorium and take her to Bulgaria. When she was going there she stopped off in Paris and she bought me a little box of chocolates from Paris that I absolutely love and I've nearly finished them all! I only started it two days ago! It's only a little box about the size of ten of these pens! (He picks up the pen from the table to show me). **Markus**

Through the rituals associated with gift-giving, once again we can see that children's consumption is relational practice. Consumption rituals provide an opportunity to demonstrate care to others and to forge links between the gift-giver and his/her family and friends, reinforcing social ties and form part of designated consumption rituals (Epp and Price, 2008; Otnes and Beltramini, 1996). Once again knowledge of the other person's preferences was important. Markus explained why his mother asked him what to buy for his friend's birthdays:

> She says, 'Does he like this?' or 'Does she like this?' because I've been invited to some *girls'* parties. I know what their personality is and what they would like. **Markus**

William also explained about how he made his choices for his gifts for his grandparents:

> If it's my grandma's birthday, and that's my mum's mum, I look in the shops and ask my mum because she knows best because it's her mum. But if it's for my other grandma I ask my dad because it's his mum and he knows more because he has known her for about 39 years since he was born! **William**

Ten year old Mikey used the opportunities of gift-giving to help him to begin to differentiate between closer and more distant friends:

> I buy me friends something for their birthday. Like me friends in the street – Ruby and George and them, for their birthday I put a tenner in their card and give them some Malteasers. My friends from school, and I'm going to their party and I don't really like them that much, I give them a fiver that's it. Or a box of Malteasers. **Mikey**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the argument put forward by Cross (2004) is that children are very often the receivers of gifts due to the delight that it invokes in the child and consequently the joy that adults feel in seeing this delight. Indeed the children did tell me, often very excitedly, and often many months after the event, the pleasure that they obtained when receiving gifts. However the children themselves also spoke about the pleasure they gained in giving gifts to others - Chloe talked about Mother's Day and the recent gift that she had bought for her mother, Callum spoke about buying perfume for his nana, and Daniel discussed bringing back gifts for his friends from his recent holiday to Spain. Although not harking back to a time of wondrous innocence there was a certain sense of pleasure that was gained from buying and giving gifts to others. This provides us with further examples of children's consumption as relational practice, in which children's establishment and construction of their own spheres of consumption, is not distinct or separate from their interactions with others.

As well as thinking about specific children, for example in the vignette about Sarah, some of the children spoke about their charitable acts and giving to others. For example Harry wore his wellies to school and donated money "for the people in need." Thomas raised money for the "lifeboat men" and "some poor people in [home town] who do not have much things." Finally Ben told me about the club that he attended "I do go to one club – it's called 'youth club.' Where people raise money for poor people. We play games and we have to pay."

One of the aims of the research was to answer the question 'What knowledge of consumption practices do children have and how is this knowledge gained?' One way in which I sought to do this was through the presentation of a vignette about a girl called Holly:

*Holly's grandma gave her a dress for Christmas but she doesn't like it! What should Holly do?*

My intention had been to find out to what extent the children knew the 'script' associated with returning an item to a shop, where scripts are "spatially and temporally ordered event sequences that are employed in a particular context and are organized to achieve a goal" (Peracchio, 1992: 425). In other words, I had intended to find out if the children in the research project were aware of how to take back an unwanted item and obtain a refund or exchange. The evidence suggested that children understood shopping scripts, and that four year olds knew that they had to go to the till, wait for the cashier to scan or record the item, hand over some money, maybe wait for some change, and finally wait for a receipt (John, 1999).

However in setting up the vignette I made the mistake of suggesting that it was Holly's grandmother that had bought the gift for her, for Christmas. In this way the children did not provide responses based upon the script of being a 'competent consumer' well-versed in refund and exchange policies, rather the children reiterated the importance of social ties and connectivity and sought to promote this over their own needs. They

emphasised the importance of being appreciative when accepting gifts, and were creative in their ways to get around potentially awkward situations:

> If she doesn't like it I think she should, I think she should wear it because it was given to her by someone who is very special to her. So at least she got something. And she should be grateful for it. **Daniel**.
>
> Ask her Mam, like 'Mammy…, mammy I don't really like this dress.' So she's not really upset. Cos she's bought it. She needs to say it in a polite way. Like, 'Mam, please can I buy a new dress cos I don't really like it.' **Grace**.
>
> Why doesn't she ask her grandma, I think it's too hairy, it's too rosy, so can you make it a bit more tightened up, and take a bit of the hairs out. **Thomas.**
>
> If she doesn't like it, everytime she sees her nana she should put it on. She could put it on and take a picture of it and say here's me in my new dress. I really like. And then put it under her bed when she gets home and never wear it again. Or sell it and get some money for it. **Mikey**

However Callum was slightly more direct in his response – "Cry. And go to her room."

Whilst recognising that the vignette did not lead to a greater understanding of the knowledge that children have regarding the appropriate scripts to returning clothes, the unintended consequences of this demonstrates that the children were acutely aware of the sensitivities involved in the giving and receiving of gifts. Furthermore it reinforces the point that consumption is a relational practice, and demonstrates the way in which the generalised processes of childhood socialisation that children are a part of cannot be separated from commercial life.

## 6.6 SUMMARY

This chapter contributes to new knowledge regarding children's consumer culture through an exploration of commercial enculturation. As stated in chapter four, this thesis provides one of the first empirical explorations of Cook's (2010) theory of commercial enculturation

Through an examination of the meanings attached to small collectibles such as Match Attax and Gogos, and the ways in which the children negotiated relationships

surrounding these items, commercial enculturation, has been shown to be the most useful way of describing the processes through which children come to know and participate in consumer culture. Rather than the traditional consumer socialisation approach, which views children as a moving along a linear trajectory, from incompetent to competent adult consumer, and having to be brought into the consumer world by significant adults, consumer enculturation recognises the pre-existing, multiple, webs of meaning that precede an individual child. Children are not socialised into being a specific kind of consumer, as seen with the example of James Bond, rather it is through socialisation, experience, and interactions that children develop particular consumer dispositions. This is also repeated in the example of clothing and fashion which reminds us of the pre-existing culture, as relating to gender, religion, or economic background for example, in which children's consumer practices must be situated.

Commercial enculturation also allows us to recognise that children are involved in an ongoing process of creating and co-creating meaning as it relates to consumer practice. For example in this chapter, through the snapshots of consumer life provide by the children, we go beyond a straightforward downwards transmission of cultural capital from parents to children, rather we see that knowledge about consumer practices develops from interactions with the market, peer group, friends, or family. The strength of association with one or more of these particular categories may differ over time and is not always strongest between parent and child.

Furthermore in examining the role that families, friends, peer group and the market plays in the consumption practices of children, which was one of the research questions of this thesis, relationality was shown to be a central feature of children's consumer practices. This was reinforced in section 6.5 when consumption as care was examined and was particularly evident in the vignette of Holly returning the dress. The children demonstrated that children's consumption practices are best understood in the context of the social relations in which they are embedded, and the pragmatic features of consumption, such as the consumer script involved in returning an item, and cannot be understood separately from these social relations.

Since children's consumer practices are relational practices, the topic of relationality will also be discussed in the next chapter. This next chapter will also provide further original contribution to study of children's consumption practices through an examination of the exploited/empowered child consumer dichotomy and practices of moderation.

# CHAPTER 7 –THE PLACE OF MODERATION IN CHILDREN'S CONSUMPTION AND THE EMPOWERED/EXPOLITED CHILD CONSUMER DICHOTOMY

## 7.1 OVERVIEW

As was discussed in chapter four, children are very often presented as powerful, agentic and savvy consumers or fragile exploited individuals who are at the mercy of the consumer industry (Cook, 2004a, 2005, 2007a; Mayo and Nairn, 2009; Schor, 2004). This dichotomy of the empowered/exploited child consumer arises from particular understandings of childhood, children as consumers, and children's consumption. However the extent to which the empowered/exploited dichotomy impinges upon children's engagement with consumption, or is indeed representative of children's encounters with consumption, requires further investigation (Cook, 2004a, 2007). Consequently this chapter, in keeping with the overall aim of this thesis, to understand more about the ways in which young children consume, will examine in further detail this dichotomy of the empowered and exploited child consumer. Furthermore, as identified in chapter four, examining children's consumption has the added benefit of informing thinking on consumption theory and the sociology of children and childhood.

Another area of children's consumption which has not been fully explored is the extent to which children nag and pester their parents to 'get what they want' (Marshall *et al*., 2007). For instance, one theme that has arisen in western cultures is that of the child and its insatiable wants, which parents loathe to ignore, often couched in terms of socially sanctioned rights (Linn, 2004). However as was mentioned in the previous chapter, children will quite often be given what they want by their parents in order that they fit in with their peer group, with parents, usually mothers, often sacrificing their own needs to do so (Evans, 2002; Evans and Chandler, 2006; Hamilton, 2009; Kempson, 1996; Middleton *et al*., 1994; Pugh, 2009; Seiter, 1995). Yet providing children with all that they want and ask for is seen to be dangerous and another example of the irreversible breakdown of social order and the damage caused to family life by consumerism (Barber, 2007; Schor, 2004). The innocence of childhood has been said to have been lost only to be have been replaced by a 'toxic childhood' based upon consumer desires (Palmer, 2006). Contrary to this, research also suggests that children

do not always pester their parents or other significant adults, and are quite sensitive towards the needs of the family (Chin, 2001; McNeal, 1999; Pugh, 2009) or work in conjunction with their parents to get a desired outcome for both parties (Darian, 1998; McNeal, 1999; Nicholls and Cullen, 2004). Consequently this chapter examines the extent and context in which the children in this study made requests, even nagged or pestered their parents. It will be suggested that although the children did all of the above, they had limits and boundaries to their consumption and the ways in which they petitioned for consumer goods, in other words moderation was a salient feature of the children's engagement with consumer culture. Examining moderation and the twin concepts of restraint and respectability introduces new knowledge into the field of children's consumption practice, which is one of the significant contributions of this thesis.

## 7.2 THE DICHOTOMY OF THE EMPOWERED AND THE EXPLOITED CHILD CONSUMER

On the one hand children are seen to be empowered through their engagement with practices of consumption. This empowerment, which Schor (2004: 179) terms the "new discourse on kid empowerment", stems from the fact that the traditional model of the rational consumer does not fit well with children's consumption. This is because whenever 'the consumer' is envisaged, it is the adult consumer who is invoked (Cook, 2005, 2007; Tingstad, 2007). Consequently, it is necessary to endow the consumer goods which children use with beneficial qualities such as being educational, promoting feelings of self-worth, and fostering active lifestyles. Resultantly 'empowerment' is a feature which becomes marketed and promoted to both children and adults (Cook, 2005, 2007; Tingstad, 2007). Small instances of 'freedom' and 'power', such as voting for your favourite contestant on the latest reality TV show (Tingstad, 2007), eating sweets (Honeyman, 2010), and adding sprinkles to yogurt (del Vecchio, 1997) position children as active, agentic consumers who happily thrive in such media infused, consumer environments. As Cook (2005: 156) notes, "The empowered child is superheroic. As an active, knowing being who makes her or his own meaning out of every morsel of culture, the empowered child offers hope, rather than fear, about the ultimate locus of power in the world."

However, most children cannot afford or are unable to purchase these consumer goods themselves, consequently, parents very often find themselves as the obstacle to their child's realisation of this empowered self (Cook, 2005). Marketers use this image of the desiring, knowing child as a way to temper parental resistance, with the result that, in wealthy countries in particular, refusing a child's request is becoming increasingly difficult to justify on grounds other than financial difficulties, even for those children in economically disadvantaged families (Cook, 2005: 157; Linn, 2004; Pugh: 2004, 2009; Schor, 2004). Consequently it is very often parents who provide the means by which children become empowered by practices of consumption, either because it is the only morally defensible position a parent can take (Pugh, 2004, 2009; Seiter, 1995), or as discussed in chapter four, it is because parents enjoy the pleasures of consuming vicariously through their children (Cross, 2004). Once again, because children's consumption is a relational practice, and is inherently connected to relationships with others, the commercially empowered child is always linked back to the family, and empowerment may be a less liberating gesture than it may at first seem (Cook, 2005). The knowledge that mothers always carry with them, the knowledge that they are constructing childhood memories for their offspring as they create consumer moments, may also be understood to be one of the factors which encourages parental support for the discourse of the 'empowered child' (Cross, 2004; Thompson, 1996).

However, on the other hand, there is the equally problematic construct of the exploited or exploitable child (see Barber, 2007; Linn, 2004; Mayo and Nairn, 2009; Palmer, 2006; Schor, 2004). Such a construct is not only concerned with the 'harm' which children may come to as a result of aggressive marketers or peer pressure, for example, but also it "encodes adult fears about the ravages of capitalism" and "serves as a readymade moral alibi for political positioning" (Tingstad, 2007: 29). Such understandings of the child are often based on a particular moral position whereby children are understood as essentially sacred beings, in danger of being both polluted and corrupted by immersion in consumer culture (Cook, 2004a; Mayo and Nairn, 2009; Palmer, 2006). As Cook (2004a: 149) comments, "The public battles over children's consumption (violent video games, sexy clothes, fatty foods, and so on) are, at base, battles over which model of the child – which model of the person – will prevail." The infiltration of commercial life into

childhood is seen as particularly damaging as children are viewed as malleable beings, and who must therefore be protected from consumerism. This also links back to the work of critical theorists, as seen in chapter three with the work of Marcuse and Baudrillard. As Martens *et al*. (2004: 159) comment, "the construction of the child consumer as easily manipulated and in need of guidance mirrors the patronizing tone adopted in the construction of the adult consumer in critical thought." It is based upon various understandings of children and childhood, but in particular those relating to childhood innocence, as well as the sanctity of personhood and self-realisation, as identified in chapter one, in relation to the work of John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In other words, the freely choosing, knowing child stands in opposition to the overdertermined nature of the market (Cook, 2004a). In such a construction, which arises from fear and distrust of consumerism, children are positioned as particularly susceptible to its devastating effects.

The marketplace is seen as a key location or conduit for obesity, sex, and violence, among other phenomena to enter into children's lives and everyday experiences. It is believed by some that children must be protected from such phenomena in order to protect the sanctity of both childhood innocence and self-realisation. This stands against the evidence that consumption itself promotes self-realisation, brings personal satisfaction and allows for the playful creation of multiple identities (Campbell, 1987; Giddens, 1991; Slater, 1997). There is, as Cook (2004a: 148) suggests, a "lingering suspicion and concern that corporate ingenuity, sophisticated market research and the lure of the televisual can overwhelm even the most savvy child consumers." However as Pugh (2009: 26) acknowledges, "Calling children the conduit of commercial culture is a bit like faulting fish for the water in which they swim."

Furthermore, as was highlighted in the previous chapter, the market and those things which relate to commercial life are seen to stand outside of, and separate from the family and the household. Consequently this reinforces the feeling that family life is contaminated by the effects of consumerism, and "introduce[s] the taint of pecuniary value into family relations" (Cook, 2009b: 112). However, saying that commerce stands outside of family life ignores the fact that children are raised and grow up within consumer cultures, and home life and commercial life are often mutually constitutive.

The discourse of the exploited child has a particular resonance with work on the media and its associated technology (Buckingham, 2007, 2009; Keller and Kalmus, 2009), yet with regards to computers and their associated technology children are very often promoted as sophisticated users, even teaching adults and governments all that they wish to know (Selwyn, 2003). This reiterates the point highlighted by some authors (see Cook, 2004a, 2007; Keller and Kalmus, 2009; Tingstad, 2007) which suggests that such a dichotomy is not representative of children's experience of commercial life, nor is it a useful means by which to situate and examine such experiences. As will also be shown in this chapter, the most useful way of understanding children as consumers is recognising that although they may be on the receiving end of corporate exploitation, they also act and live their lives with the opportunity and space to practice individual autonomy. Through an examination of moderation, it will be shown that children, along with their parents and significant others, gain significant pleasure from consumption, yet at the same time fight to limit some of the negative aspects of consumption, through practices of moderation.

## 7.3 UNDERSTANDING MODERATION

> For Christmas I got some cars, some Lego sets, a model helicopter, lots of DVDs, lots of board games, a Nintendo DS, a Nintendo Wii controller, some sweets, some chocolate and an umbrella. **Ben**

> I hate shopping it's boring just pushing the trolley around. My mum never lets me buy anything. She always says no. I don't both asking. It's better to stay at home. **Markus**

Children like Ben, seem to have everything - bedrooms full of 'stuff', extensive lists of gifts that go on forever, and easy access to the most sought after consumables. However as Markus suggests, there are some controls placed upon his consumption practices. On the one hand children's consumption appears to be moderated yet on the other hand the desires of children seem to know no bounds. Linking this to the discourse regarding the exploited/empowered child, children are seen to constantly pester and nag their parents for consumer goods, with their parents (and other significant adults), supported and opposed by manufacturers, marketers, governments and the media, battling between indulgence, saying no, and teaching self-restraint. Consequently the question arises, how then do these compromising positions co-exist in relation to children's

consumption practices? One way in which to answer this question is to examine is the extent to which 'moderation' is an aspect of young children's consumption.

Firstly however, it is necessary to begin by identifying what is understood by the term 'moderation.' Plato discusses the notion of moderation or 'temperance' in *Charmides* (2008). Here moderation is firstly presented as "doing our own business" (161b), however this is not a sufficient enough understanding of the concept and the conversation turns to the inscriptions carved into the walls of the Temple of Apollo in Delphi (164d-165a). These inscriptions, 'nothing in excess' and in particular 'know thyself' are used to direct understandings of the concept of temperance. Moderation is thus seen as a form of knowledge, albeit self-knowledge, and consequently it is hypothesised that it must be a science of itself as well as all of the other sciences - a "science of science" (*ibid.:* 166c). Furthermore, in order to truly know oneself, one must also know what one does not know. This science of temperance is very difficult to envisage completely, and ultimately Socrates is left in a state of confusion as to useful definitions of the concept.

Nevertheless, the concept of moderation is returned to in Plato's later writings. Moderation is one of the virtues, along with wisdom, courage, and justice, which are identified by him in *The Republic*, as the defining characteristics of the ideal society (2000, 430d-432a). For Plato, moderation is a form of self-discipline, "it is a mastery of pleasures and desires, and a person is described as being in some way or other master of himself" (ibid.: 430e), or as Socrates explains to Adeimantus in book 3:

> For the general population, doesn't self-discipline consist principally in being obedient to their masters, and being themselves masters of the pleasures of drink, sex and food? (*ibid.:* 389e).

Moderation, as respectability, is seen to be a quality which is lacked by certain members of society, children included, yet is evident within the lives of the more educated members of society as Socrates clarifies to Glaucon in book 4:

> But you do also find the whole range and variety of desires, pleasures and pains. Particularly in children, women, slaves, and among so-called free men, in the majority of ordinary people.
>
> You certainly do.
>
> Whereas simple, moderate desires, which are guided by rational calculation, using intelligence and correct belief, are things you come across only among a few people, those with the best natural endowment and the best education. (*ibid.:* 431c).

According to Plato however, moderation, unlike the virtues of courage and wisdom, should not be located only within certain classes, but should extend out to all citizens, in order to create and contribute to a harmonious society, in which all members "sing in unison" (*ibid.:* 432e). For Plato then, moderation is idealised practice for the individual and which also brings rewards for society at large, it focuses on self-restraint in daily life, with particular regard to the 'pleasures' of drinking, eating, and sex. However as demonstrated in the expression "all things in moderation, including moderation", temperance in daily life should not always be viewed as the ultimate achievement. This serves to reinforce the point that this research is not concerned with value judgements about the way in which children consume, whether for example they are spoiled by their parents and are indulged in their every whim or whether they consume with self-restraint, or whether advertising to children should be controlled by the state or whether or not 'pester power' is a feature of children's consumer experiences, but is instead concerned with helping us to understand more generally the place of moderation in children's engagement with consumer culture, thus contributing to the overall aim of this study to contribute further knowledge to the field of children's consumption practices.

According to Locke, one of the most important traits that parents must instil in their children is that of virtue, with virtue being a combination of rationality and self-denial:

> As the strength of the body lies chiefly in being able to endure hardships, so also does that of the mind. And the great principle and foundation of all virtue and worth is placed in this: that a man is able to deny himself his own desires, cross his own inclinations, and purely follow what reason directs as best, tho' the appetite lean the other way. (TCE, §33).

Through the work of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900) we are provided with the opportunity to bridge the understandings of the philosophers of Ancient Greece on the topic of moderation with one of the foremost critics of contemporary culture in the 19th century (Tongeren, 2002). Briefly, Nietzsche is of interest since he returns us to the concepts of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, as explored briefly in chapter one with the work of Jenks (1996). The Apollonian is associated with "moderation" and "restraint" whereas the Dionysian is associated with "excess" (Nietzsche, 2007: 21):

> Apollo, as an ethical divinity, demands moderation from his followers and, so that they can observe self-control, a knowledge of the self. And so alongside the aesthetic necessity of beauty run the demands "Know thyself" and "Nothing too much!"; whereas, arrogance and excess are considered the essentially hostile daemons belonging to the non-Apollonian sphere and therefore characteristics of the pre-Apollonian period, the age of the Titans, and of the world beyond the Apollonian, that is, the barbarian world (Nietzsche, 2007: 25).

Dionysius is the god through which the excesses of nature are defined, however "the truth of this chaotic and tension-filled nature can only be acknowledged and enjoyed when it is counterbalanced by the Apollonian appearance of unity and order" (Tongeren, 2002: 21). Nietzsche describes the all-consuming nature of Dionysius:

> And so the Apollonian was cancelled and destroyed everywhere the Dionysian penetrated. But it is just as certain that in those places where the first onslaught was halted, the high reputation and the majesty of the Delphic god manifested itself more firmly and threateningly than ever. (Nietzsche, 2007: 26).

This idea of a struggle for a balance between restraint and excess, will be examined through the example of children's birthdays and birthday parties.

If we return to moderation as it relates to matters of consumption, we see an interest in moderation emerging in Britain during the 18th century, as response to the excesses of the new consumer society that was developing at this time (Hilton, 2004). With regard to moderation and children's consumption there exists very little research and the research that does exist seems to focus on reducing alcohol in-take (Bot *et al*., 2005; Cismaru *et al*., 2008), restricting unhealthy food in the diet (Brusdal, 2007; Marshall *et*

*al*., 2007), and limiting exposure to television viewing (Chan and McNeal, 2003; Bin, 1996).

Thus moderation, as it relates to consumption, means to 'limit excesses' or 'to be within reasonable limits.' On the one hand, moderation in behaviour or practices may result from self-restraint and self-moderation, or on the other hand, consumption practices maybe under the moderation of others, in particular parents, but also the state, other family members, and friends and peers. Moderation may exist in opposition to the excesses of modern day consumption, or it may be a result of the very processes of consumption. Consequently, to shed further light on these discussions, three snapshots from the research can usefully be applied to understandings of moderation and of consumption in order to learn more about the consumption practices of children. These three snapshots relate to television and computer games, mobile phones, and birthdays and birthday parties.

## 7.3 TELEVISION AND COMPUTER GAMES[46]

Television viewing and playing computer games has been chosen as one of the snapshots through which to examine the place of moderation in children's consumption practices because it is one area of children's lives which is certain to provoke comment and concern (see chapter four; Buckingham, 2000, 2005; Critcher, 2008; Drotner and Livingstone, 2008; O'Sullivan, 2007, Postman, 1982). However concern about children's consumer culture, especially as it relates to its various media outputs has a long history, for example at the beginning of the twentieth century adults focused their concern on comic books (Hoover and Schofield Clark, 2008). Critcher (2008) also provides the example of Himmelweit *et al.* who in 1958 investigated whether television had a negative effect on children's lives - it was found not to be the case. As highlighted in chapter three, television has been seen as particularly troublesome as it has been seen to contribute to the loss of childhood. Television, suggests Postman (1982), destroys childhood by abandoning the written word and giving primacy to the pictorial, which

[46] Here 'computer games' are taken to mean video games and consoles including Xbox, DS, DS Lite, PSP, Playstation 1 and 2, Wii, as well as PC games, and online internet games.

negatively affects processes in the brain relating to language. The distinctions between childhood and adulthood are seen to be disappearing since children no longer need assistance (i.e. to be taught how to read, or the meanings of words), since television demands so very little from its watchers. Furthermore television is seen to contribute negatively to children's lives not only because of the messages that it sends out (which are for example, sexualised, violent, materialistic) but also because watching television (and screen time more generally) is seen to encourage sedentary lifestyles, one of the contributing factors to childhood obesity (Mayo and Nairn, 2009; Schor, 2004):

> Although watching television is a routine everyday activity for people of all age groups, it is often children who are singled out for particular attention and concern. Their behaviour is closely measured and monitored; they are experimented upon, surveyed and canvassed for their views; and the 'problem' of their relationship with television is frequently a focus of concern among parents, pundits and politicians. (Buckingham, 2009: 347).

Consequently television is presented as an area of concern and a realm of potential exploitation. Despite this, all of the children interviewed watched television and played computer/video games, and took great pleasure from this. Phoebe excitedly spoke about the programme she had been watching:

> And yesterday guess what I watched? The Chipmunks! It was so so funny. Guess what happened in it? The one with the green top is the cutest. Alvin. He's the cutest. A nice puffy face. He could sing. Guess what one of them did? It wasn't the cute one it was the biggest. Wow chicka wow wow!! He hit the man and went wow chicka wow wow! And at the end we were doing rock dancing because people were saying that we were doing rock dancing. (Gets up and starts dancing.) They started wiggling their hips. Wiggling their bottom! (Collapses on the sofa laughing.)

Likewise Oliver was eager to talk about his new DS Lite to me:

> My dad got this for me, cos I really wanted it but I didn't think that I was going to get it. But then my daddy came home and said Ollie I've got a surprise for you. And it was this! It was my DS Lite. And he got me some shorts from Next! And the next day we went on our holidays to the caravan and I played with it in the car all the way there and I didn't get sick at all!

As well as finding pleasure in viewing television and playing video games, such items served as an aspect of empowerment for the children. For example, every morning Samuel watched television programmes designed for very young children, which empowered him to face the day ahead:

> And there's this one thing, this baby show, which I think, in the morning I get very, very grumpy and at seven o'clock I watch a baby show called Peppa Pig, and that just cheers me up in the morning and makes me all smiley for the day. Cos normally when I don't watch Peppa Pig I get in a very grumpy mood. But when I do watch it I do just get more happier and feel better.

Television viewing and games consoles, in providing the children with the opportunity to share with significant adults their skills and thoughts and opinions on a particular subject, also provides us with further evidence for the contention that children's consumer practices are relational practices. For example, in Josh, Jade, Mikey, Daniel, William, and Emily and Ben's family's a Nintendo Wii (or an extra controller) had been purchased so that the whole family (or more often children and fathers) could play together. With regards to television viewing Ethan enjoyed watching the Grand Prix and Motocross with his grandfather, and Lucie on the shopping trip told me "usually after ice skating we go to McDonalds and get a chicken burger, and then we go to my daddy's house and we watch Disney DVDs in his big bed." Also for Alpha Chicken staying up late and watching television with his father was a special treat that they shared.[47] Such examples reinforce the emphasis which should be laid upon the dynamic nature of the connections and links between individuals within the consumption process (Crewe and Collins, 2006; Martens *et al.,* 2004; Pachucki and Breiger, 2010). This also highlights the fact that television viewing is often not a solitary activity and enjoyment can be enhanced by watching with others. Additionally when watching television, it is possible to easily slip in and out of the activity, either physically by leaving or entering a room or by being engaged in other activities at the same time.

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[47] However, as identified in the previous chapter, with Grace who found it very difficult when her family did not come together in sharing viewing habits, the relational aspects of children's consumption practices may not always be experienced in a positive light.

Consequently we are presented with the position of children enjoying their engagement with television and video games, however as will be shown, the children suggested that very often their parents were concerned about their access to these items, and set about moderating children's access to these items. Here we see that children's consumption is not necessarily expressed in terms of 'empowerment' and 'exploitation', by both parents and children, but in terms of what is 'good for' and 'bad for' children (Brusdal, 2007; Keller and Kalmus, 2009).

Between the children, the amount of time given over to television viewing and play on video games, as well as the sorts of programmes that were watched or games that were played with, differed. Differences also occurred as to whether screen time was freely available or whether permission first had to be sought. For instance Oliver was allowed to watch television whenever he wanted to, "My mummy doesn't say no, and sometimes when I'm being a bit naughty I take off my brother's Barney [DVD], and put my Playstation on! Uhh!" In comparison, William only watched Dr. Who, and Phoebe and Alfie were only allowed to watch television at the weekends. However in the majority of cases it appeared that children had to first ask their parents if they could watch television, or use the television to play their video games, but generally they received a positive response as Jack comments, "I ask my mum if I can watch it but she usually says yes." The fact that children had to ask first, but then were usually granted permission to do something, was also replicated in Marshall *et al*.'s (2007) study on the extent to which children pestered their parents for snacks. Also, as in the Marshall *et al.* study, the timing of requests, and what had been happening previously also impacted upon whether parents said yes, as Thomas and Emily explain:

> If I've had enough TV, she doesn't let me have the Wii because I've had enough TV on. I think. I only get it on, on Saturdays and Sundays. I only get it after breakfast, after dinner, and after tea. And on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursdays, and Fridays I only get it after school. And after tea. **Thomas**

> If I'm good my mummy lets me watch two cartoons in bed, but if I've been naughty and been silly in the bath I'm not allowed to watch any. So I try and be good. **Emily**

However as Markus explains, a 'yes' could not always be guaranteed:

> One programme that I always watch and that's at six o'clock and that's 'The Simpsons'. I ask my mum and she says it's ok, but sometimes if I've been watching too much TV she says no and I ask her and say please, please, please it's my favourite programme she usually says yes. **Markus**

This comment from Markus serves to highlight that the aim of this research is not to say whether or not the children 'pestered' or 'nagged' their parents in to allowing them to do certain things, or to have particular consumer goods bought for them, rather the purpose is to explore how this pestering is a feature of, and how it fits in more broadly with, children's consumption and the notion of moderation. Pestering and nagging is a very real feature of children's consumption practices as Cook (2009b) notes:

> Children – as economic dependents – are required to petition (and sometimes nag) their parents about the kinds of things they which to have acquired for them from the marketplace, producing a sometimes combative relationship that can occupy a significant part of family life and interaction. (Cook, 2009b: 114-115).

Not all of the children had access to the internet, yet all of them had access to televisions and computer games.[48] In the recent past it may have been worthy to comment on whether or not children had a television in their bedrooms, however nowadays not having a television in the bedroom is seen as an exception (Mayo and Nairn, 2009; Roberts and Foehr, 2004). In this research only six out of the 25 children interviewed did not have a television in their bedroom.[49] Instead, an interesting question is whether or not children have access to satellite television channels. For example Daniel bemoaned the fact that he only had a digibox on the TV in his bedroom, rather than Sky TV. Josh, although he had Sky in his bedroom, he had the even better Sky+ on the television downstairs. Even Alfie and Phoebe, whose television viewing was limited to weekends only and did not have televisions in their bedrooms, still had Sky TV:

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[48] Fifteen of the 25 children interviewed used and had access to the internet at the home. Three of the children (Dilianda, Emily, and Be) had the internet at home but did not use it, and seven children did not have access to the internet at home (Callum, Grace, Harry, James Bond, Lucie, Mikey, and Oliver).

[49] The six children without a television in their bedrooms were Alfie, Harry, Grace, Phoebe, Thomas and William.

**Alfie**: We only watch it Fridays, Sundays and Saturdays. So three times per week.

**Liz**: And what's your favourite programme?

**Alfie**: Boomerang!

**Liz**: Boomerang? I don't know that one.

**Alfie**: It's got Tom and Jerry on. And a few ones that I like on but if there's some that I don't like on I change to Cartoon Network 2, or Cartoon Network. They're my second best programmes. And my third best is Cbeebies.

**Liz**: Yeah

**Alfie**: Everyone's heard of that. You see the thing is that we've got Sky.

Have you got Sky?

**Liz**: No. Just the normal channels.

**Alfie**: No wonder you don't know about it.[50]

The discourse surrounding health and television viewing was also a salient feature of the children's consumption practices, for example, Phoebe and Ben told me of the dangers of getting 'square eyes' from watching too much television, and Rebecca commented, "I like watching TV, but it's not good to watch too much because you get like a couch potato and get fat." Here we see that the children self-moderated or were at least were aware of the discourses surrounding television viewing. The same was true with the kinds of programmes that the children watched. For example whilst out on an accompanied shopping trip with Samuel and his mother we went into HMV where there was a large cut-out stand displaying the new Sex in the City DVD, we stopped to take a look and the following exchange took place between Samuel and his mother:

**Samuel:** Sex and the City? What's that one about?

**Mother:** It's not something that I would recommend you looking at Samuel.

**Samuel:** I wouldn't! Cos it's got the name 'sex' in it. No way!

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[50] As well as highlighting Alfie's thoughts about satellite television, such questioning provides an example to show that the children did not feel overwhelmed or powerless in answering questions, and felt freely able to ask me questions, demonstrating the conversation with a purpose feel which was indicative of how I wanted the interviews to take place. As was shown in the previous chapter, the children would often draw me into their responses, recognising that I was an outsider, and may not know about their lives, and kindly explaining to me things that they thought that were of importance. On the one hand it may be said that researchers should acquaint themselves with aspects of children's culture, popular toys or television programmes for example, before entering the research setting. However, on the other hand, if I had known everything (or lots) about children's consumer lives, I may have failed to ask questions regarding this particular topic.

Samuel also regulated himself with regards to his computer game playing, but also demonstrating that begging/pestering/nagging are a feature of children's consumption practices:

> I got a PSP – a Playstation portable. I won't get a Playstation, a normal Playstation cos children get addicted to them sometimes, children get addicted. Well a lot of the children that have them, when I go to their houses they say let's go on the Playstation and they can't take their eyes off when I talk to them. Staring at it, doing stuff. And sometimes it can get boring. I've got a Wii that my dad got for his birthday last August and once I got it I was begging to go on it. But once I got it about a month later it was quite boring. Cos nobody goes on it now because it gets boring after you've had it sometimes. **Samuel**

The literature regarding children's practices of self-regulation is sparse (Drotner, 2009; for exceptions see Facer *et al*., 2003; Livingstone and Bober, 2006). As has been stated previously, one of the most significant contributions of this thesis to the field of children's consumption practice is through the examination of the practices of moderation in which children take part. Self-regulation, or even co-regulation among peers, is shown to be an important feature of moderation and thus children's consumption practices.

Violence is another feature of children's consumption which is viewed as particularly dangerous. As discussed in section 7.1, in order to deal with this children's consumption is often moderated so that positive elements are highlighted and negative aspects are concealed. One way in which this can be done is by focusing on the educational aspects of consumer goods, for example Ethan had a laptop to "help me with my stories for school." Unfortunately James Bond did not agree with his mother's prohibition for an Xbox because of its lack of educational value:

> Cos my mam doesn't let us have Xbox 360s because she thinks that there's like no learning in it. Like education. But I always think there is because [friend] has an Xbox 360 and I've played his and it's got the learning game on it but I can't remember what it's called. **James Bond**

The following excerpt also from the interview with James Bond, where his mother was also present, shows that parents do not want to say no to their children but at the same

time do not want them to be hurt or damaged by particular aspects of consumer culture, so seek to be moderate and search for a compromise:

> **James Bond**: I was meant to get £20 the not last week, the week before on Monday or Tuesday. It was from my Aunty Anne but now it's been nicked. From the post office.
> **Mother**: You were going to buy a game with that one. But if we were out shopping you do prefer to choose the older games that Mummy does not think is suitable.
> **James Bond**: Yeah stuff like the Stars Wars battleship 2, but that one's 12+ but that's cartoony but she doesn't like the other ones like Call of Duty which is 15 but is like real life.
> **Mother**: Mummy doesn't mind so much that you can have computer games where they are shooting and killing people where it is a cartoon because James Bond knows that's just pretend but mummy doesn't like it when they're shooting like real people because that's real.
> **James Bond**: Call of Duty that's cartoony…
> **Mother**: But the one that we saw in the shop wasn't. We chatted about it and you…
> **James Bond**: What was the game that I bought for my PS2…
> **Mother**: That you weren't allowed to play it?
> **James Bond**: The Godzilla. The Godzilla one I swapped it for something else. I swapped the Godzilla one for something else because I didn't like it.
> **Mother**: He has on occasions had games where he hasn't enjoyed playing them after a while because he's found them a bit frightening. The Godzilla game was a bit scary wasn't it?
> **James Bond**: NO! We haven't even bought it! We swapped it remember? Because you said that the image on the front looked like…
> **Mother**: … too scary…

Daniel and his family also had a pragmatic way of concealing the negative elements of his favourite video games:

> They don't mind me having the 12 ones because I'm ten next month and I'm almost twelve. But sometimes if it's got swearing in it and it's a twelve they let me buy it but turn the volume off. **Daniel**

In all, watching television and playing video games are an important aspect of children's consumer culture. Children often spend a lot of time engaged in these activities often on a daily basis, and take a great deal of pleasure from doing so. However children do not usually have unlimited access to television sets or games consoles and to a certain

extent their usage is moderated. Thus moderation may be experienced as a limitation imposed upon children by their parents, or as a consequence of self-moderation, particularly in reference to discourses about health. Violence was another area of concern, however there were attempts by parents to moderate its exploitative characteristics and emphasise its empowering features. Such insights will be further developed in the next section which examines mobile phones.

## 7.4 MOBILE PHONES

The use and ownership of mobile phones by children and young people has reached 'iconic' status and a lot has been written about this topic within a relatively short space of time (Ling and Haddon, 2008). As well as concerns relating to dangers to health due to radiation, mobile phone usage and ownership has also been taken by parents and the popular press to be a signal of children growing up too quickly (Layard and Dunn, 2009; Mayo and Nairn, 2009; Naish, 2009; Wilska, 2003). Consequently, mobile phones are presented as another area of children's consumption that may be viewed as inherently risky, bad, or dangerous for children. However little is known about the ways in which children actually use their mobiles and the meanings that they attached to this (Devitt and Roker, 2009).

Of the 25 children that were interviewed 14 of the children had mobiles whereas 11 of them did not.[51] This fits with the suggestion by Naish (2009) that over half of 5 to 9 year olds have a mobile phone. Interestingly however only three (Mikey, Rebecca, and Samuel) out of the 14 children who had a mobile used it to a great extent or spoke about it at length within the course of the interview. All three of these children were at the upper age limit of the research (10 years old) so it may be that age is a moderating factor when it comes to children's usage and ownership of mobile phones. For the other children who had a mobile they often had a rather ambivalent relationship to it as Daniel explained, "I do have one but I lost the charger but my sister's got a new one and she give us her old one." Chloe also commented, "My mam pays it and I don't really need

[51] Alfie, Alpha Chicken, Ben, Bravo B, Dilianda, Emily, Harry, Oliver, Phoebe, Thomas, and William did not have mobile phones.

that much on cos I don't really use it. I don't really text anyone." Although James Bond proudly announced to me that "I had a mobile when I was seven", like Daniel this mobile was a hand-me-down from a member of the family, this time from his Nana. Furthermore, James Bond hardly used it as "I keep losing the sim card." Markus's mobile too had been passed on to him when his father upgraded his contract:

> My dad gave me mine because he got an upgrade on his contract and gave has old one to me. It's good because now I can call him whenever I want and I don't have to ask my mum if I can use the phone… my dad mainly bought it for me not for games and that, but so that I can communicate with him without using my mum's phone. **Markus**

This freedom afforded to children as a consequence of their usage of mobile phones, to keep in touch with parents and other family members who lived away has was also been acknowledged elsewhere (see Devitt and Roker, 2009).

A greater sense of safety and geographical freedom was also afforded to the children as a result of their access to a mobile phone. Chloe for example who had received a mobile phone when she was eight years old appreciated its benefits:

> Because when you're playing out, or go over to your friends in the six weeks, and when you're playing out, your mam can ring to see how you are. They can ring you when to come in rather than come and find ya. **Chloe**

Jack too recognised the benefits of having a mobile phone, "I like going down Henderson's park, Henderson's is near me. I've got a phone so I can go down Henderson's and that." The children also appreciated mobile phones not just because they were then permitted greater freedom by their parents, but they also felt or could imagine feeling safer as a result:

> Some people at our school are 8 and they have mobile phones. I think everyone needs to have a mobile phone because someone could steal it and they need to call the police. Or hitting you with a bat or carrying a knife. You could call the police and then the police could come with you and arrest the err… gangsters. **Bravo B**

> I'm seven and I haven't got one but my friend she's nine and she's got one 'cos she walks home from school and it's more safety. Like she can ring her mum if there's any problems or anything. **Ben**

It also depended on what the children would use their phone for as to whether they thought that having a mobile phone was a good idea, for example safety was prioritised over listening to music or taking photos by Markus:

> Well I've got a friend who I was talking about and he walks home on his own, I'd say yes. But other children who drive home, they'd probably just use their phone for chatting, I'd say no. But like in my friend's case, when he's walking home and he has to let his mum know, I'd have to say yes. **Markus**

Samuel however appreciated having a mobile because it allowed him to share music and digital media with his friends. Samuel did not mention the call or text functions of his phone at all:

> Well I got this phone because a lot of people in my class like to listen to music, take photos, make movies, images, and so there's this thing called Bluetooth, and it's something where you send music and video or image to the other person. And it doesn't cost any money you just send it to them, and they have it and you have it still. I'd just have a song by Mika or I'd have a song by Girls Aloud, and somebody said that I like that song so we went on Bluetooth, found her device and then her pressed connect and then you will just, and it will say sending then it will go to 100% and it would just be with them and you'd still have it for free. And this was one of the only phones that had them in the shop. **Samuel**

The call features of Daniel's phone were also secondary for him:

> All I really use it for is to listen to the music. Sometimes I take photos. But if I go round a different street and I take it with us, so if my mum wants us to come home she phones us. **Daniel**

It was not only safety that was recognised as a benefit of having a mobile phone but convenience, for example Jade, Daniel, Josh and Chloe mentioned that their mother's could ring them to come home, rather than going out and searching for them.

In all, these examples show that the perceived dangers of mobile phones are moderated as a consequence of the benefits that they bring by facilitating ease of communication between parents and children, especially when these children are outside of the family home, and thus promoting a sense of safety. These issues have been previously discussed by others (for example, Pain *et al*., 2005; Williams and Williams, 2005; Wilska,

2003), however this research has tended to focus on older children (11+) with no comment on younger children. Consequently, this research is useful in highlighting the role of mobile phones in younger children's consumer lives.

The children who were interviewed appeared to be well aware of the discourses surrounding young children's use of mobile phones and have clear opinions on the subject, as Ben commented with incredulity, "My cousin's got a mobile and she's six!" In the same way that the older siblings of the ten year-old girls Rysst's (2010) study were shocked to see, or to imagine, their kid sisters in such 'provocative' or sexy clothing, children in this research comment on other children at certain ages who they thought should or should not have a mobile phone (Ling and Haddon, 2008). This was exemplified through the use of the vignette about Simon. In this vignette Simon was presented as a seven year old, just about to celebrate his 8th birthday. One of the features that the children are asked to comment on is that fact that Simon would like a mobile phone for his birthday. Josh, for example, did not agree that Simon should get a mobile phone, instead suggesting that ten or eleven years old is a "good age" to get a mobile phone:

> Cos if you're like eight like Simon you could drop it or something. Or you could break it cos you don't know how to use it. Even I don't know how to connect it to the internet and all that. I just use it to play music. **Josh**

Alpha Chicken was also against the idea that an eight year should get a mobile phone. Here we see another example of children monitoring their peers' consumption practices:

> I think that he shouldn't get a mobile phone because 1) he's too young and 2) because he doesn't know how to use a mobile phone and 3) people might hack into his phone and steal his phone and send bad messages. **Alpha Chicken**

Since children's consumption is a relational practice, the children often used the experiences of other children as reference points to help them promote their points of view:

> Probably about the age of thirteen. My cousin is a little girl and she's thirteen. And she's thirteen and she has her very own mobile. She lets me play with it but she only lets me have it if it's turned off! **Phoebe**

Alfie agreed with his parents' suggestion that he was too young to have a mobile, and used the reference point of being in secondary school as time when it would be appropriate to have a mobile phone. The move to secondary (high) school has been identified as a key transition point in the lives of children and is specifically borne out by the consumer goods that children and parents deem as 'natural' for a child at secondary school (Evans, 2002; Waerderhal, 2005).

In the vignette with Simon, the children also demonstrated strong ideas on whether a mobile phone was a suitable *birthday present*. The issue of money and the costs involved was particularly salient among the older children in the research, as the remarks from Chloe and Daniel demonstrate:

> He probably will because it's a good present and it's… well it's a lot of money but it's not as much as a Wii or a PS 2. He might not get it because it might be a bit too much depending on which one he wants. If he plays out much he'll use it because then people will be able to get him. **Chloe**

> I don't think that he'd get a mobile phone because I think that it'd be too much money for a birthday to buy a mobile phone. A mobile phone I normally get for Christmas or something like that. I think that he should ask for money for his birthday from everyone, so if he gets money, he might have enough money, and the money he's already got, to buy it, go out and buy one. **Daniel**.

An examination of respectability allows for further understanding of moderation. As was documented in chapter three, with regard to the work by Veblen on conspicuous consumption, there is a desire by consumers to demonstrate respectability in their consumption practices. Samuel for example suggested that Simon would only get a mobile if he was helpful – "If he was really really nice to his parents and helped around the house he might. *He might.*" Alternatively Callum suggested that Simon would not get a mobile for his birthday "because he just asked for one", rather than it being offered to him as a gift. Pestering parents was also suggested by Alpha Chicken and Bravo B as inappropriate behaviour:

**Alpha Chicken**: He might beg.

**Bravo B**: Please, please, please, please.

**Alpha Chicken**: I've seen a lot of kids doing that. Fighting with their mums.

**Bravo B**: We never fight with our mum. Never ever in our life have we had a fight with our mum. It's bad!.

Acting, or seen to be acting respectably or as Veblen (1970:36) describes it, with "good repute", is often more important for those people who have less power/economic influence in society. As was highlighted in chapter four, from the 1800s through to the present day, women have long struggled with being seen as unrespectable consumers (Casey and Martens, 2007; Cook, 2004b; Ponsford, 2011). Similarly, working class people's consumption has been viewed as unrespectable (Raisborough and Adams, 2008; Skeggs, 1997); as has that of people from ethnic minorities (Mukherjee, 2011). Likewise these groups have shown a desire to be viewed as respectable consumers (Edensor and Millington, 2009; Tyler, 2008). As was documented in chapters two and four, children have long been located in positions of less power and with more limited access to economic resources, consequently children's consumption, when it has been discussed, has often been viewed critically (see chapter six; Cross, 1997; Seiter, 1995). Therefore, as these snapshots from the research with the children have shown, children are aware of their positioning as children, and seek to assert and confirm the respectability of their consumption practices.

Despite the argument that children will petition their parents to get them what they want, and will come up with many different strategies in order to get them what they want (see, McNeal, 1999; Palan and Wilkes, 1997; Shoham and Dalakas, 2006), the children in this research appeared to know what the limits were to their requests for consumption. For example Markus noted that his mother would not bend the rules so there was no point in asking his mother for something that he already knows she will refuse. Whereas on the shopping trip, Samuel noted, "my Dad is really weak with money" and that Samuel could get his father to buy him what he wanted. However these purchases were limited to the order of things like sweets, Gogos, and Match Attax cards. Consequently the consumption practices of the children in this study should not be viewed as out of control and as the snapshots of these children show, they did know to some extent the limits of their requests; the children, when they thought it to be

appropriate, often as a means of consuming respectability, or at the request of their parents, would moderate their consumption behaviour.

## 7.5 BIRTHDAYS AND BIRTHDAY PARTIES

Birthdays, birthday parties, presents and birthday treats were spontaneously mentioned by many participants in the discussion on consumption. Plans for parties many months away were mentioned, and memories of birthdays were eagerly recounted, as Rebecca explained:

> My birthday's in July and I'm having a limousine for my birthday. Not a real one to keep but you just drive round, and it's got karaoke and DVD players and a pink disco ball! My cousin got one for her birthday and we went to see High School Musical. And I remember for my eighth birthday we just had a garden party but it was really cool. We had water fights and a BBQ with all my family and my friends. **Rebecca**

Birthdays are important occasions for both children and parents (Clarke, 2007; Cook, 2009d; McKendrick *et al*., 2000; Otnes *et al*., 1995; Pugh, 2009; Zelizer, 2002). Birthdays mark a distinct break from the routine, and apart from Christmas were the only times when the majority of the participants received gifts of any monetary worth and/or cash. Birthdays marked a change from the mundane practices of ordinary consumption and allowed children the opportunity to consume more freely yet within a legitimised context. As well as consuming respectability, consuming with restraint was one way in which moderation became a part of the way in which the children consumed. Consequently, birthday celebrations with all the associated excesses allowed moderation to be practiced and experienced in relation to what it is not. In order to understand moderation, it is necessary to understand both excesses and restraint, in the same way that in Nietzschean philosophy the Apollonian and the Dionysian depend on each other to make what they stand for clear (Clor, 2008: 51; Corbett, 2009). Explained by Nietzsche (2008: 9) thus, "I tell you: one must still have chaos in one to give birth to a dancing star. I tell you: ye have still chaos in you."

As soon as James Bond had had his birthday he began pestering his mother about the gifts that he would like for Christmas, "My birthday was March 29th and on March 31st I was bugging her about a DS for Christmas! (laughs)." From the laughter we can see that

James Bond knew that he was 'pushing his luck' and acting outside the bounds of usual behaviour by pestering his mother so early. Mikey too spoke confidently and freely about previous birthday parties as well as the gifts that he was planning to receive for his 10th birthday:

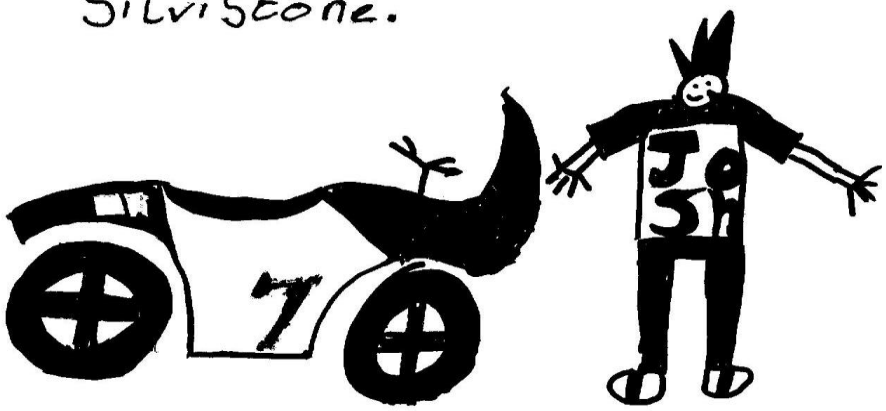
> **Liz**: Are you planning anything for your birthday that's coming up?
> **Mikey**: Nah because I've had a party three years running. So I've had a football party, a magician, and a bouncy castle. So I'm planning to save all me presents to the night and going to invite [friends] over, and then we're going to have like a party in the house, and they can help me open all me presents. Like last year my dog got hold of my first present and ripped it open!!
> **Liz**: Do you know if you're getting any gifts?
> **Mikey**: I'm getting an electric guitar. And I've got this new DS Lite that I've got as early birthday present off me granddad. A new turquoise one. So that's off me granddad. I'm getting an iPod off David (mother's boyfriend) and an electric guitar off me mam.

Thomas also appreciated the smaller finishing touches that go into making a party special, "putting ribbons up, and might have sprinklers, like fireworks, like party poppers." Oliver in his journal drew an underwater swimming pool party complete with slides and underwater swimmers with snorkels. The image below concerns Ethan's ideal birthday party. We see that he is quite specific about the activities, the guests and the food, balancing more moderate tastes such as burgers and chips with motor racing at Silverstone.

Birthdays

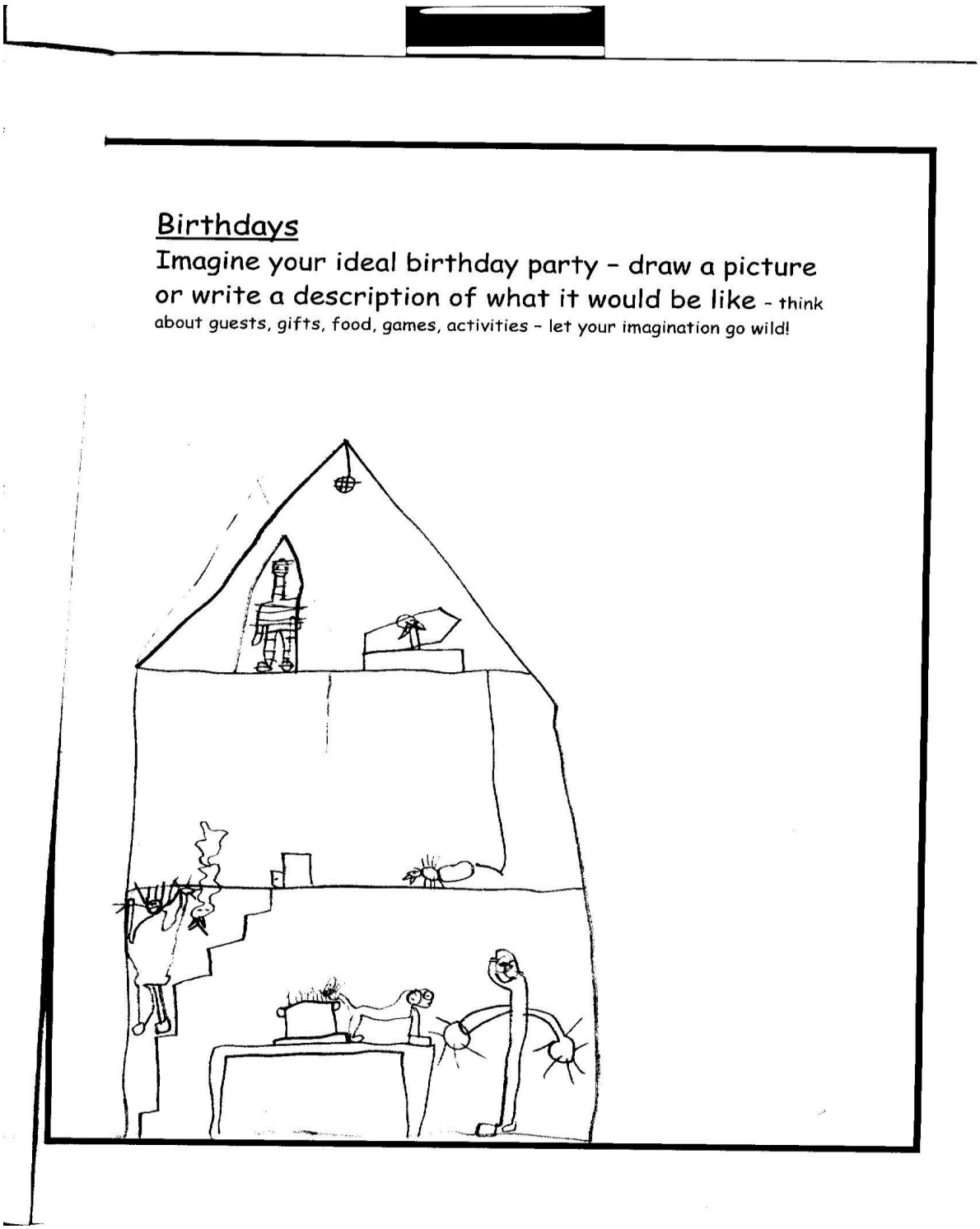
Imagine your ideal birthday party – draw a picture or write a description of what it would be like - think about guests, gifts, food, games, activities – let your imagination go wild!

the food I would like is burgers an chips, and the stuff I would like loads off lego. And the people I would invite is. James, Guy, Joe. The party I would like IS a motorbike party at Silvistone.




William's drawing of his ideal birthday party (see below) was accompanied with the text, "Dressing up party and me and my friends. We are being silly! My presents will be a nintendo DS." The birthday party was obviously something very significant for him. It is also important to look closely and recognise the detail that William had put into

accomplishing his drawing – there's a bat hanging upside down, a ghost, a mummy in a sarcophagus, a spooky looking cat and spider's web, and scary people.




Birthday parties can however be a source of stress, but there is always next year to look forward to as Samuel explains:

> And the worst thing about my sleepover party for my birthday this year was that the twins, not to be rude on them, but he broke my bed, one of the twins. There was a pull out bed and we had it out and he just bombed on it and broke it. And he put it away and I got so worried so I went to the bathroom and started crying, thinking that I was going to get the blame cos my mum says you didn't take responsibility for that. But next I'm going to have a sleepover without them next year. **Samuel**

Phoebe's consumption for her birthday was moderated however by her mother and she was made to give away all her birthday presents bar three. Although seemingly rueful that she had to give them away, she was also pleased with the ones that remained and also appeared to feel more relaxed in having given away some of her toys exclaiming "I just had too many", highlighting the fact that issues relating to the disposition of consumer goods may also affect children as well as adults (Sherry *et al*., 1992).

Since moderation involves an understanding of restraint and its opposite excess, of control and limitations, but also of 'splurges' and rule breaking, the example of birthdays and birthday parties allows us to see the importance that such festival times have for children and for their engagement with consumer culture.

## 7.6 SUMMARY

This chapter discusses two complimentary issues, both of which are made manifest through the examples of television and computer games, mobile phones, and birthdays and birthday parties. It examines the place of moderation in the consumption activities of the children involved in this research project. It also explores the dichotomy of the empowered and exploited child consumer as it relates to children's consumption.

It is shown that children are exploited and yet also empowered through their engagement with practices of consumption. Consequently one of the most useful ways of understanding children as consumers is recognising that although they may be on the receiving end of consumer exploitation, they are also empowered by practices of consumption. This is made meaningful through the examination of moderation, as here we see children, along with their parents and significant others, enjoying the pleasures of consumption, yet at the same time battling to limit some of the negative aspects of consumption, through the employment of various practices of moderation.

Such recognition of the multi layered nature of children's consumption practices serves to go beyond the straightforward and taken for granted assumptions about children and childhood, and of consumption. Likewise an understanding of moderation as it relates to children's consumption practices adds to a deeper understanding of children and childhood. In particular we returned to the concept of the Dionysian and Apollonian child as explored in chapters one and three through the work of Plato and Locke, via a re-reading by Jenks. This was then supplemented by an Nietzschean understanding of these motifs.

Despite the fact that children pester, nag, have a great variety of consumer goods at their disposal, moderation, incorporating restraint, self-control, and respectability, is shown to be an integral part of children's consumption practices. Through an analysis of television viewing and games consoles it is demonstrated that the children in this research project often spent a lot of time taking part in these activities, from which they took a great deal of enjoyment. Nevertheless, the children's access to television and games consoles was moderated, either by parents or self-regulation by children themselves, particularly in reference to discourses about health. Violence was also another area of concern, with attempts by parents to moderate television and computer games' exploitative characteristics and emphasise their empowering features.

Mobile phones were another feature of children's consumption practice which was used to explore the concept of moderation. In particular, consuming respectability was shown to be an important feature of the way in which moderation was experienced. Veblen work on 'good repute' as documented in chapter three served to reinforce that it is often those who have less power and/or economic resources often feel that they must consume respectably.

An examination of birthdays and birthday parties demonstrated that in order to understand moderation and restraint, we must also explore those particular times of excess and lack of restraint. In particular this linked to the notion of Dionysian and Apollonian consumption, and it was shown that there has to be excess in order to understand restraint; the one cannot stand without the other.

Ultimately this exploration of moderation provides one of this thesis' most significant contributions to new knowledge in the field of children's consumption practice.

# CONCLUSION

This thesis has provided an in-depth account of the ways in which a group of children, aged between 6 and 10 years old, engage in practices of consumption. In adopting an interpretive reproductionist approach to understanding how children consume, this study has recognised the ways in which children are involved in the co-construction of their social worlds, with consumption a primary feature of their lives. The questions that have been addressed are as follows: What form do the consumption practices of children aged six to ten years old take? What knowledge of consumption practices do children have and how is this knowledge gained? What roles do the child's family, peer group and friends, as well as the market play in constituting children's consumption practices? What creative features are aspects of children's consumption activities? Therefore the purpose of this final chapter is to bring together the conclusions made throughout this study with regard to children, childhood, and consumption, and to discuss the implications of these conclusions on the ways in which children are positioned as consumers. Additionally this chapter will consider the limitations of the research and make recommendations for future research on the topic of children and consumption.

## 8.1 OVERVIEW

In order to effectively understand children's engagement with consumption this study began by examining critically the categories of children and childhood. Consequently the cultural and historical analysis of children and childhood based upon early philosophical writings and literature as presented in chapter one, provided the foundations for exploring the ways in which these categories have been constructed, understood and used within society. The work of Rousseau (1991) and Locke (1964, 1996) opened up the discussion on the inherent nature of the child, which brought the notion of childhood innocence to the fore. Such treatises still have some bearing on the ways in which children and childhood are conceptualised today (Jenks, 1992; Meyer, 2007). The influential legacy of Ariès (1962) - that childhood is a social construction means that it is no longer possible to think of childhood as a universal biological stage in the life course - is also acknowledged. Whilst recognising the influence of Ariès in this

field of study, work by Riché and Alexandre-Bidon (1994) and Alexandre-Bidon and Lett (1999) among others, was particularly useful in demonstrating that there has been a certain regard for children in society, and a specific yet changing cultural space for children, at least as far back as the Middle Ages. This recognition that the meanings of the categories of children and childhood have not remained constant through history, led to the analysis of the contemporary models of children and childhood as seen in chapter two.

The second chapter refuted biological and developmental psychology as the determinant approaches to understanding childhood. It also demonstrated the ways in which children as a social category have come to be defined in and through social constructs such as law and education policy. Such approaches often ignore the experiences of children as living human beings, and instead children are seen as a homogenous group that are in need of protection (Cook, 2004; Prout *et al*., 1998). Consequently this study recognises the similarities of the shared experience of children, but it does not presume that all children will share the same experiences, in particular due to structural constraints such as social class, geographical location, (dis)ability, and family compilation. Early socialisation theory and the work of Talcott Parsons was also explored, which helped to establish Corsaro's (1997) interpretive reproductionist approach to understanding children's lives. This was also supported by a thorough examination of the new sociology of childhood (Prout and James, 1997).

Chapter three provided the definitions for what is meant by consumption and consumer culture and explored consumption theory from the classical work of Marx, through to the work by Veblen on conspicuous consumption, emulation and fashion. The theme of fashion is also explored through the work of Simmel, as well as an understanding of the blasé nature of city life. This critical approach to consumption was further developed through an exploration of Marcuse whose work on false needs provides a critique of the stultifying nature of the consumer industry. Baudrillard's examination of the value (functional, exchange, symbolic, and sign value) of consumer goods, through which individuals gain identity, power, and prestige, was useful as it positions consumption as a form of language through which meanings and messages are conveyed. Baudrillard can however be criticised as he fails to appreciate the lived experiences of consumption,

and commodities often have many meanings and may also be read in many ways. Consequently these shortcomings were explored within the context of children's consumption practices. Lastly Bourdieu's (1984) work on distinction was explored. Lifestyles were shown to be particularly important as they demonstrate that consumption practices can perform important communicative functions by giving expression to consumers' cultural dispositions and tastes. An examination of Bourdieu's work on habitus, taste, and cultural capital also opened up the debate on the extent to which children are born into particular patterns of consumption, and the role played by parents and peers in socialising children into specific consumption dispositions.

Subsequently chapter four brought together contemporary research on children, childhood, and consumption. Through the work of Cook (2004b) it was suggested that the emergence of the child consumer can be traced to the beginning of the twentieth century when the innocence and 'special' nature of children began to be recognised (Cross, 1997). The dichotomy between the empowered and exploited child consumer was introduced, and it was suggested that there needs to be the appropriate research on children's consumption, which takes into account *children's* thoughts and opinions on consumption; this thesis exists to achieve this aim. Consumer socialisation, which sees children developing along generalisable predetermined paths, based upon biological age, is examined and discredited in favour of commercial enculturation as the most appropriate way of understanding how children consumer (Cook, 2010). Unlike consumer socialisation, commercial enculturation is a reflexive process, in which the multilayered webs of meaning of society and culture precede children and cannot be separated from social and cultural contexts. Children are not socialised into consumption per se but engage in consumption practices that are socially and culturally embedded in understandings of childhood, family, and the market. Furthermore, since there is little empirical research on commercial enculturation, one of the most important contributions of this thesis to the study of children's consumption is that it provides one of the first empirical studies of commercial enculturation.

Child-focused research methodology, as well as the research methods employed in this research were discussed in chapter five. Furthermore the main findings of this thesis as relating to commercial enculturation and moderation have been greatly enhanced by a

'snapshot' approach to children's consumption. Through a research methodology which seeks to understand and document children's consumption as lived experience, and a desire to see consumption through the eyes of the children taking part in the research project, we garner an understanding of a group of children's consumer activities. These snapshots are made meaningful through extended quotations, situational details, and being mindful of my role and power as a researcher.

Chapter six discussed some of the findings of this research project, namely offering empirical evidence for Cook's assertion that commercial enculturation rather than consumer socialisation is the most appropriate way to understand the means by which children come to consume. This was made possible through the examination of family, friends and peers, and the market, and evidenced through the children's engagement with collectible figurines, clothing and fashion. The multi-layered weds of meaning in which children's consumption is embedded also allows us to see that children's consumption is a relational practice.

Finally chapter seven explores moderation and the dichotomy of the empowered/exploited child consumer through the examples of television and computer games, mobile phones, and birthdays and birthday parties. It is shown that children are simultaneously exploited and yet also empowered as a consequence of their engagement with practices of consumption. This is made meaningful through the examination of moderation, and its twin associates of restraint and respectability, as children, along with their parents and significant others, enjoy the pleasures of consumption, yet at the same time battle to limit some of the negative aspects of consumption, through the employment of various practices of moderation.

The themes covered in chapters six and seven provide a substantial contribution to new knowledge on children's consumption practices, consequently there will be an extended discussion of commercial enculturation, moderation, and the dichotomy of the empowered/exploited child consumer in the following three sections.

## 8.2 COMMERCIAL ENCULTURATION

As was mention previously this thesis provides one of the first empirical studies of Cook's (2010) notion of commercial enculturation. Commercial enculturation, has been shown to be the most useful way of describing the processes through which children come to know and participate in consumer culture. Rather than the traditional consumer socialisation approach, which views children as a moving in a linear fashion from incompetent child consumer to competent adult, and having to be taught and brought into spheres of consumption by adults.

As was demonstrated through snapshots of the children's experiences and the pre-existing cultures into which their consumer practices must be situated, consumer enculturation recognises the pre-existing, multiple, webs of meaning that precede an individual child. Children are not socialised into being a specific kind of consumer, rather it is through socialisation, experience, and interactions that children develop particular consumer dispositions. Furthermore, unlike consumer socialisation, commercial enculturation does not identify a particular endpoint, a certain level of ability or knowledge, which can be used to identify when a child becomes a "complete" (adult) consumer, and it also recognises that children may be the socialisers, for friends and peers or for adults, rather than consistently being the ones who are being socialised. An empirical examination of Cook's theory of commercial enculturation also allows us to recognise that children are involved in an ongoing process of creating and co-creating meaning as it relates to consumer practice. For example, through the snapshots of consumer life provide by the children, we go beyond a straightforward downwards transmission of cultural capital from parents to children, rather we see that knowledge about consumer practices develops from interactions with the market, peer group, friends, or family.

## 8.3 MODERATION

Moderation, temperance, self-control, these are not attributes that are usually associated with children's consumption. However by listening carefully to children's experiences, as demonstrated in this thesis through the examples of television and computer games, mobile phones, and birthday parties it was shown that children

experienced and practised moderation in their consumption practices. That is not to say that children do not pester nor nag their parents for consumer goods, or that life was always frugal, rather that there were moments when children's consumption would be moderated by their parents, or children would moderate their own consumption practices as well as those of other children.

Moderation is understudied as a feature of consumption, particularly in terms of children's consumption. However through a recourse to the Apollonian and Dionysian child as encountered in chapters one and two, and recognition of restraint and respectability in children's consumption practices, we see that moderation is very much a feature of children's consumption practices. Furthermore, in examining the topic of moderation, some of the taken for granted assumptions regarding children's consumption are challenged.

## 8.4 EMPOWERED/EXPLOITED CHILD CONSUMER

One theme that has run throughout this thesis is the recognition that children are often viewed as incompetent beings. It was noted in chapter two with regards to children as beings as well as becomings, and is further explored in the same chapter with regard to the paradigm of the 'new sociology of childhood' which recognises, among other things, that children themselves are those best placed to tell the stories of their experiences (Ambert, 1986; James and Prout, 1990, Jenks, 1982; Qvortrup *et a*l., 1994; Prout and James, 1999). Similarly, the theme of childhood innocence and vulnerability has been shown to be another way in which children have been conceptualised within society. Such conceptualisations are central to understandings of consumption, as can be evidenced through the dichotomy of the empowered/exploited child consumer.

There is nothing inherently empowering or exploitative about children's engagement with consumer culture, as can be evidenced through the many examples in this research. On the one hand children may be empowered through the ways in which they consume – helping them maintain social networks and reinforce peer relations. Children are seen to have a 'natural' affinity with technology and electronic goods. This is probably the only example of an instance in which children are presented as knowledgeable and competent consumers in front of adults. For some children, at some times, consumption

can be an enjoyable process, yet at the same time children are deemed by adults to be vulnerable and in need of protection.

## 8.5 IMPROVEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the use of a child-focused research methodology and the employment of semi-structured interviews, accompanied shopping trips, and journals I was able to gain an in-depth and multi-dimensional understanding of the ways in which consumption features in the lives of children. However it is recognised that since only a small sample of children was involved this has implications for the reliability of the research project. To make any broader claims to knowledge it would be necessary to develop the study to include more children, and children from more diverse backgrounds. It would also be useful to consider undertaking some longitudinal research with children, from birth onwards, in order to take into account the changing experiences that children have with their social worlds.

Future research may seek to include interviews, shopping trips, and journals with parents and other family members as well as children in order to provide a more focused understanding of the familial dynamics in which children are located. It would be useful to understand the collective standpoint from all the individuals within a family as this would reinforce the understanding that consumption is an embedded part of family life, and would help to reaffirm the fact that the market does not stand separate from family practices.

Additionally further research could involve extended interviews and observations with children, in bedrooms and living rooms, in order observe the prepurchase and postpurchase aspects of interacting with consumer goods (McNeal, 2007). This may also contribute to further ensuring the validity of the research since children will then be explaining their own social worlds in their own social environment and this may assist in diminishing the power differentials between adult researchers and child participants. However the particular ethical concerns associated with conducting research in children's bedrooms are recognised (Pole, 2007).

This research has endeavoured to examine children's qualitative experiences of their engagement with consumer society. It has provided an insight into how the children in this study think and feel about consumer goods and how this intersects with the market, family life, and relationships with families and peers, through the notion of commercial enculturation. It has also brought to the fore the complexities of the relationships between these categories. Importantly through an examination of moderation in relation to children's consumption practice this research questions some of the taken for granted assumptions about children and the ways in which children consume. Finally this research demonstrates that the understanding of children in consumer society is one of the central features for the general understanding of contemporary Western childhood.

Appendix 1.1

## Participants

| NAME | GENDER | AGE | LOCATION | FAMILY | ETHNICITY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alfie | M | 8 | small city | Mother - secondary school teacher; Father – librarian; sister (Phoebe, 6). | White British |
| Alpha Chicken | M | 10 | village | Mother - full-time mother; Father – engineer, brother (Bravo B, 8), sister (Dilianda, 6), sister (1). | Malaysian |
| Ben | M | 7 | rural town | Mother – full-time mother; Father - fencer; sister (Emily, 6). | White British |
| Bravo B | M | 8 | village | Mother - full-time mother; Father – engineer; brother (Bravo B, 8); sister (Dilianda, 6); sister (1). | Malaysian |
| Callum | M | 7 | town | Mother – part-time factory worker (food preparation); Father – electrician; brother (2). | White British |
| Chloe | F | 9 | town | Mother – part-time housing officer; brother (13). | White British |
| Daniel | M | 9 | town | Mother – HE college teacher; Father – secondary school teacher; sister (19), sister (17). | White British |
| Dilianda | F | 6 | village | Mother - full-time mother; Father – engineer; brother (Bravo B, 8); brother (Alpha Chicken, 10); Sister (1). | Malaysian |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Harry | M | 6 | small city | Mother – part-time cleaner; Father – gardener for local council; sister (Grace, 7). | White British |
| Emily | F | 6 | rural town | Mother – full-time mother; Father - fencer, brother (Ben, 7). | White British |
| Ethan | M | 7 | village | Mother – cleaner; father - HGV driver; brother (14). | White British |
| Grace | F | 7 | small city | Mother – part-time cleaner; Father – gardener for local council; brother (Harry, 6). | White British |
| Jack | M | 9 | rural town | Mother – teaching assistant secondary school. | White British |
| Jade | F | 9 | town | Mother – part-time PhD student; Father – builder; sister (17), brother (16). | White British |
| James Bond | M | 8 | village | Mother – charity fundraiser. *Two half-sisters living in Germany.* | White British |
| Josh | M | 9 | town | Mother – part-time nursery nurse; Father – car manufacturer; brother (3); female cousin (14). | White British |
| Lucie | F | 8/9 [52] | town | Mother – radio researcher, half-brother (14), half-sister (6). *Stays with father (special needs assistant) nearly every weekend. Half-sister (12) living in Ireland.* | White British |

[52] Lucie was 8 when the interviews were undertaken and 9 when she completed the journal and we went on the accompanied shopping trip.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Markus | M | 9 | village | Mother – university lecturer; step-father - university lecturer. *Two half-brothers and a step-sister living in Bulgaria* | Bulgarian |
| Mikey | M | 10 | town | Mother – office administrator; mother's boyfriend – car manufacturer. | White British |
| Oliver | M | 7 | rural town | Mother –carer; Father – telecoms engineer; brother (5). | White British |
| Rebecca | F | 9 | town | Mother – part-time café assistant; Father – motorway maintenance worker; sister (4). | White British |
| Phoebe | F | 6 | small city | Mother - secondary school teacher, father – librarian; brother (Alfie, 8). | White British |
| Samuel | M | 10 | small city | Mother – university assessment manager; father – managing director of chemical company. | White British |
| Thomas | M | 6 | small city | Mother – part-time receptionist, part-time university student; Grandmother – retired. | White British |
| William | M | 9 | large city | Mother – private music teacher; Father – IT manager;[53] brother (5). | White British |

[53] William's father became unemployed mid-way through the research process.

| CHILD | **ADULT/S** | **LOCATION** | **SHOPPING ENVIRONMENT** |
|---|---|---|---|

Appendix 1.2

## Accompanied Shopping Trips

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Chloe | Grandmother | Large town | Town centre shops, town centre shopping centre, supermarket |
| Ethan | Mother | Large city | City centre shops, city centre shopping centre |
| James Bond | Mother | Out of town retail park | Supermarket - (Tescos) |
| Lucie | Father | Large city | City centre shops, city centre shopping centre |
| Oliver | Mother | Out of town retail park | Supermarket - (Tescos) |
| Phoebe | Mother | Out of town retail park | Supermarket – (Sainsburys) |
| Rebecca | Mother, grandmother | Out of town retail park | Household and clothing store – (ASDA Living) |
| Samuel | Mother | Small city centre | City centre shops |

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