Consumer Culture, Branding and British Adolescents: A Vicious Cycle? A Comparison between High and Low-Income Adolescents

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in the Faculty of Humanities.

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Katja Jezkova Isaksen

Manchester Business School

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Abstract

The University of Manchester
Katja Jezkova Isaksen
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The growth of consumerism has meant that individuals are increasingly using possessions as a means of developing their personal identities and forming social connections. Specifically, the consumer culture has seen the increase of brands and branded goods as marketers attach emotional attributes to them. Thus, brands have become communicative symbols which display, amongst other things, the owner's values, beliefs and social status. As a result, consumers are attempting to form their identities, social connections and self-worth by consuming (often branded) possessions which they feel are representative of their self or ideal self and will increase their chances of social acceptance. However, psychological studies in consumer behaviour suggest that the increasing propensity to seek inner happiness and social bonds through external means (consumption), has led consumers to be less satisfied with their lives and hence decreases psychological well-being; the focus on external rewards has reduced the importance that individuals place on personal development and intrapsychic developments.

This study investigates the relationship between the consumption culture, branding and British adolescents, with a comparison between high and low-income teenagers. Adolescents are particularly prone to assuming consumer orientations (and hence the consequences thereof) due to their stage in identity development, their need for social acceptance and the fact that they are a very profitable market segment. As a result, teenagers are encouraged to turn to consumption for developing their personal and social identities, as opposed to more traditional means such as personal skill development. Although limited studies have investigated adolescent consumption, little attention has been paid to low-income adolescents who are prone to reduced self-worth but have a restricted consumption scope and thus cannot consume their self-worth in the same 'normal' ways as their peers.

In light of previous studies, it was necessary to first develop a new measure of self-esteem which included the vital role of possessions (and specifically brands) in feelings of self-worth amongst adolescents. The scale-development process revealed the functional importance of self-esteem as a marker of social inclusion and hence shed light on the reason for the importance that adolescents place on specific brands; they are a promise of fitting-in. A valid and reliable 23-item, self-report measure of self-esteem is presented.

Subsequent to developing the new scale, the research provided empirical support for a model of the psychological characteristics of adolescent consumption (including self-esteem). The result is a 'Vicious Cycle' model of consumption which suggests that there is a relationship between the factors which contribute to a consumer orientation and the likely effects of having such an orientation. For example, the model suggests that reduced self-esteem may contribute to consumerism and a consumption orientation may contribute to a reduction in self-esteem. Furthermore, the comparison between high and low-income teenagers showed that low-income teenagers were significantly more materialistic than their high-income counterparts thus supporting the suggestion that low-income teenagers are more prone to consumerism than their high-income counterparts.

With reference to the detailed links presented in the Vicious Cycle model, the author proceeds to explore the efficacy of extant consumerist-curbing strategies and highlight the need for more effective methods if we wish future generations to develop in to more than simply shoppers.

Declaration

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The Author

The author's research interest resulted from her undergraduate degree at York University (UK), where she completed a Bsc in Psychology. Her undergraduate dissertation was an empirical study on the impacts of music tempo and genre on reading speed and comprehension. This was an entirely quantitative study and involved data analysis using SPSS. Upon completing her undergraduate degree, the author undertook an Msc in Marketing at Manchester Business School. The dissertation research for this degree formed the foundation for this PhD thesis; it investigated the impacts of branding upon identity formation amongst adolescents, with a comparison between high and low-income consumers.

As a result of the dissertation research, the author developed a keen interest in the complex relationship between psychology and marketing in terms of consumer behaviour and identity. Furthermore, the focus on adolescents was the result of personal interest (stemming from a history of social work with teenagers), as well as a recognised gap in the consumer literature with regards to this age group. As a result, the author pursued this PhD with the help of an ESRC award.

The author's interest in the 'western' consumer culture possibly stems from the fact that she spent most of her youth and adolescent life in Southern Africa (Namibia and Botswana), although she is Norwegian. Living and attending schools in these countries, meant that the author developed values, interests and priorities which were inherently different from the 'typical' British teenager. Indeed, these differences became obvious to the author when she commenced her University studies in the UK. Furthermore, whilst completing the Msc in Marketing, the differences in consumer priorities between the 'western' and the 'developing world' became even more pronounced. This is very possibly the main reason for the researcher's interest in low-income consumers; specifically, the experiences of those living in a wealthy society.

Throughout this doctoral study, the researcher has learned (and indeed developed a keen interest in) both qualitative and quantitative social research methods. Specifically, the process of scale development has opened the author's eyes to the many complexities and opposing views which exist in this field. Most of all however, this study has taught the author (and indeed she hopes that the readers of this thesis will agree) about the importance of listening to adolescents; they know more than we give them credit for and they need to be heard.

Chapter 1. Introduction

This thesis examines the impacts of the consumer culture and specifically, the proliferation of the brand, on British adolescents. The psychological antecedents and consequences of high consumer involvement are examined, with a specific focus on levels of self-esteem. Furthermore, a direct comparison is drawn between high and low-income adolescents in order to assess whether 'the poor' do indeed suffer more in the current consumer society in which we live. This research is based on previous work (Isaksen, 2006) which highlighted significant gaps in the literature and hence motivated this further study. Indeed Kasser and Kanner (2003) argue that there is a distinct lack of studies pertaining to consumerism within psychology and thus the effects that consumerism are having on the personal, social and psychological well-being of consumers remain to be fully understood. Interestingly, Arnould and Thompson (2005) share a similar opinion in terms of the lack of psychology in the marketing field; "still in its theoretical infancy, concerns the moral constitution of consumption and the nature of moral dilemmas and challenges that the commercialization of everyday life, including its most intimate moments, pose for consumers" (pg. 876). Therefore, it is clear that although the culture of consumption[1] has long been recognised, studied and accepted, its psychological impacts on individuals (increasingly referred to as consumers) remain to be thoroughly investigated.

1.1 Possessions, Brands and Adolescents

Tuan (1980) argues that "Our fragile sense of self needs support, and this we get by having and possessing things because, to a large degree, we are what we have and possess" (pg. 472). Considering the central role that possessions and brands play in developing and expressing personal and social identities (e.g. Belk, 1988, Holt, 2002), adolescents are particularly motivated to consume and hence are more prone to the negative psychological impacts of living in a consumer culture. The high consumer involvement amongst adolescents is due to their social and psychological developmental stage; they are at a crucial stage of identity development and thus have a greater need for social acceptance (Clarke, 2003). Furthermore, due to their highly social lives (school, after school clubs and various socially oriented activities), they are constantly surrounded by other adolescents and continuously compare themselves to others; they are at the final, confirmative stages of identity formation and their identity is validated through social interactions (Jenkins, 1996). For this reason, any fashionable or widely accepted

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[1] The terms 'consumer culture', 'consumerism' and 'culture of consumption' are used interchangeably in this thesis when referring to the societal trend whereby consumption has become a dominant force.

possession (for example the latest Nike trainers) becomes a central theme of their social lives. Moreover, given the emotional and communicative power of brands (e.g. Barber, 2007), adolescents are particularly drawn toward them. The reasons behind this keen interest becomes clear when one considers the fragile identity of the average adolescent; they are developing their identities and thus turn to the most widely accepted, popular and expressive tools to do so; brands.

Furthermore, the heightened involvement of adolescents in the consumption culture is not only due to their developmental stage; they are a lucrative market for organisations and thus are highly targeted. Indeed the UK teenage market has been quoted to be worth over £12billion (www.tgisurveys.com, cited in Mayo and Nairn, 2009, pg. 5) and according to Rice (2001), the money spent on child marketing doubled during the 1990s and reached a value of over US$12billion. As a result, there is a great deal of knowledge about child and adolescent consumers and this knowledge is used to market and advertise to children in the most effective way. Indeed it is ironic that most of the research on child and adolescent consumption takes place in the corporate world (Levin and Linn, 2003). As a result, teenagers are exposed to extremely sophisticated methods of advertising in all aspects of their lives; not only at home on television but also in their classrooms, their games consoles and last but most definitely not least, the internet (as explained by Nairn, 2008). These advertisements aim to create hype around the product which most often results in a new 'must have' item that becomes a necessity amongst adolescents and the end result for the teenager is: if you don't have one, you don't belong. Therefore, as expressed by Lilly Allen in her aptly titled song 'The Fear', teenagers are likely to feel that "I am a weapon of massive consumption, it's not my fault it's how I'm programmed to function". If they truly are 'programmed' to consume, it leads to the question, what if they cannot afford to consume these possessions, in particular the expensive branded ones? What are the consequences of the consumption culture for low-income adolescents who crave to consume but may not be able to afford to do so? Indeed, as expressly noted by LaPoint and Hambrick-Dixon (2003), there is a dearth of studies which systematically examine the connection between socio-economic status and the impact of commercialism influences.

1.2 The Vicious Cycle of Consumption

Previous research on this topic, has led to the development of a model of adolescent consumer behaviour (Isaksen and Roper, 2008). The model is referred to as the 'Vicious

Cycle' model and it illustrates the possibility that the psychological characteristics which make teenagers susceptible to consumerism and materialism, are continually reinforced by the consequences of it. For example, because they strive for social acceptance, teenagers are likely to be highly susceptible to interpersonal consumption influences which contributes to their want/need for material possessions and detracts from personal fulfilment. This shift in focus is likely to result in lowered self-concept clarity and self-worth which once again contributes to their susceptibility to consumer influence; hence a vicious cycle is thought to exists. Furthermore, due to specific psychological characteristics, and their restricted consumption opportunities, low-income adolescents are thought to experience magnified and more severe consequences of the consumer culture and hence the vicious cycle. As a result for example, it has been noted that low-income adolescents are especially prone to either being the perpetrators or victims of crime based on the theft of designer, branded and celebrity endorsed goods (LaPoint and Alleyne, 2001). It is for this reason that Isaksen and Roper (2008) argued that "low-income teenagers receive the 'shortest end of the poverty stick'…" (p.g.1070). However, despite being a convincing argument, the Vicious Cycle model was in need of further confirmation before it could confidently be used as a model and for this reason, one of the main aims of this research was to test the model using a larger sample size, a greater number of psychological measures and more sophisticated statistical analyses.

1.3 The Role of Self-Esteem

A central element of the vicious cycle model and indeed of many other psychological investigations regarding consumerism was the concept of self-esteem. Indeed self-esteem is mainly argued to be negatively related to materialism due to the shift in focus from internal (intrapsychic) to external (material) endeavours. Furthermore, with regard to low-income consumers, Hill and Stephens (1997) found that reduced self-esteem is a common consequence of the inability to afford those 'standard' goods which are possessed by a majority of the surrounding social circles and society. Indeed, self-esteem is central to the psychological aspects of consumption but it is also an important aspect of the psychological development and well-being of adolescents. For this reason, self-esteem is a key focus of this work; how does the consumption culture impact adolescent self-esteem and what happens when the adolescent's consumption is severely curtailed (by living on a low-income)? However, attempts to identify these consequences have been stunted by the lack of an adequate, up-to-date and appropriate measure of self-esteem (e.g. Isaksen, 2006). It is for this reason that a large portion of this thesis is dedicated to the

development of a new scale to measure adolescent self-esteem. This includes an in-depth review of the self-esteem literature (in order to familiarise the author with the concept) and importantly, extensive and in-depth qualitative research with adolescents. This is because, as will be made clear throughout the thesis, a common weakness amongst extant measures of self-esteem is that they are not developed with the respondents in mind; in terms of their age, opinions, nationalities, life-stage and social circumstances. For example, there is no extant self-esteem scale which incorporates material possessions and brands in adolescent self-esteem. This is surprising considering the central role that these play in shaping and expressing teenage identity. For these reasons, specific importance and extensive efforts were placed in incorporating qualitative methods in the development of a quantitative instrument; in order to measure respondents on a particular characteristic, it is first necessary to fully understand what one is measuring.

1.4 This Thesis

This thesis can be conceived of as existing of two main parts: the development of a new measure of adolescent self-esteem and subsequently the testing and use of the vicious cycle model to compare the effects of consumerism on high and low-income teenagers. The scale development process revealed a number of issues faced when working with adolescent respondents; including access (see Isaksen and Roper, 2010a), methodological considerations and analytic implications. Furthermore, central scale-development issues will be addressed and thus the methodology of this study attempts to overcome the most pertinent issues so as to produce a valid, reliable and usable self-esteem scale. Upon completing the new scale, it is used- in conjunction with other psychological constructs such as materialism- to examine the complex relationship between the antecedents and consequences of consumerism and the vicious cycle. Subsequently, in the framework of the vicious cycle, a direct comparison is made between high and low-income teenagers and the specific differences found are used to determine whether low-income adolescents truly do receive the shortest end of the poverty stick. Furthermore, given its detailed representation of adolescent consumer behaviour (and its consequences), the results from the vicious cycle model will be used to assess the efficacy of various suggested consumerist-curbing strategies for children and teenagers.

The work undertaken in this thesis hopes to exemplify the merging of academic and 'real-world' and practical research. By combining established academic theories from psychology and marketing with significant input from today's adolescents and their

consumer worlds, an in-depth and up-to-date look at the antecedents and consequences of adolescent consumption is achieved. Indeed, due to the academic background of this research, the findings are placed in the context of past and present theories within marketing and psychology. Furthermore as a result of the practical orientation of the research and indeed the researcher, the findings are used to not only contribute to theory but also to policy and strategy developments which seek to tackle the negative consequences which plague adolescents (especially those from low-income families) in their experience of the consumer society.

Considering the several aspects of this research- including scale development and the comparative study of adolescent consumer behaviour- the main aims will be outlined below. Subsequently, the structure and content of each chapter are outlined so as to make the reader aware of the structure in which the work will be presented.

1.4.1 Main aims

1. To review extant literature from psychology and marketing pertaining to the social and psychological role of possessions in identity. Furthermore, the growth of the consumption culture will be examined and its hereto established psychological consequences will be identified; in particular, the consequences faced by low-income and adolescent consumers.

2. To gain an in-depth understanding of the meaning and role of brands in the lives of British adolescents, specifically in terms of their social and psychological identity and self-esteem development. Comparisons will be drawn between high and low-income adolescents.

3. To develop a new and up-to-date quantitative measure of adolescent self-esteem which incorporates the central role of material possessions and brands in the lives of adolescents. This process will be guided by scale development procedures which include an in-depth review of the relevant psychology literature, in-depth qualitative data (from adolescents) and statistical scale refinement procedures.

4. To examine the relationship between consumption, self-esteem and other psychological characteristics in order to further understand the antecedents and consequences of adolescent consumer behaviour. This examination will use the existing vicious cycle model and hence will work to develop, establish and add evidence for its existence, in the context of a large-scale

and empirical study. The model will in turn provide a framework upon which further studies (both qualitative and quantitative) can be based, such that the data bank for adolescent consumption studies can be expanded and enriched.

5. To expand and clarify previous work pertaining to adolescent consumption and identity development (e.g. Isaksen, 2006; Isaksen and Roper, 2008).

6. To draw attention to the importance of including low-income and adolescent consumers in consumer research. They represent particularly vulnerable consumer segments and thus must be included (indeed central) in investigations pertaining to the psychological impacts of the consumer culture.

These aims will be addressed and achieved throughout this thesis and the steps taken are outlined in the following chapters.

1.4.2 Structure outline

Chapter 2 will review the marketing literature in order to examine the growth of the consumer culture and the social role of possessions in it; specifically in terms of reference groups and the culture creation. This will lead to a specific focus on brands, including the proliferation of brands and their recently attained emotional power amongst individuals and societies. As a result of this, the overall psychological impacts of the consumer culture will be reviewed (in terms of extant research) and the antecedents and consequences of having a materialistic value orientation will be assessed.

The latter part of this chapter will consider the consumer groups which are particularly prone to materialistic value orientations; low-income and adolescent consumers. The literature reviewed will first address these consumer groups individually, in terms of their attitudes, behaviours, social context and experiences of marketing and advertising. Subsequently, the disadvantages amongst low-income adolescents living in the consumer culture will be highlighted by explicitly reviewing the combined consequences of living on a low-income *and* being an adolescent in a consumer society. Finally, in light of all the literature reviewed, the vicious cycle model will be presented, which provides the theoretical framework for the subsequent comparative study.

Chapter 3 address self-esteem. The chapter provides an extensive review of the psychological literature surrounding self-esteem, its definition and its formation, reaching as far back as the 17th century. This in-depth review is necessary and indeed useful in order to understand the complexity of the concept and hence the complexities faced in its measurement; for example, the dimensionality of self-esteem was a central debate amongst psychologists then, and still is now. The chapter will then consider self-esteem in terms of its role amongst humans. That is, in order to contextualise self-esteem, the concept will be considered in terms of its meaning and role within individuals and hence societies. This will make assist in clarifying the importance of self-esteem in the context of this research.

The chapter will then proceed to critically assess the efficacy of some of the most popular self-esteem measures used in psychology and marketing studies. This assessment will highlight the strengths and weaknesses of these scales and hence clarify the need for the development of a new measure. Subsequently, based on the review of the extant measures, some of the key issues in scale-development are noted and suggested solutions presented. In combination, this chapter addresses the understanding of self-esteem as a concept but also closely consider the weaknesses of existing scales so as to improve upon these when developing the self-esteem measure.

Chapter 4 will outline the scale development procedure. This chapter consists of two main parts. In the first half of the chapter, special attention is given to the methodological considerations that must be given when working with young (adolescent) respondents. These will include both practical and ethical issues and the author will outline the steps taken to overcome these issues. Following on from this, the focus will be shifted to the theoretical aspects of scale development. This will outline the benefits of using qualitative methods to develop a quantitative measure; specifically, the reasons and rationale for using focus groups with young samples will be discussed here.

The second part of the chapter describes the scale development procedure. This includes both the collection and analysis of the qualitative data and clearly illustrates how the initial scale items were developed and the response scale chosen. Subsequently, the stages of collecting and analysing data from the scale results obtained from a development sample are explained; this involves exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. Furthermore, a number of correlations with concurrent measures are conducted in order to validate the scale; the concurrent measures are clearly described and their use justified. Finally, the

administration and results of the scale on a test-retest sample is described and the chapter concludes with the presentation of the new, finalised self-esteem scale.

Chapter 5 can be considered as the 'official' methodology chapter. Having completed the new scale, this chapter describes the process of its administration to a large number adolescent respondents. Furthermore, because a number of additional psychometric measures were included at this stage (in order to asses the vicious cycle model), these are described in full and their inclusion justified. Subsequently, the sample of respondents are described; because the respondents were accessed through nine different schools of varying socioeconomic levels, the geodemographic profile of each school and its surrounding areas are described. Finally, the procedure of the distribution of the scales is outlined.

Chapter 6 presents the expected findings in the forms of hypotheses and propositions. Indeed, due to the two-part nature of this thesis (scale development and comparative study) there were numerous expected findings and this chapter serves as a brief description of the reasons behind the expected results. Furthermore, the expected findings are presented in an order which is then adhered to in the results and discussion chapters as well. This was thought to be the best way to present the results in a logical order; scale development, vicious cycle testing and finally, the comparison of high and low-income respondents.

Chapter 7 will outline the results and analysis of the quantitative data collected; it will be presented in a similar order as the expected findings. This will include the descriptive statistics of the respondents, followed by a further assessments of the new scale's reliability and validity (on this larger sample). Subsequently, the vicious cycle model will be statistically tested to establish whether the links are empirically supported. The final results presented are those pertaining to the comparison between high and low-income respondents with regards to the vicious cycle. For ease of interpretation, this chapter does not only present the statistical findings but also relates these findings to a selection of the most relevant literature. This helps to contextualise the numerous findings of this thesis, making them as understandable and relevant to the reader as possible. The chapter is concluded with a brief synopsis of the findings.

Chapter 8 is the final chapter which presents the discussion, implications, limitations and contributions of the thesis. As with chapters 6 and 7, the discussion of the findings will be organised in to three main sections: scale development (including the explicit benefits of

the new scale), the vicious cycle model and finally the comparison between high and low-income adolescents. The discussion will relate the qualitative and quantitative findings to the extant literature as well as the current social climate. This will highlight the similarities, differences and new findings of this work in comparison to extant theories and previous findings. In addition, it will emphasise the particular relevance of this work amongst today's British adolescents. The implications of this thesis will be discussed in terms of how the vicious cycle can be practically applied in, for example assessing and developing policies or educational programs aimed at stemming the negative impacts of adolescent consumerism.

The latter half of the chapter will present suggestions for future research in light of the limitations of this research. The directions for future research will pertain to both the self-esteem and scale-development literature, in addition to the topic of adolescent consumption and psychological well-being. The chapter will be completed with a brief and concise summary of the main contributions of this thesis.

The findings and contributions of this thesis are hoped to assist in enhancing the understanding and stemming the potentially concerning impacts of the consumer culture upon adolescents. Indeed, it is not only of academic but also societal interest to clearly understand the specific relationship between the antecedents and consequences of materialism and self-esteem formation amongst adolescents. If we wish to prevent future generations from living in a society whereby identity and self-esteem are commodified, we must begin by examining the intricacies of the relationship between material goods and psychological characteristics.

Chapter 2. Literature Review Part 1 – Consumer Culture

In order to examine the impacts of consumerism on adolescents, it is first necessary to fully understand the contextual circumstances in which they live. This chapter will achieve this by providing an extensive review of sociological, psychological, marketing and advertising research which relates to the topic. More specifically, the chapter will first place the research within the consumer culture literature, thereby exploring its growth, sociocultural impacts and the proliferation of the brand. Subsequently, extant research relating to the psychological consequences of consumerism will be reviewed and evaluated, with a specific focus on materialism. After reviewing the context of the consumption culture, particular attention will be placed on the experience of low-income consumers, as their limited income is thought to directly exclude them from this culture and thus the implications must be examined. However, in order to understand the combined impacts of living in poverty *and* being an adolescent consumer, the impacts of the consumer culture on adolescent and low-income consumers will be examined separately. This will lead to a consideration of the effects of consumer culture on those adolescents who live in poverty. Finally, a the vicious cycle model of adolescent consumer-behaviour will be presented in order to clarify the expected antecedents and consequences of consumerism on both high and low-income adolescents.

The specific focus on the contexts of consumption – general consumer culture, low-income consumers, and adolescent consumers – will highlight the importance of the sociocultural and ideological aspects of consumption. Therefore, the researcher's approach adheres to a general post-positivistic theory but specifically, in terms of investigating consumerism, pertains to Consumer Culture Theory (CCT). CCT refers to "a family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace and cultural meanings" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, pg. 868). In order to understand the socio-psychological impacts of consumer culture on adolescents from different socioeconomic groups, it is vital to consider and understand the cultural and contextual dimensions in which they learn to become consumers. This is because "Consumer culture…. Frames consumers' horizons of conceivable action, feeling, and thought, making certain patterns of behaviour and sense-making more likely than others." (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, pg. 869). As will become clear throughout this work, child and adolescent consumer research has often failed to assume a wholly, child-centred approach in its investigations and thus, CCT provides a more appropriate framework for investigating child consumption because it "provides access to the dynamic and complex social roles that brands (and possessions) play in children's everyday lives"

(Nairn et al., 2008, pg. 628, parentheses added). In order to clearly set the scene for this chapter, figure 2-1 below diagrammatically illustrates the structure of the many sections of this chapter.

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                      │      CULTURE            │
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              │      THE SOCIAL ROLE OF               │
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              │ -Interpretations of consumption meanings│
              │ - Culture creation through possessions │
              │ -Reference groups and other influences │
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              │            CULTURE                    │
              │ -The growth of brands and emotional branding│
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              │     THE CONSUMER CULTURE             │
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CONSUMER CULTURE
-Definitions and causes

THE SOCIAL ROLE OF POSSESSIONS
-Interpretations of consumption meanings
- Culture creation through possessions
-Reference groups and other influences

BRANDS IN THE CONSUMER CULTURE
-The growth of brands and emotional branding
-Effects and consequences of branding

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF THE CONSUMER CULTURE
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LOW-INCOME CONSUMERS
-Relative poverty and perceptions of 'normal'
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ADOLESCENT CONSUMERS
-Impacts of developmental stage
- Self-esteem and materialism
-Influences and impacts of marketing

LOW-INCOME ADOLESCENTS
-Common denominators and double impacts

-The need for investigation

THE VICIOUS CYCLE

Figure 2-1 Structure of the consumer literature review

2.1 The Culture of Consumption

It is undeniable that we are living in a consumer society; acquiring, consuming and possessing material goods are central to our existence. This culture of consumption has proliferated in the western world since the 80s/90s, to the extent that consumption is now seen as a necessary means by which to develop one's identity and integrate in to society effectively (e.g. Belk, 1988, Bauman, 1988; Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991; Shavitt and Nelson, 2000). Indeed, Firat (1995) argues that in the west particularly, the term 'consumer' increasingly defines the human experience. Through the consumption of commercially created objects, texts, images and ideas, individuals orientate themselves in society and make collective sense of their lives (e.g. Baudrillard, 1998; Kozinets, 2001). The symbolic values attached to products and brands have resulted in consumption becoming a communicative act (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979; McCracken, 1988). As Kasser and Kanner (2003) have correctly stated, "There is no escaping the fact that modern day humans live in a culture of consumption… To ignore the place of consumerism in people's lives would be tantamount to ignoring that humans are begotten through parents who raise them" (pg. 3-4).

The notion that consumption is a prerequisite for self and social existence immediately implies its power. Beck (1992) and Lash and Urry (1994) argue that consumers have replaced citizens; lineage, caste and class have been replaced by consumption. Furthermore, material possessions are now used for basic psychological needs such as security, independence, social inclusion and self-worth. This is why "Sociocultural (and psychological) pressures to consume and to acquire goods are pervasive, indeed impossible to avoid completely" (Hill and Stephens, 1997, pg. 40, parentheses added).

Despite the widespread acceptance of the term 'Consumer Culture', it is necessary to closely examine the various definitions of this term, how and why this culture has arisen and the impacts and consequences of this societal state. The following sections will describe the growth of the consumption culture and examine how and why material goods have become such an integral part of identity and society. Furthermore, the proliferation of branded goods will be discussed and opinions on this 'state of consumerism' will be reviewed.

2.1.1 Defining consumer culture

Richins and Dawson (1992) define the consumer culture as the state which exists "When a large portion of society avidly desires to consume goods for reasons that economists have traditionally defined as non-utilitarian (e.g. status seeking, novelty)…" (pg. 304). This definition highlights the non-functional value ascribed to possessions and the contribution they make in developing, displaying and communicating our identities. Indeed the symbolism of consumer goods provide reflections of a consumer's identity and personal characteristics such as age, race, culture, beliefs, values and sexual orientation.

As a result, consumption is now a normalised and expected activity. For example, Keyfitz (1992) suggests that there is now a 'world standard package' of goods which people are expected to own; for example televisions, mobile phones and cars. Although such possessions have a functional value, they are not necessary for sustaining life and merely owning them can provide consumers with enjoyment, self-worth, independence and in some cases hope (e.g. Hill and Stephens, 1997; Oropesa, 1995). For this reason, it is not surprising that some authors refer to consumers as 'addicts' (e.g. Lasch, 1991). Indeed consumers rely on possessions to support their fragile identities and this is why Holt (2002) considers consumer culture as an "irresistible form of cultural authority" (pg. 72).

However, as Belk (1995) points out, not only can consumption distinguish us from one another, it is also a means by which we relate to one another. Through the commonly interpreted values attached to goods and brands, social interactions and social distinctions become more evident. In Bourdieu's (1984) terms, the values expressed through objects, equate to our 'cultural capital' and hence facilitate and communicate social classes and social distinctions. These social implications of consumption are emphasised in Arnould and Thompson's (2005) definitions of consumer culture: "Consumer culture denotes a social arrangement in which the relations between lived culture and social resources, and between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend, are mediated through markets."(pg. 869). The use of 'markets' refers to not only the objects consumed, but rather the "interconnected system of commercially produced images, texts and objects" (pg. 869), thereby highlighting the role of marketing and advertising in the definition of consumer culture.

The consumer culture considers the individual as a symbolic project, built through possessions and social interactions (Thompson, 1995). Considering that marketers are portrayed as cultural engineers (Holt, 2002), Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) make a

well-founded call for the inclusion of more identity literature in marketing. Furthermore, Alsem and Kostelijk (2008) argue that identity must in fact be included in a new extension of the marketing paradigm. The following section will outline the antecedents of the increased consumerism and explore the means by which values and emotions have become attached to commercial objects.

2.1.2 Post-modernism and the substitution of social values

Many authors blame post-modernism for our excessive consumption. The post-modern world is portrayed as a fragmented age of instability and constant change whereby excessive production, has removed the unique meanings attached to our possessions, and thus we are forced to continually consume in order to bring meanings back into our lives and identities (Baudrillard, 1998). As explained by De Chenecey (2005), this "fragmented, stressful and dangerous world seemingly stuck on fast forward" has driven consumers to strive for a genuine connection with others and to categorise themselves within society through consumption" (pg. 21). Therefore, as the capitalist economy has spread, "consumerism, profit's younger twin, has followed close behind" (Kasser and Kanner, 2003, pg. 3).

Capitalism has increased consumer choice and resulted in a world whereby individuals can create their own biographies using the values attached to commercial goods (Beck, 1992). For this reason, Consumer Culture Theorists often refer to consumers as 'identity seekers and makers' who engage in their own 'Consumer Identity Projects' (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Although this may present freedom of expression, Beck (1992) warns that such 'intensified individualisation', also brings with it a greater risk of making the wrong choice. Whereas traditionally, one's identity (and the resulting ways of being) were influenced by culture and traditions, the consumption culture requires individuals to consciously create their own identities with possessions. For this reason, Giddens (1991) stresses that consumption has replaced traditions and thus commodified our concept of self; "The consumption of ever-novel goods becomes in some part a substitute for the genuine development of self; appearance replaces essence as the visible signs of successful consumption come actually to outweigh the use-values of the goods and services in question" (pg 198). Indeed, Isaksen and Roper (2010b; Appendix A) have argued that basic psychological needs such as self-esteem have also been commodified.

Bauman (1988) adds that not only are our personal identities jeopardised by consumerism, but our social identities are too. Humans are social beings with an evolutionary need to belong and develop a collective identity; we have an innate need for social attachments (e.g. Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Arnould and Thompson, 2005). This dual need for uniqueness and social assimilation was explored by Ruvio (2008), who found that individuals often view consumption as a means of expressing individualism whilst remaining within the safety net of social acceptance. Thus, if consumption has replaced culture and traditions, it follows that there is a likely reduced level of societal attachment. Consumption can be considered as a double edged sword; providing greater identity freedom but simultaneously greater risk and fear of excessive individuality. It is this risk which causes Warde (1994) to suggest that consumption can be considered as the contemporary form of suicide because "if the correct choice creates a sure self, presumably the wrong choice entails self-destruction" (pg. 889). Based on this, it seems likely that individuals who are insecure in themselves experience greater threat because the risk of making the wrong choice is heightened with uncertainty.

However, despite the perceived risk, research has shown that individuals with high levels of insecurity, in fact have a stronger desire (and need) for material possessions (e.g. Chang and Arkin, 2002). This is because they attempt to enhance their sense of identity and security through consumption. Furthermore, when consuming as a result of insecurity, it serves to enhance or fulfil one's concept of self and is thus referred to as 'symbolic self-completion' (Wicklund and Gollwitzer, 1982). This refers to the consumption of value symbols in order to fill/disguise specific aspects of the self. For example, Elliott and Leonard (2004) showed that low-income consumers often engage in symbolic and conspicuous consumption in attempts to disguise poverty and restore a damaged sense of self. Furthermore, it has been shown that individuals who place greatest importance on the symbolic value of goods tend to be insecure and have low self-esteem - they consume for social acceptance (Darley, 1999; Rose et al., 1997). For example, Pressdee (1986) found that teenager and the unemployed placed emphasis on proletarian shopping; that is, the consumption of images. This provides further evidence for the notion that those with typically high levels of insecurity (like teenagers and low-income individuals) are most likely to use consumption for security.

2.1.3 Sociocultural role of possessions

The visibility of possessions (for example clothes), makes them effective security tools. This is because the socially shared values that they signal are immediately obvious. In past times, individuals relied on more traditional sources of social recognition and acceptance, for example hard-work and social skills. However, these characteristics are now communicated through the consumption and possession of specific goods and brands. Due to the attachment of personal values on to goods, marketing and advertising has made consumption a socially communicative act (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979; McCracken, 1986). Thus, possessions symbolise personality and status and depending on our sociocultural consumption practices, we learn to consume through them (Brownlie and Horne, 1999).

2.1.3.1 Contextual influences on the interpretation of consumption meanings.

The individual's social and cultural context determines the nature of the shared values attached to specific goods; "The *essence* of the object resides not in the object but in the relation between the object and the individuals classifying the object" (Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967, pg 25). The 'classifiers' of object are societies and subcultures with have shared values and meanings which are collectively understood. Consumers co-create their understanding of objects over time and space and they are transmitted across ages and generations. For this reason, an individual's life themes and projects will impact and shape the way they read and interpret advertisements and consumption symbols (Mick and Buhl, 1992). For a symbol to convey the desired meaning it must match the meanings and values of the group, it must be understood by all within that context (McCracken, 1986). This was exemplified by Allen (2002) who found that the consumption choices of working-class consumers was shaped by the social and cultural context they had been exposed to and grown up with. For this reason Consumer culture theory (CCT) posits that, 'Consumers' interpretive strategies' result in 'Mass-mediated marketplace ideologies' (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Failing this mass-mediation, possessions would have little communicative value and thus could not be used as a tool for security, 'fitting in' and adhering to social norms. In Bourdieu's (1984) terms, without shared meanings of goods, consumption would not provide the social and cultural capital that it does.

2.1.3.2 Culture creation through possessions.

The social function of consumption is clearly portrayed in the CCT term, 'Marketplace cultures'. These are subcultures which are produced through the feelings of solidarity which consumers attain by consuming a communal object or brand. For example Kozinets (2001) found a strong culture to exist amongst consumers of the Star-Trek brand (e.g. conventions, language) and similarly, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) found that Brand Communities are formed around brands such as Ford, Macintosh and Saab. These communities create not only brand value (Schau et al., 2009) but also a sense of order and security for the consumer which closely resemble traditional communities (O'Guinn and Muniz, 2005). Similarly, Bennett (1999) highlights the tribal aspects of youth subcultures which have formed as a result of consuming a specific musical genre (dance music) and the styles that are attached to it. Furthermore, Bennett (1999) argues that, in this day and age "notions of identity are 'constructed' rather than 'given' and 'fluid' rather than 'fixed'" (pg. 599). The fluidity of identities, according to CCT, is due to influences "such as marketing communications or the fashion industry… (which) systematically predispose consumers towards certain kinds of identity projects" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, pg 874, parenthesis added). As a result, the predisposition of several consumers to similar identity projects, forges feelings of similarity, social inclusion and hence community amongst them. The communities formed, allow consumers to orientate themselves within a group. Thus, in the context of the present research, it is necessary to examine the culture produced amongst teenagers in the consumption culture (in Britain) and whether reduced financial opportunities (living on a low-income) affect participation in the culture.

2.1.3.3 Reference groups and consumption influences.

It is clear that, as Belk (1995) claimed, consumption differentiates us from one another but can simultaneously relate us to one another. For this reason, a subculture (of for example British teenagers) will attach specific meanings to possessions based on their unique (socially couched) experience and interpretation of goods (and the promotions surrounding them). As a result of these socially constructed meanings, members of a particular group- which hold the respective favourable attributes- will be referred to when making purchase decisions; the group becomes a reference group (Bearden and Etzel, 1982). A reference group consists of a social group and can be made up of peers, family members (Childers and Rao, 1992) and even aspirational figures such as celebrities (Saxton, 2005); consumers then consume in accordance to their reference groups. The persuasive power of reference groups is strong and this is clear when one considers the power of word-of

mouth advertising. Furthermore, reference groups have also been shown to be a strong influence in consumer brand-choices; individuals often chose select brands according to their reference group(s) (e.g. Childers and Rao, 1992). Brands are indeed of great value to organisations in terms of attaching meaning to their products and the following section will provide an overview of the role and impacts of the brand in the consumer culture.

2.1.4 Brands and branding in the consumer culture

"The world has witnessed the dawning of the age of mass consumption and periods of conspicuous consumption… it has seen a proliferation in brands…" (Nataraajan and Bagozzi, 1999, pg 633). Brands no longer simply convey the origin of a product; they have become the product itself (Salzer-Morling and Strannegard, 2004). Such statements accurately point out a key factor in the close relationship between possessions and identity: the brand. The following sections will review the progressive proliferation of the brand and the marketing strategies employed to attach meanings to them. Subsequently, the impacts of this brand proliferation will be explored and thereby the extreme power of brands will be exemplified.

2.1.4.1 Brand Proliferation- the shift from product to brand

An orientation towards brands started when increased production capabilities produced an influx of choice within product categories; traditionally, trademarks had been used to differentiate products within the same category. Initially, customer needs such as price and quality were used to attract consumers, but as marketing and production developed, trademarks were developed to brands which encapsulated images, values and lifestyles. Brands convey personal traits such as gender, social status, beliefs, and culture and these traits were used to appeal to consumers' emotional values and aspirations (as opposed to simply financial ones), thereby creating greater desire for products. Humans are ruled by emotions and thus, the attachment of emotions to brands resulted in a transition "from a system that serviced wants (such as quality and price) to a system that produced wants (through emotions)" (Barber, 2007, pg. 178, parentheses added). That is, most consumers no longer buy a product simply to fulfil a practical need, they consume to satisfy a newly created want. For example, shoes are no longer purchased purely for their functional value, they are selected and purchased for the signalling power they provide. In fact, Barber (2007) claims that a product is now merely a marketing tool which carries the brand; the brand is dissociated from the content. Consumers select brands which represent a desired lifestyle and use them to communicate those lifestyles (McCracken, 1993,

Barber, 2007)[2]. Escalas and Bettman (2005) refer to brand-connections when examining the extent to which individuals incorporate brands in to their concept of self. These developments illustrate the shift in focus from production to brand creation; the production of 'desire-inducing marketing symbols' (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). To this effect it can be argued that whereas brands have existed throughout the 20th century, the use of emotions has dominated the second half of it and continues in to the 21st century.

2.1.4.2 Emotional branding,

The power and indeed importance of a brand is clear; especially when one considers that in 2004, the World Economic Forum concluded that 'corporate brand reputation' has outranked 'financial performance' as a measure of success (in Barber, 2007). This raises questions regarding the means through which emotions are attached to brands. How have simple words, logos and symbols become so powerful?

2.1.4.2.1 The attachment of meanings to brands

The commonly cited 'Meaning Transfer Model' (McCracken, 1986), explains that marketers observe cultural discourses within society and through advertising, impose these discourses on to brands and consumer goods. These goods and brands are then incorporated into consumption rituals which further reinforce the desired symbolism of the brand. As a result, over time the brand develops its own brand personality; a "set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). Through evaluative conditioning, the repetitive association between a brand and meaningful cultures and traditions, will strengthen the association between them and as a result, the brand begins to represent lifestyles and values. In this sense, marketers can be described as cultural engineers who shape consumers' consumption desires by selling cultural values in the form of brands (Holt, 2002). Similarly, Barber (2007) refers to 'professional market doctors' who surgically attach emotions to brands; there need not be a logical link between the product and the emotion. For example, a T-shirt, depending on its brand, can signal ethical beliefs, music taste or even social class.

Regardless of the lack of logic in the link between a product and a brand, consumers form **self-brand connections** based on the congruency between the brand-image/personality and self-image, or desired self-image (Chaplin and Roedder-John, 2005); brands matching

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[2] For example, surfers and 'beach bums' are associated with Roxy, Billabong, QuickSilver, and Havaiianas.

the 'ideal self' are preferred. For example, "the description of an ideal youth brand is in tune with the respondents' description of the ideal self" (Barber, 2007, pg 188). Consumers – specifically those focused on identity development- buy brands as a means of attaining their desired image and life style. Therefore, "If a brand name can shape or even stand in for identity, then to figure out "who you are" you must decide where (and for what) to shop" (Barber, 2007, pg. 194). Such statements help to illustrate the consumption culture; consumers are buying their identities and the self has been commodified. The implications of this commodification may not be of direct concern to those who are secure in their identities and those who are able to afford them, however, when one considers an individual's social and psychological development, one is forced to question where the role of personal character, skills and values lies.

2.1.4.2.2 Aspirational power; celebrity endorsement

The values and emotions attached to brands are also increasingly mediated through their association with celebrities and aspirational figures. The pairing of a brand with an admired persona will transfer one's perception of that person, to one's perception of the brand. Saxton (2005) argues that this is because the celebrity culture is filling the moral and spiritual vacuum in young people's lives. The bearer of the brand hopes to become or be associated with its endorser. For example, teenagers purchasing Nike shoes and sports wear, do so with a subconscious hope that it will help them to, for example, play football like Ronaldo, Ronaldinho or Rooney. This is because celebrities (particularly in the UK; Saxton, 2005), are used as moral, ethical and behavioural guides (Wicks et al., 2007) and thus the evaluation of a brand is dependant on the perceptions towards its endorser. For example, Schemer et al. (2008) notes that due to evaluative conditioning, the pairing of a brand with a liked or disliked actor in music videos can increase the potential for either the positive or negative evaluation of that brand, respectively. Due to the central role of music in adolescent lives, "embedding brands in rap music videos (is) an efficient way of targeting adolescent consumers." (Pg. 923). Furthermore, celebrities can themselves become a brand. For example, Oprah and Madonna represent specific beliefs and values that consumer's buy in to; including religious and political views. Thus it is clear that an effectively managed brand, be it product or person, provides lifestyle guides and choices for consumers.

2.1.4.2.3 Sponsorship

Brands can also provide tangible, pleasurable and enjoyable experiences – through sponsorship and product placement. For example, by providing educational resources and sponsorship to schools, brands can – in the minds of the users- be perceived positively and warmly, as a result of their 'help'. However, the benefit is clearly two fold as the producer heightens its chances of brand loyalty. For example Mayo and Nairn (2009) report that families involved with school promotions – such as Tesco's Vouchers for schools – are 30% more likely to shop with the promoter. The benefit of such a relationship is aptly expressed by Travis (2000), "A transaction makes the cash register ring once. A relationship makes it ring again and again" (pg. 54). In a similar vein, the sponsorship and promotions by brands can attach the emotions associated with an event to a brand. For example the beer brand 'Tuborg' sponsors a number of music festivals in and around Europe- as a result, frequenters of those festivals may be reminded of 'good times' when purchasing that brand of beer in the future. Similarly, Close et al. (2009) have shown that attendees to sponsored events "focus on how the sponsoring retailer fits with their image and sense of self" (pg. 271). Associations with human emotions are powerful and this is clear when one considers that they can even influence event attendance.

2.1.4.2.4 Product Placements

The locations and contexts in which a brand is placed will also condition consumers' perception of it. For example, product placement – which has spread from films to television programs, computer games, internet gaming sites, console computer games and music videos – has become a much used marketing tool. Furthermore, these platforms for product placements have been shown to be particularly effective in reaching adolescents consumers (e.g. Mayo and Nairn, 2009; Schemer et al., 2008). Conversely, Barber (2007) explains that a well-placed brand can add context and emotion to the scene; the benefit is double sided for the brand and the producer of the image it is used in. However, the mere exposure to brands in daily real-life settings, can also encourage brand choice. Ferraro et al., (2009) explain that Incidental Consumer Brand Encounters (ICBE) can increase choice for that brand. Once again, the mere effect of repetitive exposure is fruitful in creating desire. Thus, those brands with the greatest level of exposure are likely to be the most popular; there seems to be a multiplying effect whereby popularity produces further popularity. This is why 'must have' children and teenage products have such a rapid adoption rate. Teenagers have highly social lives and hence the pester-power of "everyone's got it" works extremely well. This is why companies (especially in the child

and adolescent domains) strive to create 'mulitstoried stories' around their brands, so as to increase the chances of interaction with that brand (Brown, 2000). For example, the huge success of brands such as High School Musical and Harry Potter is spurred by the fact that the brand is present is several domains (or stories) such as entertainment, education, food (lunch boxes), and games. These powerful brands increase their emotional resonance and power due to the continuous interplay between the brand and different aspects of real life (Diamond et al, 2009).

2.1.4.3 Brand proliferation – pros and cons

Having established the extreme importance, power and prevalence of brands, it is necessary to examine what, if any, are the impacts of this 'state'; both positive and negative. For example, Olins (2000) claims that brands are of great value to both consumers and producers in creating and shaping their identity and company image, respectively. However, other researchers highlight the negative consequences of the brand-dominant consumption culture (e.g. Kasser, 2002). The 'pros' and 'cons' of the growth of brand use, are explored below.

2.1.4.3.1 Freedom of identity

In terms of branding's impact on consumers, as with the general state of the consumption culture, there are opposing views as to whether they are positive or negative (or indeed harmful) for the individual consumer and society as a whole. Those who argue the favourable effects of these identity-brand connections, do so in terms of the freedom and fluidity of the expression of identity. For example, Saxton (2005) notes that due to the communicative power of brands, consumers have the ability and freedom to portray different images of themselves from day to day - depending on the brands they use. In the world of adolescents this is particularly appealing as they – by definition- shift their identity daily (Barber, 2007). In this sense, brands have become necessary tools for building our 'consumer identity projects' (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). In fact, brands have been shown to strengthen, or even alter a consumer's perception of him/herself (e.g. Fennis et al., 2005; Kleine et al, 1993; Shavitt and Nelson, 2000; Gao et al, 2009). For example, Fitzsimons et al (2008) found that participants primed with the 'Apple' brand, behaved more creatively than those primed with IBM. Thus it is clear that through strong emotional connections, the creative and funky essence of the Apple brand had been transferred to the participants' behaviour. Moreover, because of the identity signalling power of brands, they have also been referred to as 'Passports to global citizenship'; by

wearing the 'correct' brands in accordance with specific cultures or even nationalities, one can ease the process of integration (Strizhakova et al., 2008).

2.1.4.3.2 Security

Rindfleisch et al., (2009) found that insecure individuals display stronger connections with their preferred brands than those who are more secure. In terms of the insecurities presented by the postmodern world, Feldwick (1999) explains that brands bring a sense of consistency and security in an ever-changing world. Indeed, when they are members of brand communities, "consumers employ both self-and communal-brand connections as a mechanism for bolstering their sense of security" (Rindfleisch et al., 2009, pg. 3). This mechanism is of particular use to groups of consumers who tend to display high levels of insecurity; for example, those living on a low income (Hill and Stephens, 1997), adolescents (Clarke, 2003), and those who display materialistic tendencies (Kasser and Ryan, 1993). Amongst adolescents for example, displaying certain brands can provide physical and social security as they often determine whether or not one is accepted or rejected by peer groups (Elliott and Leonard, 2004) and whether or not one is subjected to clothes-related bullying (Piacentini and Mailer, 2004).

2.1.4.3.3 Motivational source

Brands are familiar and aspirational and can thus be used as a source of motivation (e.g Hogg et al., 1998). For example, in the UK there was consideration of replacing a generic gym uniform in schools with one produced by Nike, in order to encourage participation in physical activities and raise self-esteem (MEN, 2005). Although this seems like an innovative way to promote and encourage healthy lifestyles to children, such initiatives fail to consider the negative impacts on children who come from low income families and thus may not be able to afford this new 'gym kit' at the elevated price[3]. In such cases therefore, the effect might be reversed; those who cannot afford the branded kit may avoid the physical education classes due to a fear of being different and 'the odd one out'.

2.1.4.3.4 Societal detriment

Critics of the 'branded world', argue that the commercialisation of identity has commodified our concept of self and resulted in identity politics. For example Giddens (1991) expresses concerns for the breakdown of societal goals and values when emphasis

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[3] Despite the fact that they were subsidized.

is placed on buying one's identity. Barber (2007) claims that the involvement of businesses in forging identities is "undermining agency, community and democracy" (pg. 167) and "As identity moves away from public categories rooted in religion and nationality and toward commercial categories associated with brands and consumables, identity itself is privatized (though hardly individualised!)." (pg, 200). In this sense, consumption is infiltrating the deeper structures of society.

2.1.4.3.5 Psychological concerns

A more psychological concern regarding the ability to buy identities is presented by Kasser and Ryan (1993). They note that if individuals are turning to material possessions to develop their selves, there follows a substantial neglect of intrapsychic development, thereby reducing the individual's understanding and concept of the self. Without such self-awareness, the individual is less likely to have a stable concept of self and is thus at an increased risk of negative psychological consequences; such as low self-esteem and depression. Indeed several studies have shown negative relationships between psychological well-being and a tendency to focus on material goods and brands for self-expression and satisfaction (eg. Chaplin and Roedder-John, 2007; Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998). This is a central focus of this thesis and will thus be thoroughly explored and examined in term of extant literature and with the data collected.

Despite the claims that the branded world facilitates the security of identity development and can be exploited to encourage positive initiatives and behaviours, there are certain detrimental consequences. The psychological well-being of individuals (in particular those consumers who struggle to participate in the consumption of branded and expensive goods) seems to be at stake.

2.1.4.4 Brand Power

Regardless of the negative consequences of the brand-orientated society, the power of brands is growing and they continue to assume a dominant presence in our lives. Indeed, Lash and Urry (1994) argue that international brands and global advertising has turned citizens into consumers; citizenship is no longer based on political rights and duties but rather, is a product of consumption. Likewise, Barber (2007) points out that, whereas previous generations were defined by cultures and movements (such as the 'Woodstock generation' or 'flower children') today's generations x and y are more defined by commerce and consumption. In terms of the role of music, this progression illustrates a

higher-level societal shift in the focus of music messages. That is, whereas the music of the Woodstock generation spread messages of love, peace and community, the current generation's music spreads individually-focused messages of competitive and consumption orientated success; for example the dominant notion of 'bling' in hip hop and rap music today. Moreover, brands have also become personalities in their own right - they now have profiles on sites such as MySpace, Twitter, Beebo and Facebook. This means that consumers can virtually communicate and interact with a brand; once again appealing to the more emotional aspects of brand-consumer interaction and thereby forging strong consumer-brand relationships.

The importance of emotional appeal in brand development has received considerable attention in the last 10 years. For example book titles such as '*Emotional Branding: How Successful Brands Gain the **Irrational** Edge*' (Travis, 2000, emphasis added) and '*Emotional branding: The new paradigm of connecting brands to people*' (Gobe, 2001) are increasingly popular. Similarly, Roberts (2004) points out that, the previous shift from trademarks to brands is now being repeated; from brands to 'Lovemarks'. Due to the increasing emotional connections between consumers and brands- they are approaching religious status and for this reason, Barber (2007) purports that we are now living in a 'Spiritual economy'. Moreover, arguments for the incorporation of 'brand identity' into the traditional marketing paradigm suggests a shift towards a more balanced 'Identity Based Marketing' paradigm (e.g. Alsem and Kostelijk, 2008). This fundamental shift in the marketing concept seems necessary; if everything and anything is a brand, marketing must consider the central role of brands in consumers' lives.

2.1.5 The state of consumerism; is it all bad?

Aside from the benefits to producers and vendors, it seems that the brand prolific consumer culture can be detrimental to individuals' psychological well-being as well as societal functioning. Strong links between consumerism, anxiety and insecurity support this. However, this anxiety-inducing view of consumption has been challenged by Warde (1994) who suggests that the relationship between consumption and self-identity (and the resulting anxiety) is misjudged and must be modified. He argues that it is not the consumption which provokes anxiety, but rather the advertisements encouraging consumers to do so (adding that this is often their sole purpose). If consumption is anxiety inducing, Warde (1994) questions why there are such high levels of participation and claims that there is a lack of visible distress amongst those most heavily involved.

Furthermore, although he agrees that a "lack of resources must be one of the most potent sources of consumer anxiety" (pg 891), he argues that the anxiety is dealt with through group identification. However, if the consumption of status-signalling brands has replaced social bonds (e.g. Giddens, 1991), it is unlikely that consumption-related anxiety is easily avoidable. This is because, if consumption-related anxiety is overcome through social bonds, those bonds must not be achieved through the act which causes the anxiety in the first place; i.e. consumption of branded goods. Indeed this is supported by psychological evidence which illustrates strong links between consumption involvement and reduced well being. The following section will provide a thorough review of this (limited) evidence.

2.2 Psychological Impacts of Living in a Consumer Culture

In order to understand the macro, societal effects of this consumption culture, it is first necessary to comprehend the micro, psychological impacts on the individual. For example, has the consumption culture altered the way people develop, interact and exist? What happens if one does not have the means to partake in this excessive consumption culture? Does everyone succumb to the consumption pressures equally? Does everyone have the same view and experience of the consumption society? Such questions must be investigated because the state of 'hyperconsumerism' present in today's society, is by no means an innate, evolutionary human characteristic (Saxton, 2005). Although human social environments have supported consumption tendencies, never before has it been so avidly used as a means of expression and satisfaction (Kasser et al., 2003). As Barber (2007) and Giddens (1991) have noted, the activities of marketing and advertising professionals have fundamentally changed the ways in which (western) societies communicate and function. In order to tackle the problems associated with consumption cultures, we must understand the individual impacts; one must understand the trees before we can decipher the forest.

2.2.1 Lack of research

Despite this seemingly obvious need for investigation, "issues surrounding consumerism have yet to be widely recognised, studied, or even accepted by psychology; all we have at this point is a small bud with a nascent root system" (Kasser and Kanner, 2003, pg.6). Kasser and Kanner (2003) explain that this is partly due to a tendency for psychologists to focus on internal (intrapsychic) elements rather than external variables such as

consumption pressures. However, it is also due to the fact that the limited findings revealed are regarded as precious trade secrets (to be used for marketing strategies) and are thus rarely revealed to social researchers. Most alarming however, is the suggestion that this lack of research is due to young psychologists being discouraged, censored and even punished when attempting to expose controversial issues related to consumption and consumerism. Comments such as "you should not be doing that kind of research" have been noted in the psychology circles (Kasser and Kanner, 2003, pg. 5).

In addition, the majority of psychological investigations have been conducted in America by the likes of Tim Kasser, Naomi Klein and Juliet Schor. These authors argue (convincingly), that there is strong evidence for the link between consumer involvement and reduced mental health; for example lowered self-esteem, depression and anxiety (eg. Schor, 2004; Kasser, 2002, Klein, 2000). However, in terms of self-esteem, the author feels that these investigations fail to adequately investigate – empirically- the *combined* relationship between materialism, self-esteem and self-doubt using the adequate measures. Furthermore, the American context of this work means that the results can not be directly applied to a British sample. Until recently there was sparse investigation on the impacts of consumerism on the UK population. However, investigations by, amongst others, Richard Elliott, Agnes Nairn and Ed Mayo, have shed a light on the effects of the commercialism on children in the UK. Their findings are surprising and often shocking and provide motivation to lift the 'embargo' on psychological research in the consumer culture context.

2.2.2 Materialism

The terms used to express the state of the consumer culture vary; Schor (2004) refers to 'consumer involvement', LaPoint and Hambrick-Dixon (2003) refer to 'commercialism influences' and Kasser (2002) refers to 'materialism'. For Kasser (2002), the term materialism encapsulates the value orientation that has developed as a result of the consumer culture. Thus, measuring materialism seems to provide an effective means by which to gauge an individual's extent of consumer involvement. The following sections will accurately define materialism and examine its antecedents, before continuing to review its psychological consequences.

2.2.2.1 Defining materialism.

Materialism, as defined by Belk (1985), referred to the importance humans attach to worldly possessions. However, this definition has since developed to incorporate a value

orientation which guides an individual's attitudes and choices concerning not only consumption choices, but a variety of situations (Richins and Dawson, 1992). As aptly put by Chang and Arkin (2002), "materialism is a value orientation that has implications for people's desires, decisions, psychological well being and social behaviour" (pg 389). Thus, the more materialistic one is, the more precedence will be given to thoughts, feelings and behaviours involved in consumption. Indeed, Goldberg et al (2003) consider materialism as a mediating construct in market behaviour and general happiness and Cleveland et al., (2009) have shown that it can predict behaviour. Given the changes in the definition of materialism, it is clear that, over time, the role materialism plays and the impacts it has on individuals, has developed with the growth of consumer culture.

Three dominant aspects of materialism are: acquisition centrality (the importance placed on acquisition), acquisition as the pursuit of happiness, and possession-defined success (Richins and Dawson, 1992). Thus materialistic individuals tend to seek extrinsic rewards (material/financial) and social recognition to provide happiness and self-worth (Kasser and Ryan, 1993); material goods play an important role in "achieving major life goals or desired states" (Richins, 2004, pg. 210). As a result, this external orientation towards success and happiness outweighs the importance of self-actualisation and personal achievement amongst materialists.

2.2.2.2 Development of materialism.

Chaplin and Roedder-John (2007) found that materialistic tendencies are displayed in children as young as eight and continue to develop throughout adolescence. In her work, Flouri (1999) established that both socialization agents (e.g. family and peers) and interpersonal factors are responsible for the development of materialistic values. More specifically, materialistic parents, ineffective family communications, extensive TV viewing, low self-esteem, uncertainty, perceptions of 'normlessness', insecurity, need for control and living on a low-income are thought to be contributory factors in breeding materialism (e.g. Chaplin and Roedder-John, 2007; Chang and Arkin, 2002). However, it is important to note that there are opposing views as to the direction of causality between these elements (Flouri, 1999; Muncy and Eastman, 1998); do familial stresses result in materialism, or does materialism result in familial stresses? Through the literature reviewed and the data collected, this issue will be explored.

2.2.2.2.1 Parental and peer influence

Children mimic their parents when developing and learning about gender roles, food preference, brand preference, cultural rituals and values. Materialistic values appear to be no different. As expressed by Hite and Hite (1995), children can be described as akin to plaster – initially they are soft and soak up influences, then they solidify, based on the shapes they have been exposed to. Thus it is not surprising that several researchers have found that a materialistic orientation amongst parents, is closely related to a materialistic orientation in their children. For example, Flouri (1999) has dedicated her research to models of materialism development in the context of family and parental values; she confirmed that maternal materialism was positively correlated to materialism amongst adolescents. Similarly, Kasser et al., (1995) showed that children whose mothers valued financial success highly, had similar attitudes. Furthermore, Goldberg et al., (2003) found that amongst 540 parent-child dyads, those parents scoring in the upper quartile of a materialism measure had children who were statistically significantly more materialistic than those of parents in the lower quartile.

As children develop towards adolescence, peer influences start to become a dominant regulator of behaviour and values. It is at this stage of development that teenagers start to look to peers, rather than parents, for guidance in identity formation, consumption choices, value orientations and behaviours (Roper & LaNiece, 2009; Ross & Harradine, 2004; Shim, 1996). For example, Mandrik et al., (2005) found that strong peer influence outweighs intergenerational influences on brand preference. Amongst others, Shim (1996) and Flouri (1999) have shown that levels of brand consciousness and conspicuous consumption were greater amongst those teenagers who frequently communicated with their peers about consumption. Indeed this is why techniques such as in-school marketing and viral campaigns are such an effective means of targeting adolescents; the likely hood of peer interaction and influence are high (Levin & Linn, 2003).

2.2.2.2.2 Insecurity

The fast-pace and the stresses of post-modern life have been argued to result in insecurity, self-doubt and uncertainty, which cause consumers to seek stability and security in material possessions (e.g. Chang and Arkin, 2002 and Douglas and Isherwood, 1979, and Chaplin and Roedder-John, 2007). This is because, as Rindfleisch (1997) suggest, as opposed to real life, material possessions are object which can be controlled. Furthermore, Rindfleisch et al, (2009) found that materialists form close connections with particular

brands. They explain this through Terror Management Theory and argue that existential insecurity predisposes people to seek connections with material possessions and brands; their stability and consistency provide a sense of security. Similarly, Henry (2004) found that low-income consumers are more likely to display materialistic tendencies than affluent ones. This is thought to be a result of a lack of hope and aspirations for the future and hence they use consumption as a means of attaining a level of normalcy. Furthermore, Douglas and Isherwood (1979) and Elliott (1995) have shown that the unemployed and low-income consumers tend to purchase status-signalling goods; a clear attempt to prove one's own worth.

Such attempts to restore one's self-worth through symbolic self-completion are suggestive of social anxiety. Indeed Schroeder and Dugal (1995) found that socially anxious individuals tended to be highly materialistic. More recently, Rose and DeJesus (2007) have shed light on this issue by presenting a model which suggests that this tendency stems from the act of self-monitoring. Individuals who self-monitor, also show a greater need to belong and thus believe in 'buying-to-belong', clearly displaying materialistic tendencies. Therefore, based on such findings, it seems that individuals with a high need for social inclusion (for example adolescents), are likely to have high levels of materialism (e.g. Chaplin and Roedder-John, 2007; Lindstrom and Seybold, 2004).

2.2.2.2.3 Self-esteem

Personal insecurities such as self-doubt and low self-esteem are also related to materialism. For example, Kasser (2002) provided evidence of strong links between materialism and low self-esteem, depression and psychological well-being. Similarly Chaplin and Roedder-John (2007) conducted a detailed study with adolescents and claim that theirs was the first study to confirm the causal direction between low self-esteem and materialism; they claim that low self-esteem in adolescents leads to materialism. Similarly, Chang and Arkin (2002) suggested that materialism is a coping response for insecure and uncertain teenagers. Conversely however, Kasser (2002) argues that it is in fact the high level of materialism which causes a drop in self-esteem; because precedence is given to external rewards rather than personal achievements. Indeed "the question of whether materialism is essentially the cause or the result of unhappiness has not yet been resolved" (Flouri, 1999, pg. 709), and thus further work is needed to establish the direction. This will be examined in depth with the data collected. However, regardless of the findings, the

bottom line remains: materialistic values are not associated with a balanced and healthy life-state.

2.2.2.2.4 Television advertisement.

The link between television viewing and materialism has been studied in more depth than insecurity/uncertainty because it has been of greater interest to marketers and advertisers; will advertising increase consumption? In short, the answer seems to be yes. Moschis and Moore (1982) conducted a longitudinal study of television advertising effects and highlighted the development of materialistic values as a main consequence. Furthermore, Churchill and Moschis (1979) and Nairn et al (2007) agree that as television viewing increases, so does materialism and social motivations for consumption. Shrum et al (2005) explain that television viewing breeds materialism because viewers use it to construct their perceptions of social reality and given the nature of advertising, it "appears to cultivate perceptions of an affluent society" (pg. 473). In other words, "Television induces discontent with what one has, it creates an orientation to possession and money, and it causes children to care more about brands, products and consumer values." (Schor, 2004, Pg 169). Considering the reported figures on television penetration in UK households (as will be shown), curbing television is likely to be a means of reducing materialism (as suggested by Shim, 1996). Children and teenagers must be prevented from believing that "the act of purchase is…the only road to certainty" (Bauman, 1988, pg.66). For example, Thomas (2007) claims that by the age of six, the average child will have spent one full year in front of a television. The extent of media and advertising exposure to children is immense; on average, a UK tween will spend 2 hours and 36 minutes in front of the TV (Childwise, 2007/8). In addition, it is important to note that these findings refer to traditional television viewing only and thus these effects are hugely increased when one considers the advancement in technologies which allow for viewing on mobile phones, computers and games consoles (Mayo and Nairn, 2009).

2.2.2.2.5 Family environment and communication.

The context in which an individual is raised, has considerable consequences for how their values, attitudes and behaviours develop. It has been shown that families who discuss consumption in the home, are more likely to neutralise the negative impacts of television advertisement; namely materialism (e.g. Schor, 2004). Discussions and lessons on budgeting can also stem the development of materialism; Flouri (1999) found materialism to be negatively related to the amount of home-teachings on how to manage money

effectively. Thus *effective* family communications can reduce materialism and it seems that *ineffective* family communications and challenging home-life can have the opposite effect. For example Flouri (1999) found that a mother's description of family communications was predictive of materialism levels in their adolescents; the less communication reported, the more materialistic the child. Furthermore, a poor quality of family life (eg. family disruption) is closely linked to materialism. For example, John (1999) and Kasser et al., (1995) both found that materialists were more likely to have experiences insecure childhoods in disrupted families with non-nurturing parents. As Rindfleisch et al (1996) explain, this is due to direct causes such as a lack of encouragement from both parents, but also indirect causes, for example – the child experiences feelings of insecurity and thus turns to material possessions. Once again, materialism may be seen as a coping response (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 1997).

2.2.2.3 Consequences of materialism

2.2.2.3.1 Low self-esteem and dissatisfaction

Kasser and Ryan (1993) claim that materialism results in low self-esteem. Although Chaplin and Roedder-John (2007) argue otherwise, the reasons behind Kasser's arguments are reasonable. External and financial aspirations outweigh motivations for self-acceptance and self-development because they detract from intra-psychic developments and internal endeavours; thereby interfering with self-actualization and personal integration (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Such logic explains why materialistic tendencies are positively correlated with self-consciousness and social anxiety (Schroeder and Dugal, 1995). Furthermore, these anxieties have been shown to be present in the dreams of individuals high in materialism; they experience more insecurity in their dreams, for example interpersonal conflict and death (Kasser and Kasser, 2001). Hence it truly seems that, even on a subconscious level those "who are looking outwards for satisfaction are the ones who are hurting internally" (Mayo and Nairn, 2009, pg 214).

Further evidence of the 'materialism = low self-esteem/unhappiness' effect, shows that materialists are less satisfied because they are caught in an endless cycle of acquiring goods (Richins and Dawson, 1992). The consumption culture promises happiness through material possessions, which clearly cannot provide security and happiness in ways which family or self-awareness can (Mayo and Nairn, 2009). Interestingly, Layard (2005) points out that, although UK wealth has doubled in the last 50 years, levels of happiness have not. In fact, the increase of mental health problems in the UK, coincides with a sharp rise in

gross national product and increased consumption (Graham, 2007). This clearly demonstrates that affluence and consumption cannot be an independent source happiness because, "the lust for goods can be insatiable; the pleasures of a new acquisition are quickly forgotten and replaced with a desire for more" (Richins and Dawson, 1992, pg.308).

Considering the above evidence, it seems that there is support for both directions; low self-esteem and unhappiness can cause the development of materialism, but materialism is also very likely to cause unhappiness and low self-esteem. The role of self-esteem in basic human functioning, suggests that its link with materialism must be investigated if we wish to increase the psychological well-being of future adults. However, as opposed to attempting to isolate *a single* causal direction, it is perhaps more important to look at the relationship between variables in order to identify their effects on well-being. "It is probable that the relationship between happiness and materialism works in a process of feedback loops with children caught in a complex web woven around the emerging development of their own values, their own attitudes and their own identity." (Mayo and Nairn, 2009, Pg 214).

2.2.2.3.2 <u>Impacts on consumption and behaviour</u>

Rose and DeJesus (2007) found that materialists are motivated by a 'buying-to-belong' orientation because the individual is motivated to consume items which will increase their chances of inclusion in peer/social groups and society. Furthermore, Achenreiner (1997) and Goldberg et al (2003) have found that materialistic youth are also more likely to be susceptible to purchase influences including peer groups, celebrity endorsements and advertising. The relationship between these two variables (materialism and susceptibility to influence) is often explained by the fact that materialistic individuals have reduced self-esteem and self-worth. The negative relationship between self-esteem and Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (CSII; Bearden et al., 1989) has been confirmed in several studies (Rose et al., 1997, Chang and Arkin, 2002 and Bearden et al., 1989). Furthermore, Isaksen and Roper (2008) identified a significant, negative relationship between the clarity of one's own self-concept and susceptibility to interpersonal influence. Thus it appears that a low self-esteem and uncertainty of one's self-concept (often seen in materialists) results in a greater susceptibility to consumption influences; and hence, a greater propensity to consume.

Furthermore, it is also possible that a high susceptibility to consumption influence increases materialism, thereby creating a feedback loop between materialism and consumption influence. That is, those who are highly susceptible to consumption influences are likely to have a stronger motivation to seek comfort in material possessions and those who are highly susceptible to consumption influences are also more likely to consume status signalling goods (e.g. Rose et al., 1997). This highlights the importance of social comparison influences in consumption choices. Recently Cleveland et al. (2009) showed that materialistic consumers purchase luxury products more frequently and place greater importance on owning hedonic and status signalling goods. Materialists are more socially motivated to consume.

2.2.2.3.3 Interpersonal relations and family life

The social consequences of a materialistic orientation also include a reduced interest in personal relationships (Richins and Dawson, 1992). In terms of the psychological well being of materialists, the relationship with the family has become a growing point of interest. For example, studies have shown that materialistic individuals spend less time with their families (Schor, 1998), are less satisfied with them, have less interest in their communities (Kasser and Ryan, 1993) and experience more parent-child conflict (Mayo and Nairn, 2009). Furthermore, Moore-Shay and Berchmans (1996) found that parent-child conflicts about consumption issues are a clear indicator of a materialistic child; the more materialistic, the more conflict. Indeed conflicts often arise as a result of children's desire for expensive, and often branded possessions. For example, Ross and Harradine (2004) found that 91.3% of parents of school children think their children are too concerned with having the right brand of clothing. The result of such conflict is that materialistic children have a low opinion of their parents and consequently themselves. This is because a vicious circle occurs; materially orientated children are more likely to pester parents for luxury and status-signalling objects and "Statistically speaking, more nagging is bound to lead ultimately to more refusals. Refusals cause resentment and guilt. The atmosphere in the house becomes bad and children begin to feel sad." (Mayo and Nairn, 2009, pg. 218).

2.3 At-Risk Consumers

Due to their circumstances, certain consumer groups have shown to be more prone to developing materialistic attitudes and hence may be more likely to experience the negative consequences of consumerism (for example low self-esteem). A heightened focus on the symbolic and social function of possessions has been shown to predispose individuals to a consumption orientation. For this reason, "anxiety is likely to be highest among those with the greatest investment in self-identity as achieved through adornment." (Warde, 1994, Pg 893). As has been shown, both low-income and adolescent consumers have typically high levels of materialism and use consumption to protect and support their identities. For this reason, the following sections will focus on the factors which can increase the consumer orientation amongst these groups and hence the importance of considering their well-being.

The importance of gaining a greater understanding of these 'at risk' consumer groups stems from the fact that "consumers form their cognitions, emotions, and intentions about future opportunities based upon positive and negative interactions with the marketplace that occur across the consumption cycle." (Hill and Gaines, 2007, pg 82). Thus if low-income and adolescent consumers are more likely to have negative experiences in the consumption cycle, it follows that their aspirations and ambitions may be stemmed. For this reason, considering the importance of child development and social equality, the role of consumption amongst these groups must be given particular attention.

2.3.1 Low-income consumers; do the poor suffer more?

The answer to the above question appears to be yes. In a comparative study between high and low-income consumers, Henry (2004) identified reduced perceived control over environment, less hope of achievement, reduced self-control, reduced emotional control and reduced task persistence, as key differences between social classes. Further studies have pointed to lowered self-esteem and depression, social exclusion, poor physical and mental health and negativity, as typical consequences of living on a low income (eg. Ridge, 2002; Hill and Stephens, 1997). Thus it seems that the lower the social class, the more negative the affect and for this reason low-income consumers are more likely to focus on financial success and materialism as a means of dealing with feelings of uncertainty, hopelessness and inadequacy (Chang & Arkin, 2002; Elliott & Leonard, 2004).

It is important to note that these consequences of poverty refer to the 'western world' where affluence and the consumer culture persist. That is, in a culture where customers

buy their identities, often with expensive brands, those consumers who face restricted consumption opportunities will face greater feelings of isolation from the rest of society (Elliott and Leonard, 2004). Thus, while marketing and advertising are effective in informing consumers of what they can have, it also reminds the low-income population what they cannot have; increasing perceptions of deprivation (Mayo, 2005b). It is these perceptions of inequality, alienation and a reduction in self-esteem which play a large part in feelings of negativity amongst low-income consumers (Hill and Gaines, 2007).

The role of the consumption culture in producing negative experiences amongst low-income citizens implies that by limiting investigations of class differences to the economic domain, one runs the risk of omitting complex social-psychological relations which may lie at the heart of these differences (Henry, 2004). For this reason, low-income consumers must be understood in the context in which they exist; in the case of the UK – a context of consumption. Although some argue that the current brand/consumption era gives consumers the power to enhance their sense of self, its negative impacts on low-income consumers, who do not share this consumption freedom, are rarely considered. Furthermore, considering the central role of consumption in the formation of identity, it is surprising that such limited attention has been given to the effect of poverty on identity formation (Hamilton and Catterall, 2005). "Overall, this highlights a very limited interest amongst marketing academics in psychological differences between social class groups" (Henry, 2004, pg. 376).

2.3.1.1 Lack of research

The lack of consumer culture research amongst low income consumers was pointed out by LaPoint and Hambrick-Dixon (2003). They highlight the fact that the majority of consumption research and the concerns raised in this field, have focused on the 'middle class' population. More often than not, market researchers focus their efforts on investigating consumers who are most likely to yield high profit margins; high-profit, affluent customers are of more interest than less-profitable, low-income ones (Kotler and Armstrong, 2004). Essentially, by assuming this view, academics and practitioners of marketing research are excluding a segment of consumers that account for a considerable portion of the (European) population.

This is especially true in the United Kingdom where, in 2007/8, over 13.5 million people were living below the low-income threshold[4]; this equates to 22% of the population (poverty.org.uk). Furthermore, UK poverty rates are exceptionally high in comparison to other members of the European Union (EU). Of the 27 EU countries, only four countries have a higher poverty rate than the UK; "The proportion of people living in relative low income in the UK is twice that of the Netherlands and one-and-a-half times that of France." (poverty.org.uk). Furthermore, the discrepancy between 'rich and poor' is continually rising in Britain; the '80s and '90s saw the richest 20% of the population's income rise almost 10 times as quickly as the poorest 20% (Elliott, 2006). As a result, the United Kingdom is one of the most unequal societies of the modern world, and thus its children experience high levels of stress (Cunningham, 2006). This discrepancy elevates feelings of social exclusion and magnifies the negative, psychological experiences of living in poverty (Ridge, 2002).

Indeed this effect was made clear by a UNICEF (2007) report which concluded that Britain is the worst, rich country to grow up in. The report measured child well-being in 21 OECD[5] countries on 6 different dimensions including 'material well being'; in which the UK was ranked 18th. In light of such findings, this thesis is aimed at gaining a true understanding of the impact that consumerism has on low-income British adolescents. A thorough review of extant findings, in combination with a large-scale comparative study of high and low-income consumers, is hoped to reveal important findings which may aid in dampening the negative consequences of living on a low income.

2.3.1.2 Relative poverty

While economic measures may provide statistics on poverty rates within a country, they do not suffice in explaining the extent to which individuals are affected by it. While the average family income may vary between countries, the equality of the distribution of incomes within a country provides a more accurate indication of the true level of deprivation experienced. Whether the poor in one country have greater financial resources than the poor in another, is irrelevant, the importance is placed on whether their socioeconomic status is in-line with the average, dominant population. Thus poverty must be examined in terms of "the relative deprivation from socially defined necessities, involving exclusion from the components of a 'normal' lifestyle" (Ringen, 1988). The

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[4] This is an EU-agreed indicator of relative income poverty. The low-income threshold refers to those who are living on 60% or less of the average household income in that country.
[5] Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

aspirations, goals and behaviours of individuals are largely dependent on the way in which they perceive themselves *in comparison to others*; goals are not created in a vacuum (Chang & Arkin, 2002). For this reason, it is crucial that the definition of poverty encompasses elements of social interaction and contextual differences; after all, "Individuals cannot be reduced to energy-consuming organisms" (Townsend, 1993, pg. 31).

This shift to define poverty in relative terms, was marked by the increase of living standards and the development of welfare states; the suitability of the 'basic needs approach' to poverty research has been questioned, as developments have secured the fulfilment of basic needs such as food, water and shelter amongst most societies (Flotten, 2006). For this reason, the definition of poverty has progressed to: "a lack of resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or are at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they (the individual) belong" (Townsend, 1979, pg. 31 – parentheses added). Thus, considering the state of consumerism, impoverished consumers are classed as those who face restrictions on product and service availability as well as the inability to afford them (Alwitt and Donley, 1997). This is why Warde (1994) argues that "advanced consumer societies create strong senses of relative deprivation and may effectively exclude households and individuals from any normal range of social participation" (pg. 891).

Hill (2002) suggests the use of the term 'consumption adequacy' in a new framework for investigations involving low-income consumers. He argues that certain sets of goods are needed to attain basic human dignity and self-determination and agrees that the set of these goods will "vary from culture to culture based on customs, tastes, available resources and status markers" (Hill, 2005b, pg.217).   Therefore, both indirect indicators (for example income) and direct indicators (such as self-perception of poverty) must be considered when measuring poverty (Flotten, 2006). It is clear that the negative impacts of poverty must be considered in the context of the 'normal' British consumption culture.

2.3.1.3 Perceptions of a 'normal' life

Studies have shown that low-income consumers' perception of the extent of their poverty is increased by the general belief that a 'normal' lifestyle, is an affluent one. The consumer culture and societal pressures to consume are undoubtedly involved in this perception of

affluence because as Holt (1998) points out, consumption serves as a site for reproducing social class boundaries. The abundance of status-signalling goods and consumers' use of them for social recognition means that one's socioeconomic status is now glaringly obvious to all. Furthermore, when living in a society where the discrepancy in income levels is high, there is an even stronger motivation for those living below the poverty line, to appear as though they live above it. It is for this reason that high levels of materialism are typically high in socially and economically dynamic countries (Ger and Belk, 1996). There is a constant drive to 'catch up'.

As will be further explored in the following chapter, social comparisons (Festinger, 1954) are responsible for the individual's perception and evaluation of themselves. People gauge their worth according to qualities they deem to be worthy amongst others. However, this no longer solely refers to personal attributes; Nesselroade et al. (1999) showed that social comparisons extend to one's possessions. In Belk's (1988) terms, consumers are now comparing their 'extended selves'. With this in mind, it is plain to see why the consumption culture can easily result in feelings of inadequacy; brands and the symbolic value of possessions are obvious and immediate indicators of status. Therefore, those who are unable to afford products of a high stature will experience continual reinforcement of their perceived inadequacy when faced with more affluent peers, society and media depictions of 'normal', affluent life. It is for this reason precisely that Elliott (1995) argues that the inequality and alienation experienced by low-income consumers is magnified by an exclusion from this culture of consumption. Therefore, because it is unavoidable, consumption may in fact engender social inequality (Elliott and Leonard, 2004).

2.3.1.3.1 Media's depictions

Many have argued that the media is responsible for skewed perceptions of what a normal life encompasses. Shrum et al., (2005) explain that consumers use information from television and the wider media to construct their perceptions of social realities, including the prevalence of affluence. Furthermore, O'Guinn and Shrum (1997) concluded that the amount of television viewing is positively related to perceptions regarding the prevalence of high-status products. Therefore, it seems that the higher the television viewing rates, the stronger the belief that expensive, luxury goods and brands are 'normal' possessions. This is why advertisements can induce a sense of inadequacy, they frequently display unattainable and idealised images of standards of living; with regards to for example

affluence, appearance and body image (Waller et al., 1992). Indeed, some consumer researchers feel strongly about the effects of the media. Mayo and Nairn (2009) point out that the rise in mental health disorders is often attributed to the fact that consumers (particularly those on a low income) are making unfeasible comparisons between their sources of reference – as seen on TV and as seen at home.

However, the effects of media exposure are not equally distributed; low-income consumers have more computers, use them more often and watch more television (Mayo and Nairn, 2009). This is because television is commonly used as a cheap form of entertainment in low-income households (Huston and Wright, 1998). This means that not only do low-income consumers spend more time in front of the televisions than affluent consumers, but they are also more exposed to advertisements and the result is an increased level of materialism (Nairn et al., 2007). Considering these facts, it is understandable why there is such a strong stigma attached to the consumption of low-cost and cheap products amongst individuals living on a low-income (e.g. Isaksen and Roper, 2010b).

2.3.1.3.2 The stigma of poverty

The stigma attached to poverty is forceful and bears significant social consequences. For example Argo and Main (2008) found that a mere association with poverty, can transfer the stigma on to the associated person. Thus, despite a restricted income, low-income consumers are motivated to consume and display expensive, status-signalling brands in attempts to disguise poverty (Elliott & Leonard, 2004). It seems that "One implication that arises from society's fascination with wealth and status is that, when consumers engage in behaviours that deviate from this view, they risk being sanctioned." (Argo and Main, 2008, pg. 559). This risk of 'social sanctions' was evident in Hill and Stephens' (1997) work, where they found that welfare mothers experienced feelings of humiliation and shame when forced to expose their financial circumstances. Roper and Shah (2007) found that children who lacked the latest fashion brands were often perceived by their peers as 'poor quality people'. Moreover, figures from the National Consumer Council (NCC) show that in comparison to high-income children, low-income children prefer clothes with popular brands (Mayo, 2005b). It seems that, "low power fosters a desire to acquire products associated with status to compensate for lacking power" (Rucker and Galinsky, 2008, pg 257). Considering the price attached to status symbols, it is not surprising that in comparison to 28% of affluent children, 69% of those from deprived backgrounds, only aspire to jobs which provide large financial gains. The more affluent

children have a lesser fear of being associated with poverty but "those who have less want more" (pg. 225).

2.3.1.4 Materialism and self-esteem

Low-income consumers are thought to be more materialistic (Kasser et al, 1995) and have lower levels of self-esteem (Ridge, 2002) than high-income consumers. Thus, given the symbiotic relationship between materialism and self-esteem presented previously, it seems that low income consumers may be predisposed to a consumer orientation as a result of the interplay between their values and psychological characteristics. The materialistic orientation amongst low-income consumers seems to be based on symbolic self-completion (Wicklund and Gollwitzer, 1982) as they "attempt to restore a psychological deprivation that the class structure has effected in their lives" (Claxton and Murray, 1994, pg. 424). For this reason, Mayo (2005b) argues that "A consumer orientation is likely to be a symptom, rather than a cause, of poverty" (pg. 22). This need and desire for material possessions is powerful and indeed the high debt rates amongst low-income consumers are often a result of excessive consumption of expensive, status-signalling goods and brands (Hill and Gaines, 2007).

Isaksen and Roper (2008) assessed levels of self-concept clarity amongst British adolescents and found that low-income teenagers displayed significantly lower levels of self-concept clarity than their high-income counterparts. It seems that a reduction in awareness of self-concept, is related to reduced self-esteem amongst the poor (e.g. Henry, 2004). In addition, low self-esteem, reduced well-being and mental health issues are amongst the most commonly reported consequences of living on a low income (e.g. Keynote, 2002; Ridge, 2002). For example, figures in the UK have shown that in households with incomes under £100 a week, 16.1% of children suffer from mental health issues; in comparison to 5.3% in households earning over £700 (as reported by Mayo and Nairn, 2009). In addition, Hill and Stephens (1997) found that isolation, alienation, loss of control and poor mental health, including lowered self-esteem and depression, were amongst the most pertinent consequences of their restricted consumption. Therefore, the relationship between low self-esteem and materialism, helps to explain the high consumer involvement amongst low-income consumers; if one has a low self-esteem and thus continually compares oneself to unreachable and unrealistic depictions of life, one is likely to feel inadequate and experience low self-worth.

2.3.1.5 Susceptibility to commercial influences

The use of conspicuous consumption as a means of enhancing self-esteem is counter-intuitive. This is particularly true if a reduction in self-esteem is thought of as an indicator of social exclusion (as proposed by Leary et al., 1995)[6]. For this reason, when individuals feel a low sense of self-esteem, they will seek means by which to gain social inclusion. In a consumer society, these means pertain to largely to consumption and thus, those with low self-esteem are likely to have a higher 'Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (CSII) (Bearden et al, 1989; Rose et al, 1997). Indeed this is the case, as has been shown by Isaksen and Roper (2008). Furthermore, Shim (1996) found that low-income teenagers are more receptive to television advertisement than high-income adolescents. The result of this is not surprisingly, increased consumption. Moreover, because low-income consumers typically have greater feelings of uncertainty, lower self-esteem, more materialistic orientations and a greater susceptibility to consumption influences, it becomes clear that marketing and advertising can perpetuate the negative psychological consequences of living on a low income. Low-income consumers appear to enter in to a cycle of consumption whereby they attempt to cure the symptom (low self-esteem) with what may be the cause (consumption).

2.3.1.6 Coping mechanisms

A number of authors suggest that low-income consumers use certain mechanisms to cope with the negative impact of the consumption culture. For example, Henry (2004) explains that the lower classes assume a more present-orientated view of life, focusing predominantly on living a 'normal lifestyle'. That is, through cognitive deconstruction, low-income consumers narrow their thoughts to concrete and current happenings rather than consider the 'bigger picture', which might force them to consider their self and their identity in the greater scheme of things (Elliott, 1995). In addition, low-income consumers have been shown to be more externally orientated; they tend to attribute achievement or failure to an external loci of control such as fate or luck whereas high-income consumers tend to believe that they have personal control (Herzog, 1963). For example, Belk et al. (1982) compared high and low-income consumers' interpretations of consumption items and found that pictures portraying affluent lifestyles (big house, nice car) were categorised by low income consumers as belonging to lucky people. Their high income counterparts however, perceived these pictures as portraying the lifestyle of a hardworking and successful individual. Therefore it seems that by psychologically

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[6] This theory of self-esteem will be explored in depth in the following chapter

relinquishing responsibility for their poverty, low-income consumers attempt to deal with their feelings of deprivation without risking feelings of failure and low self-worth.

Other researchers suggest that low-income consumers cope with their circumstances by avoiding consumption. Carver et al (1989) refer to this as an avoidance strategy, whereby denying and resisting materialism prevents threats to self-esteem. This suggests that consumers, who live in subordinate positions with blocked mobility, develop oppositional practices in terms of consumption. Therefore, those who cannot partake in these consumption practices, may in fact develop a distaste for shopping (e.g. Lunt and Livingstone, 1992). Another coping strategy may be referred to as rational or active coping (Carver et al., (1989). For example Warde (1994) argues that by interacting with people from similar social backgrounds, consumers learn about appropriate consumption practices and thus alleviate their consumption anxieties and avoid embarrassment.

However, as will be seen, these methods of avoiding or coping with consumption pressures may not be applicable to low-income consumers living in disparate economic societies. Hooper et al., (2007) investigated the experiences of living in poverty as felt by those living in affluent areas as compared to those living in deprived areas and found that "Stigma was widespread and contributed to families' isolation. It was associated with poverty particularly for families living in more affluent areas" (pg. 4). Furthermore, it was found that families often experienced guilt due to their inability to meet their own and children's consumption desires and expectations. Given such reports, arguments for avoidance coping strategies amongst low-income consumers seem weak- specifically in consumer societies. In addition, the author argues that claims suggesting that avoidance coping and emotional distancing protects consumers' self-esteem (e.g. Elliott, 1995; Hill and Stephens, 1997) may be based on data which is inappropriate for conclusive findings. For example, in their research, Elliott (1995) and Hill and Stephens (1997) failed to explicitly measure levels of self-esteem and thus it remains possible that their chosen methodologies (focus groups) were not entirely appropriate for assessing self-esteem levels. Indeed, discussing a sensitive issue such as poverty in groups may cause consumers to try and disguise their true feelings on the issue. For this reason, thorough investigations- involving both qualitative and quantitative methods- are needed to ascertain the pertinent consequences of living on a low income in a consumer society.

2.3.2 Adolescent consumers; are they more vulnerable?

Consumption anxieties are prominent amongst those who invest heavily in identity formation (Warde, 1994). For this reason, it is somewhat surprising that teenagers are not a more closely examined segment; indeed the adolescent years are commonly referred to as the 'identity crisis' years where identity formation is at its peak (Clarke, 2003). Furthermore, given the onus on conformity and peer acceptance amongst them, adolescent communities are heavily stylised, there is a "kind of discipline or regulation over both self-image and consumer practice" (Warde, 1994, pg. 885) amongst them. Thus the symbolic nature of consumption and its use in personal and social identity formation suggests that teenagers are at greater risk of consuming the 'wrong' things. For this reason, the behavioural and psychological factors which are likely to predispose adolescents to high involvement in the consumer culture will be explored in the following sections.

2.3.2.1 The youth and adolescent markets

The size of the youth and teenage market proves the active involvement of adolescents in consumption society. In 2007 Thomas' "*Buy Baby Buy*" revealed the baby market (0 to three years old) is worth over 20USD billion alone. In addition, Palmer's (2007) "*Toxic Childhood*" assumes a more in-depth perspective in exploring the decreasing well-being of children and examines the factors that are 'toxifying' childhood today; including celebrity culture and aggressive marketing. More specifically, Schor's (2004) "*Born to Buy*" and Mayo and Nairn's (2009) "*Consumer Kids*" have brought attention to the characteristics of tweens and teens which are actively exploited by organisations to increase their market share. For example, in the UK alone, the teenage market (to the age of 19), is worth £12billion (www.tgisurveys.com, cited in Mayo and Nairn, 2009, pg. 5). Furthermore, this sum does not consider the enormous purchase influence that youth and teens have. If one includes the purchases that children influence in the household, the worth of the child market jumps to a drastic £99.12 billion (Mayo and Nairn, 2009). Marketing to children is the means by which to sell to parents, and with values like these it is no surprise that "young people as seen through the lens of business, could be described as the dominant force in the economy as a whole" (Mayo and Nairn, 2009, pg. 25).

The spending power of youth is clear, however the consequences upon their well-being is less well understood. The fact that children are growing older younger as the race to 'chiq' and 'style' speeds up (Schor, 2004); is bound to affect their development. This is particularly true because "marketing today is neither love nor hate for children, but the

very air that they breathe" (Mayo and Nairn, 2009, pg. 26). Thus, in order to understand the impact of marketing and commercialism on youths, we must first understand the nature of their development (Levin and Linn, 2003). For example, the teenage years between 14-16 are marked as an influential stage in terms of consumption (e.g Chaplin and Roedder-John, 2005). Furthermore, evidence from England and America suggests that higher rates of mental health problems exist amongst children who are pre-occupied with material possessions such as clothes and electronic goods (Ward, 2008). For this reason this culture of consumption may be "detrimental to its younger citizens' psychological well-being" (Kasser & Ryan, 1993, pg. 421) and must thus be investigated in order to inform possible policies and interventions for youth.

2.3.2.2 Impacts of child development.

2.3.2.2.1 Nature versus nurture.

Teenagers are particularly focused on the status signalling role of possessions. This is because their developmental stage - physical, hormonal and cognitive – differentiates them from older consumer segments. As a child's cognitive development progresses, so does his/her understanding of him/herself. The teenage years are marked by immense psychological and physical changes and as a child's cognitive development progresses, so does his/her understanding of 'the self'; "One's self-concept becomes more psychological, more abstract, and more of a coherent, integrated self-portrait from childhood throughout adolescence." (Shaffer, 2002, pg 426).

According to Jean Piaget's (1960) Cognitive-developmental stages, adolescence pertains to the 'Stage of Formal Operations' which pertains to children above the age of 11. Piaget purports that at this stage, children are able to think rationally about abstract concepts as opposed to earlier stages where thoughts are centred purely on observable and factual facets. In terms of children's consumer socialization, John (1999) refers to children between 11 and 16 as being in the 'reflective stage'. Entrance into this stage is thought to facilitate a richer understanding of people and the causes of their behaviour; enabling the development of meaningful relationships. However, Piaget's chronological and linear conception of development has been challenged by authors such as Nairn et al., (2008) who argue that when investigating consumption, more consideration must be given to non age-related factors such as gender, culture and living environment. Indeed, the researcher agrees that Piaget's strictly sequential conception of child development is not appropriate for the current investigation (children and consumption) because humans and indeed

societies are too complex to be studied in a manner which disregards external/environmental influences. Thus, this contextual approach to consumption-oriented research justifies the adoption of the Consumer Culture Theory approach in this study; both nature and **nurture** must be taken into account.

2.3.2.2.2 Social comparison

As the child enters adolescence, s/he is able to confirm or disconfirm their thoughts of the self through their behaviours, thoughts, feelings and others' responses to them. That is, by comparing themselves to others, they are able to set benchmarks for themselves according to valued behaviours and achievements; it is a vital part in the formation and understanding of the self. This is because (as will be seen in the following chapter) one's identity and concept of self are validated through social interactions (Jenkins, 1996) and are tightly bound to the appraisal of others (Wells and Marwell, 1976). Thus, upon entering adolescence, the need to belong to reference groups and the attainment of social status, become increasingly important (Ross and Harradine, 2004). The dominance of social comparison amongst teens is not only due to its impact on self-perception, but also, the extremely social environments that teenagers typically find themselves in; schools, social clubs, neighbourhood friends. The combination of identity insecurity and uncertainty and high levels of peer interactions, means that teenagers are constantly engaging in social comparisons. However, constant social comparison can both strengthen and weaken one's concept of self. If unattainable benchmarks are set, and cannot be reached, the individual may suffer from lowered self-esteem as a result of personal failure to form a desired identity (Young, 2004). For this reason, the social role of consumption in adolescent life is highly likely to impact upon their development.

2.3.2.2.3 Understanding the brand

As children enter adolescence (8-16), not only are they able to understand themselves (and others) in more abstract ways, but their cognitive development enables them to understand the symbolism of objects and brands. For this reason, material possessions become a more salient part of an adolescent's self-concept (Chaplin and Roedder-John, 2005). Furthermore, as Holbrook and Schindler (1994) point out, adolescence constitutes a particularly 'sensitive period' for the formation of brand preference. This is due to a qualitative shift from understanding brands on a perceptual level (focusing on observable and concrete features), to a more conceptual level (abstract, intangible features of a brand are appreciated) (Achenreiner and John, 2003).

Brand awareness and recognition occurs in early childhood. Thomas (2007) reports that from the age of only 18 months, infants are able to recognise and discern brands and by the age of two, they are asking for products by name. It is clearly not a lack of exposure which prevents young children from understanding the symbolic nature of the brand. Rather, adolescence allows them to associate brand images with social status, group affiliations and personality traits. Given the significance of these elements in self and group identity formation, it is not surprising that brands are in the forefront of the adolescent mind and result in a constant *demand* for popular brands (Achenreiner, 1997). For example figures have shown that, whereas 49% of 13-16 year olds prefer wearing clothes with a well-known brand, only 41% of 11 and 12 year olds do (Keynote, 2002). Brands are more important in the teenage years as they are starting to form self-brand connections based on the congruence between the brand and their own personality, the brand user stereotypes and the use of the brand by reference groups (peer groups for example) (Chaplin and Roedder-John, 2005). Indeed, Hogg et al (1998) found that "the influence of peers and 'significant others' (such as sports stars) was central to the acquisition of consumption symbolism" (pg. 298).

Just as social contexts can influence brand use, brand use can equally influence social contexts and perceptions. For example, Dittmar and Pepper (1994) point out that, "a person's possessions will influence our perception of their social standing and, in turn their personal qualities."(pg. 237). Indeed this has been found to be especially true amongst low-income children, they judge the worth of a person and their potential suitability as a friend, based on whether or not they posses the appropriate brands (e.g. Elliott and Leonard, 2004; Roper and LaNiece, 2009). Similarly, reports of possession-related bullying in youth are common (e.g. Ridge 2002; Daly and Leonard, 2002; Mayo and Nairn, 2009). Given the power of brands and possessions in judging others, it follows that adolescents have strong socio-psychological motivations to consume brands. Through brands, adolescents "can project a self-image – which is often idealized – to others" (Chang, 2005, pg. 887). It is for this reason that brand relationships have become "tools through which children grow up, gain competence, pursue the pleasure of life, fulfil their dreams, and become connected with others" (Ji, 2002, pg. 383). This is surely why, so many children pester their parents for the 'right' brands.

2.3.2.2.4 <u>Self-esteem development</u>

According to Chaplin and Roedder-John (2007), upon entering adolescence, individuals experience a reduction in self-esteem levels and as a result, turn to material possessions and brands in order to develop and communicate their identities, enhancement their self-image and facilitate social inclusion. Therefore, considering that teenagers use brands to reinforce their own identity and judge that of others, brands are also likely to be involved in perceptions of self-worth (e.g. Piacentini and Mailer, 2004). For this reason it can be argued that to an extent, self-esteem has been commodified (Isaksen and Roper, 2010b).

2.3.2.2.4.1 Social inclusion and the shift towards peer influence

In order to deal with the changes that come with the teenage years, adolescents seek comfort by identifying and 'fitting in' with their peers through music, activities, language and often, clothes (Young, 2004). Indeed social inclusion and group homogeneity play a particularly important role in these years (Elliott and Leonard, 2004). Positive feedback from peers takes precedence because social inclusion is a pre-requisite of self-esteem (e.g. Leary et al ., 1995). This is why Ruble (1983) states that "the study of social comparison is of greatest interest during childhood, because this is when initial self-conceptions are being formed" (pg 136). The extreme importance 'fitting in' suggests that adolescents seek acceptance by consuming (and dressing) in ways considered to be acceptable by their peer groups. For this reason, Drake and Ford (1979) have argued that, "permitting adolescents to dress like others, may aid in the development of self and move them toward greater self-acceptance" (pg. 290). Possessions are closely linked to acceptance and acceptance is related to self-esteem; by this logic, possessions are important to the development of stable self-esteem (e.g. Isaksen and Roper, 2010b). However, as was previously explained, this use of products to gain self-concept clarity is counterintuitive. Furthermore, due to the high cost of continuous consumption, a restricted income is likely to contribute to low self-worth and thus "some kids are being set up to fail" (Mayo and Nairn, 2009, pg. 55).

In adolescence, consumption influences shift from parental and familial sources, to peers and mass media (e.g. Shim, 1996; Ward, 1974). For example, Moschis and Moore (1979) found peer influence to be the most important socialization agent in adolescence and Mandrik et al., (2005) found that strong peer influence actually outweighs intergenerational influences on brand preference. Bachman et al., (1993) specified that peer groups are especially influential in publicly consumed goods (for example clothing). Thus, considering the close social contact that adolescents have with their peers, most of

their possessions will be of a public nature and hence peer influence on consumption is likely to be especially strong. This is why, when children can physically bring items in to the school environment (e.g. as collectibles or lunch boxed), they often become 'must haves' as a result of their public nature. For this reason, peer pressure is avidly used by advertisers and marketers in adolescent-directed campaigns to increase product interest (Levin and Linn, 2003).

Furthermore, figures reported by Mayo and Nairn (2009, pg.29) show that 68% consumers trust consumption advice from peers; as opposed to the 76% who *do not* believe advertisements. This clearly shows that businesses benefit by encouraging word-of-mouth marketing amongst teenage peer groups. However, despite the sense of security gained from close affiliation with reference and peers groups, the close social interactions experienced by teenagers may not always provide security. This is because, in close social environments such as school, the differences between individuals within a group are immediately highlighted (van der Hoek, 2005/06). For this reason, and the extreme importance on fitting in, there is an imminent risk of social exclusion, bullying and hence lowered self-esteem.

2.3.2.2.4.2 Fears of bullying and social exclusion

There has recently been a stark increase in clothes-related bullying amongst teenagers (Dorothy Espelage, cited in Mayo and Nairn, 2009, pg. 67). This is most likely due to the fact that designer brands have become 'must have' items amongst adolescents and thus those without them, are bullied, excluded and judged as un-cool. Given the obvious display-aspect of clothing – specifically branded clothing- it is not surprising that the enthusiasm for the 'right' clothes, reaches its peak in adolescents. Indeed, of the £12billion worth of the adolescent-spending market, its largest proportion (£1.53bn) is thought to be spent on clothing and shoes (www.tgisurveys.com, cited in Mayo and Nairn, 2009, pg.5). As often expressed by child and adolescent respondents, "it's important that other people recognise them" (Ross and Harradine, 2004, pg. 23). The combination of an exceptionally social life-stage, an emphasis to fit in and the harsh judgements of peers, has brought about a powerful want (and indeed need) to possess the correct clothes. Indeed the stress and anxiety surrounding the 'right' clothing, has been expressed by children and adolescents themselves (e.g. Isaksen and Roper, 2010b). According to reports, having the correct and newest possessions is now considered to be the third most stressful concern amongst tweens (e.g. Page, 2007, cited in Mayo and Nairn, 2009, pg. 67). For an

adolescent, the fear of bullying and social exclusion encourages them to focus on consuming the correct possessions in order to alleviate their anxiety (Rindfleisch et al., 2009). For this reason, simply being able to dress in the 'expected' way has been suggested to contribute to social survival amongst teenagers (Piacentini and Mailer, 2004).

Despite the use of uniforms in British schools, 'essential' accessories such as mobile phones and MP3 players, quickly assume a status-signalling role. Furthermore, the content of the child's lunchbox is now a source and subject of bullying; consuming budget or own-brand foods, have resulted in bullying and name calling (e.g. Roper and LaNiece, 2009). As a result, parents spend large sums of money on providing their children with (often) luxury and expensive items "so our kids aren't pushed out" (Mayo and Nairn, 2009, pg. 65). Indeed, as noted by Miller (2001), through the consumption of branded goods, parents are able to convey their love for their children by buying them brands which help them to fit-in with their peer-groups, thus leading to social acceptance. Thus materialistic tendencies amongst adolescents appear to be enhanced not only by the rise in bullying, but also parental desires to show love to and protect their children.

2.3.2.2.4.3 Materialistic tendencies and susceptibility to influence

Materialism is associated with a strong need to belong (Rose & DeJesus, 2007), self-consciousness and social anxiety (Schroeder & Dugal, 1995), self-doubt and uncertainty (Chang & Arkin, 2002) and low self-esteem (Chaplin & Roedder-John, 2007). For this reason, materialistic teenagers may also be more likely to be influenced by marketing activities because their insecurity and low self-esteem means they are more likely to be influenced by peer pressure and advertising than those with stable self-concepts and high self-esteem (Achenreiner, 1997; Bearden et al,1989; Rose et al., 1997; Shim,1996). Auty and Elliott (2001) provide clear evidence for the strong link between a desire to identify with peers and the tendency to buy top fashion brands. It follows that those who are more susceptible to consumption influences, may develop materialistic tendencies and be more likely to seek out top fashion brands.

It seems that a cycle exists; consequences of inadequate possessions include bullying and social exclusion which may contribute to lowered self-esteem and uncertainty, and in turn this uncertainty is likely to contribute to an increased susceptibility to peer and media influence as well as materialism. Furthermore, materialism may detract from self-concept

and psychological well-being, which may once more contribute to a greater susceptibility and hence increasd materialism.

2.3.2.3 Marketing and advertising influences

The wealth and efficacy of adolescent-targeted marketing activities, greatly increases their chances of a high involvement in the consumption culture. Teen-targeted advertising appeals to their anxieties and insecurities and thus it is clear that advertising directed at teenagers, are continually exploiting their lack of knowledge of the persuasive intent and anxiety inducing techniques of advertising. The questionable tactics employed in child and adolescent marketing has been a topic of much debate and includes opinions from the fields of psychology, sociology, health and nutrition. The following section will examine theories of advertisement processing amongst adolescents and subsequently, the tactics used by promoters will be reviewed. It will become clear that the lack of cognitive defences, in combination with sophisticated methods, makes child-directed marketing a significant contributor to the increased materialism amongst today's youth. With regards to the aims of this thesis, these methods must be examined before the role of marketing and advertising can be implied in the negative psychological consequences of consumerism.

2.3.2.3.1 <u>Advertising literacy/awareness</u>

Investigations surrounding child advertising have predominantly focused on determining the age at which they are able to distinguish advertisements from regular programs, recognise their persuasive intent, and thus critically evaluate them and cope with them. As Friestad and Wright (2005) point out, there seems to be a search for a magic age whereby targeted advertisements are ethical and acceptable. However, as Nairn and Fine (2008) point out, the sophisticated nature of contemporary advertising – as opposed to traditional information based advertising- employs evaluative conditioning formats which are not solely dependant on cognitive developments. Furthermore, the majority of the research on child development and advertising were conducted between the early 70s and late 80s (Wright et al., 2005). This suggests that most research was based on Piaget's (1960) 'cognitive developmental stages' and thus may not be relevant to the methods used in contemporary advertising. Thus, as when exploring child development, children and adolescents' understanding of advertisements must be examined by means other than purely their cognitive development.

2.3.2.3.1.1 The shift from Piaget's stages

Evidence based on Piaget's (1960) cognitive development stages, claims that by eight years of age, the child understands 'selling intent' (Oates et al., 2003) and by the stage of formal operations (11 years plus), they are able to understand 'persuasive intent'. Based on this, it has been argued that children above the age of 11 are able to understand persuasive intent at the level of adults. However, several studies have shown that this is by no means the case. For example Livingstone and Helsper (2006) reviewed 50 studies of television advertisements' effect on food choice according to three age groups; 2-6, 7-12 and 12-16 years. They found no evidence to suggest that the oldest age group was any less persuaded than the youngest one. This clearly does not support the cognitive-developmental view; the understanding of persuasive intent has not altered the processing of the advertisement. Moreover, Rozendaal et al.(2008), found that although children understand selling intent by age eight, 12 year olds have no greater understanding of persuasive intent. These studies suggest that "merely having the concepts in some latent form does little if anything to prevent children from being led astray by advertising" (Moses and Baldwin, 2005, pg. 197).

2.3.2.3.1.2 Dual process models

So why are children more susceptible to advertising? Nairn and Fine (2008) point to the nature of contemporary advertising; the use of *evaluative conditioning* as opposed to the *explicit persuasive information* in the trade. This means that in today's advertisements, the products are associated with rewarding stimuli such as humour or fun. Therefore, exposure to these advertisements causes a positive emotional association with the product or the brand and an implicit (underlying and possibly unexpressed) attitude is formed. These implicit attitudes, in turn, can impact consumption behaviour and hence Mayo and Nairn (2009) explain that advertisements make use of 'implicit persuasion' (pg. 448). Dual Process models in neuroscience make use of the terms implicit and explicit attitudes, when referring to subconscious and conscious, attitude formation, respectively (e.g. Gawronski and Bodenhausen, 2006). Thus, the fact that advertisements can *implicitly* persuade the consumer means that the persuasion is unnoticed. This is precisely why an explicit understanding of persuasive intent in the 'formal operations' stage will **not** prevent children above the age of 11 from being affected by advertisements in today's day and age.

2.3.2.3.1.3 Neurological developments

Sherman et al (2008) explain that cognitive control is needed to override the formation of implicit attitudes and facilitate accurate judgement. However the parts of the brain which underpin cognitive control are not completely developed amongst adolescents (Giedd et al, 1999). As explained by Wallis (2009), the brain areas associated with planning and control are the last sections of the brain to be shaped. With these facts in mind, it can be argued that teenagers are literally, not neurologically developed enough to override the formation of implicit attitudes as encouraged by evaluative conditioning in advertising. It seems that "contemporary formats (of advertising) deliver subtle affective associations rather than a rational or factual message, and are therefore perfectly placed to bypass children's explicit persuasion knowledge and instead persuade implicitly" (Nairn and Fine, 2008, pg. 448).

Furthermore, the brain centres responsible for cognitive control, are also responsible for planning, prioritizing, organising, weighing-up consequences and suppressing impulses (Wallis, 2009). Indeed, this helps to explain a number of typically irrational adolescent behaviours and in the context of consumption, this suggests that adolescents may not have the neurological ability to understand the consequences of their demands for expensive possessions. Therefore, it is no wonder that the hysteria and pressure to buy specific brands and luxury products often results in conflict; it would seem that parents and their children do not see 'eye to eye' or indeed 'brain to brain'.

2.3.2.3.2 Advertising tactics; social comparisons and perceived affluence

Contemporary advertising strategies do not only use evaluative conditioning to form implicit associations with a product, the associations created are most often couched in fear. Advertisements appeal to teenage vulnerabilities in order to persuade them that the product is a 'must-have'. Most often, these vulnerabilities refer to typical teenage concerns such as social inclusion, status and often, affluence. For example, LaPoint and Hambrick-Dixon (2003) explain that "the fashion industry capitalizes on the developmental status and needs of youth when marketing dress." (Pg 236). This helps to account for the disproportionately high spending on clothes in the adolescent market.

Social comparison, social status and the depiction of 'cool' are often key themes in adolescent advertising (eg. Klein, 1999; Del Vecchio, 2002). As reported by Harris (1989) "advertising at its best is making people feel that without their product, you're a

loser…Kids are very sensitive to that…because they're the most emotionally vulnerable" (pg. 1). Despite the fact that this was said 20 years ago, it still holds true; strongly suggesting that it is an effective strategy. Indeed, it has been noted that amongst adolescents, low self-esteem is correlated with a tendency to compare oneself to advertising material (Martin and Kennedy, 1993). Subsequently, as a result of low levels of self-esteem and their inability to override implicit persuasion, teenagers will associate the product with the ideal depiction and hence be more motivated to purchase it. This strategy is particularly effective with teenagers due to their socially motivated consumption habits. Indeed, "from a business perspective, consumers with social/conspicuous oriented decision-making styles can be a marketer's dream" (Shim, 1996, pg. 567); that is why teenagers in particular are so heavily targeted. Amongst adults, the conspicuous motivation to consume is lessened by the fact that they have (predominantly) come to terms with their identity and have less need for social acceptance.

Marketers 'raise the bar' for social comparison and as Richins (1991) points out, advertisements are created to engender upward social comparisons which make their viewers feel inferior. Indeed, "We are all potential victims of invidious comparisons of reality to the world seen in advertising. Once convinced that the grass is greener elsewhere, one's own life pales in comparison and seems a life half-lived" (Pollay 1986, pg 27). As a result, these feelings of inferiority create motivations to consume objects likely to disguise perceived inadequacies. In addition, the effect of social comparison is especially potent amongst adolescents, Martin and Kennedy (1993) found that in comparison to 4th and 8th graders, 12th graders' standards for beauty were more increased after exposure to advertisements. Although this study concerned advertisements of beauty products, it seems reasonable to assume that the effect holds true across different product ranges.

2.3.2.3.3 Social uses of advertisements

The extent to which the depiction of these idealised lifestyles are believed and incorporated by consumers will depend on their contextual circumstances. As consumer culture theorists argue, effects of consumption must be placed in context; and advertising interpretation is no different. This is because an individual or group's life themes will shape their reading and interpretation of advertisements (Mick and Buhl, 1992) and thus, adolescent peer groups will use and interpret advertisements in a unique way. Indeed this was shown in an in-depth qualitative study by Ritson and Elliott (1999) who found that amongst teenagers, popular media plays a large part in social interactions, they have a

phatic role in their lives. For this reason, the messages and ideals depicted in advertising have the potential to be truly engrained in the social lives of teenagers. For example, the authors note that simply having seen an advertisement helps to socially include them; "they were merely displaying a post-modern manifestation of an age-old teenage phenomenon: the need to fit in." (Ritson and Elliott, 1999, pg. 266). Furthermore, slogans and ideas from campaigns were often interpreted by the teenagers and subsequently became rituals amongst peer groups. Ritson and Elliott (1999) showed that teenagers are indeed 'interpretive agents'[7] because they often discuss and explain the meanings of advertisements with each other. Therefore, the interpretations of the advertisement are truly embedded in the social rules and realities of the adolescent life. Considering that the frequency of peer communication surrounding advertising is positively related to conspicuous consumption and brand consciousness (Moschis and Moore, 1978), one can argue that the social uses of advertising by teenagers is likely to make them a particularly impressionable target.

2.3.2.3.4 <u>Advertising exposure</u>

Although the developmental stage of adolescents, makes them more susceptible to advertising influences, the sheer amount of exposure to advertising also plays a large part in their tendency to consume conspicuously (Shim, 1996). The UK holds the highest penetration of television in Europe with 97% of all households owning one or more televisions (Mintel, 2005). Furthermore, 79% of 10 to 15year olds in the UK have a TV in their bedroom and 40% of parents admit to allowing their children to watch TV unsupervised (BSC/ITC, 2002; cited in Muto, 2004, pg. 38). This has meant that the average UK tween will spend 2 hours and 36 minutes in front of the TV a day (Childwise, 2007/8) and consequently be exposed to copious amounts of advertising. Furthermore, because television viewing is often unsupervised, children are likely to be exposed to advertisements intended for an adult audience. For this reason, some hold the view that " Children who spend 5 hours a day watching television are ingesting images that water the negative seeds of craving, fear, anger and violence in them" (Hanh, 1998, pg. 33).

Furthermore, product placements in television and music videos can target even those viewers who avoid traditional TV advertising (Reijmersdal et al., 2007; Roehm et al., 2004). Furthermore, despite the opportunity provided by digital television to fast-forward advertisements, they can still influence the viewer. Brasel and Gips (2008) have shown

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[7] As termed in Consumer Culture Theory

that viewers focus on the centre of the screen whilst fast-forwarding, and hence brand information placed there will be processed by the viewer. Furthermore, Robert (2009) showed that low levels of attention on advertisements can still build consumer perceptions of brands. This means that even when they are not paying close attention to the television (for example when advertisements come on) viewers are still being affected by advertisements.

The influx of media and technology in our lives is of particular importance to the younger age groups; "technology is no longer part of children's lives- it is part of them" (Mayo and Nairn, 2009, pg. 112). By the age of 16, it is considered abnormal if one does not own a computer and boys and girls in high school have a mobile phone ownership of 90% and 98% respectively (Childwise, 2007/8). Aside from connecting them to the world, this technology also connects teenagers to new forms of advertising. For example, Mayo and Nairn (2009) point out that teenagers frequenting social networking and chat room sites such as Myspace, Bebo and brand websites are in effect the easiest targets. This is not only because of the amount of advertising on these sites, but also because they are often disguised (as games or video clips) and hence cannot be avoided by even the most advert aversive internet users. For example, "advergames create a bond with the brand based on emotions of winning and losing" (Mayo and Nairn, 2009, pg. 187). Furthermore, the presence of brands on social networking sites such as BeBo and Myspace, means that teenagers are now able to communicate directly with the brand itself, thereby forging a close relationship with it and increasing the likelihood of repeat purchase. Brand-sites and personalities such as these often serve to recruit young children to endorse their products, thereby benefiting from 'insider' word-of-mouth marketing as well as an incredibly detailed insight into their target market.

Similar tactics are also used via the mobile phone. For example, there are companies who offer children and teenagers free text messaging if they agree to receive promotional and advertising material directly to their phones (see Mayo and Nairn, 2009). It is not surprising that this is popular amongst teenagers and despite thinking they may not be affected by these promotions, the implicit evaluative conditioning used in the adverts, means they probably are. Considering the concern around television viewing and suggestions of curbing exposure, it seems logical that adolescents' exposure to alternate forms of advertisement should also be curbed. However, the problem lies in how one can possibly control a teenager's mobile phone, internet, gaming *and* television usage.

2.3.2.3.5 Conclusions

Adolescents are a highly targeted consumer segment due to factors which make them particularly susceptible to consumption pressure; it is central to their lives. Not only are they at a social and psychological developmental stage which increases their focus on social comparisons and consumption, but they are also targeted with copious and intelligently designed advertising. The fact that they are particularly concerned with social inclusion and fitting in, means that the need and want for the latest (often branded) good is guided and enhanced by peer pressures. As a result, threats of social exclusion, bullying and ultimately lowered self-esteem, are strong motivators for consumption. Advertisements also play a large part. Teenagers are particularly susceptible to influences which play on social anxieties and suggested 'normal' ways of living. Furthermore, the amount of advertising targeted at teenagers, their social uses of them and a lack of defence against their persuasive intent, suggests that teenagers are effected by their own social circumstances as well as the marketing tactics employed by producers. Furthermore, the negative consequences of consumerism tend to multiply as a result of the relationship between low self-worth and increased consumerism.

2.3.3 Low-income adolescent consumers; the shortest end of the poverty stick?

The literature and evidence presented thus far, implies that low-income and adolescent consumers are 'at risk' groups who are highly likely to assume a consumer orientation and thus experience the negative consequences of it (for example reduced well-being). Their consumption orientation seems to be influenced by similar factors; the need to belong, insecurity, low self-esteem, high rates of media exposure and reduced cognitive coping. Considering these similarities, one must ask, how are low-income adolescents impacted by the consumer culture in Britain? Do they receive the shortest end of the poverty stick?

In Britain, the likelihood of living in a low-income household is greater amongst children and adolescents than adults; although the number of children living in workless households has decreased in the UK, the proportion is still higher than in any other EU country (poverty.org.uk). UNICEF (2009) recently expressed the need for urgent action on child poverty when figures released in 2009 revealed that 1 in 3 children in the UK lives in poverty. Furthermore, when examining the effects of these poverty rates, UNICEF highlights the need to consider a) material well-being, b) health and survival, c) education and personal development, d) social inclusion and participation. Therefore, considering

the consequences of living on a low-income, in combination with the developmental characteristics of adolescents, the need for considering material well-being, social inclusion and participation amongst low-income adolescents is paramount. Poverty has clear negative consequences and these are likely to be exacerbated when one is at a key stage of development in one's life.

2.3.3.1 Common denominators and double impacts

2.3.3.1.1 Environment

Consumer socialisation refers to the "process by which young people acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes relative to their effective functioning as consumers" (Ward, 1974, pg 2) and it has been shown to directly affect consumption patterns. Page and Ridgway (2001) compared the consumption environments of low and high-income children and found that their environments accounted for their consumption knowledge and patterns. For this reason, when one considers the effects of a low-income environment, in combination with the highly social environment of adolescents, it is reasonable to assume that feelings of inadequacy resulting from restricted income will be exacerbated amongst low-income teenagers. The negative impacts of consumer culture are doubled; low-income adolescents will experience feelings of social exclusion as a result of poverty and thus, they will be more motivated to consume because they do not have the cognitive defences to resist materialism. The result is likely to be elevated feelings of social exclusion which may magnify the already negative, psychological experiences of living in poverty (Ridge, 2002).

2.3.3.1.2 The quest for 'normal'

Another common denominator between low-income and adolescent consumers is their quest for normality. Thus, if one combines the consumption motivations of low-income consumers – *conspicuous consumption and reaching status quo* - with that of the typical adolescent - *fitting in-* the impact is multiplied. For example, an adolescent may experience heightened feelings of deprivation due to a low-income, but when the additional, importance of fitting in is added; the result may be doubled. Indeed, younger children are spared this double impact as they are less likely to comprehend the socioeconomic differences amongst them. This is because they are less aware of the role of money and are less likely to compare themselves on this basis. Furthermore, younger

children are more likely to attend nursery, kindergarten and pre-school in more socially homogenous areas than teenagers (Rosenberg and Pearlin, 1978).[8]

Considering that adolescents and low-income consumers have a greater desire to fit-in and the means by which to do so often involves the consumption of popular, expensive and branded goods, the likelihood of avoiding the negative impacts of poverty may be reduced. Indeed, studies have shown that a tendency to comply with norms and a low-income amongst adolescents are associated with a tendency to seek and display popular brand names (Auty and Elliott, 2001; Rose et al., 1997). For this reason, it is not surprising that adolescents of a low socioeconomic status value financial success aspirations above those of self-development and community (Kasser et al., 1995); they do not want to be associated with poverty. The result: the wants and needs of low-income adolescents are increased but their resources to consume are not -they are left with feelings of exclusion and low self-worth.

2.3.3.1.3 Low self-esteem

Low-income adolescents have a particularly low self-esteem and given the links between low self-esteem and susceptibility to consumption influences, they are also more likely to be motivated to consume. Furthermore, the insecurity and uncertainty experienced by both adolescent and low-income consumers, is likely to contribute to their materialistic tendencies and their susceptibility to consumption pressures. The likely result therefore, is that low income adolescents will be extremely motivated to consume; they are dealing with not only their personal insecurities, but the social consequences of them. Once again, the desire to acquire is increased yet the resources are not. Furthermore, despite claims that maturing adolescents experience a progressive increase in self-esteem and security which reduced their materialism (Chaplin and Roedder-John, 2007), this is less likely to be the case for low-income adolescents. Low-income teenagers are likely to experience persistent feelings of insecurity due to their perceptions of deprivation.

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[8] Care and education facilities for younger children are likely to be situated in local areas whereas adolescents often travel long distances for secondary schools; often taking them to socioeconomic areas which are of a higher level than their own.

2.3.3.1.4 <u>Advertising and communication</u>

Advertisements and inefficient family communication are contributors to the formation and maintenance of materialistic tendencies. Considering that exposure to television advertisements is greatest amongst the low-income and adolescent consumer segments, adolescents from low-income households are likely to be exposed to an exceptional amount of advertising. Moreover, the level of family communications (which has been shown to stem the development of materialistic orientations) is lower in low-income households. Churchill and Moschis (1979) found that the higher the social class of the teenager, the more interaction s/he has with parents and the less television viewing. Therefore it seems that low-income teenagers have little to no defence against the development of materialistic tendencies.

In light of the coping strategies reviewed previously, it seems that low-income teenagers are less likely to put these into practice. Although they pertain to adult consumers, the adolescent pressures of social inclusion, are less likely to allow for avoidance coping strategies. That is, adolescents may not be capable of resisting materialism due to its centrality to the formation of their self-concept/identity and their interactions with their peers. Furthermore, the phatic role of television advertising amongst teenagers, suggests that it is impossible to avoid completely (Ritson and Elliott, 1999).

2.3.3.2 Need for investigation

The adverse effects of living on a low income (especially during childhood and adolescence) in a rich society are plentiful. Social exclusion due to a lack of funds and product availability, coupled with incidents such as bullying and feelings of low self worth, may ultimately result in a damaged self-concept and low self-esteem. Furthermore, the negative consequences of materialistic values and consumption orientations amongst low–income adolescents include a) heightened feelings of deprivation b) lowered self-esteem and perceptions of inadequacy due to social comparisons c) lowered self-esteem as a result of the external focus placed on materialistic values d) social exclusion due to lack of 'correct' possessions d) insecurity resulting from bullying e) increased susceptibility to consumption influences and hence f) enhanced focus on material possessions for development. It is clear therefore, that the impacts of the brand-rich, consumption culture on low-income teenagers are psychologically harmful and difficult to avoid. There seems to be a catch-22: brands and material possessions are central to identity formation (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004) but having a materialistic orientation is likely to result in

lowered satisfaction and reduced psychological well-being (Kasser & Ryan, 1993). Restricted consumption in combination with extreme consumption pressures serve to exacerbate the negative consequences.

When considering children and adolescents, the most frequently documented effects of poverty are mental health disorders. For example, Keynote (2002) reports that one in seven children of unskilled workers suffered from depression and anxiety as opposed to one in 20 children from the professional classes. These figures are akin to ones published by the Department of Health in 2004 (cited in Mayo, 2005b, pg 28) which show that as gross weekly household income increases, prevalence of mental disorders amongst children decreases. However, if one includes the effects of branding, advertising and consumerism, it seems that the already negative consequences of living on a low-income may be magnified.

For these reasons, low-income adolescents must be studied, in order to identify and specify the factors which contribute to these effects and how they are inter-linked. That is, "Understanding how self-brand connections are made for lower-income children… could point to additional factors that influence the process of development" (Chaplin and Roedder-John, 2005, pg. 128). This will allow for a greater understanding of the relationships that low-income adolescents have with brands and would therefore provide insight as to how to curb the extreme want and need for them.

Indeed, previous work has identified key factors which contribute to adolescent consumption and have been interpreted to build a model of adolescent consumer behaviour. This will be used as a framework in the current thesis, in attempts to decipher the intricacies of the relationships between poverty, materialism, self-worth[9], self-concept, consumption pressures and identity formation. Thus, Isaksen and Roper's (2008) 'Vicious cycle model' is explained below.

2.4 The Vicious Cycle Model

When considered in conjunction with each other, the findings presented above, suggest that there seems to be an interplay between the factors which contribute to an individual's consumer orientation and the likely effects of having such an orientation. Furthermore, these factors appear to be linked in a cyclical manner which may result in a self-

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[9] 'self-worth' and 'self-esteem' are used interchangeably in this thesis.

perpetuating cycle of consumption. Thus, due to the large number of factors and the complex relationships between them, a model was created to visually depict the vicious cycle of adolescent consumer involvement; as shown in figure 2-2. This model (created by Isaksen and Roper, 2008) assists the reader in envisaging consumption amongst teenagers (links B to E). Furthermore, link A illustrates the possible additional impact of living on a low income. The data collected and the results presented in this thesis, will be related to the links in the model.
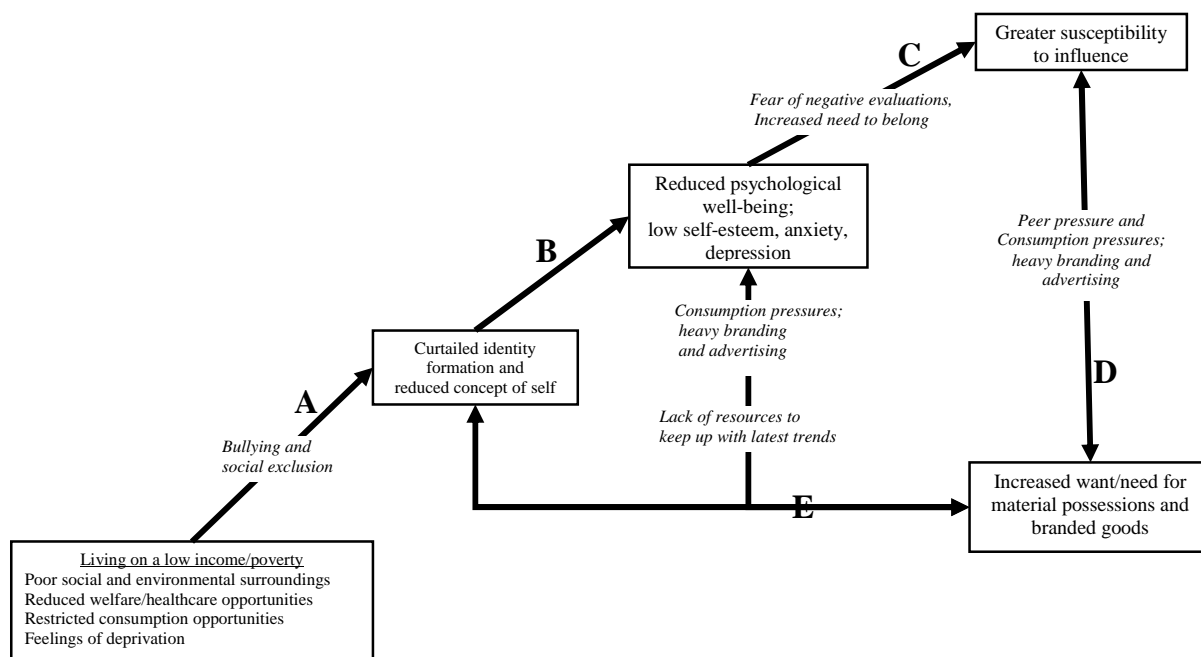
Figure 2-2 The vicious cycle model

Table 2-1Examples of evidence for links A-E in the vicious cycle

Link A	Ridge (2002); Piacentini and Mailer (2004); Isaksen and Roper (2008); Hill and Stephens (1997)
Link B	Henry (2004); Kasser and Ryan (1993); Elliott (1995); Campbell et al. (1996)
Link C	Leary et al.(1995); Rose et al. (1997); Bearden et al. (1989); Rose and DeJesus (2007)
Link D	Flouri (1999); Richins (1991); Moschis and Moore (1982); Nairn et al (2007); Shim (1996).
Link E	Kasser and Ryan (1993); Schor (2004); Elliott and Leonard (2004) Chang and Arkin (2002); Chaplin and Roedder-John (2007); Rindfleisch et al. (2009)

2.4.1 The core cycle

The core of the model (links B, C, D, E) is applicable to adolescents from all socioeconomic levels. However, with the inclusion of link A, this cycle is thought to be perpetuated; low-income adolescents are thought to receive the 'shortest end of the poverty stick'. In terms of adolescents in general, the argument is as follows:

The identity crises experienced during adolescence, result in a reduced self-concept and insecurity which contributes to reduced self-esteem, anxiety and overall reduced psychological well-being (**Link B**). Those with reduced self-esteem are likely to have a heightened need to belong and a greater fear of negative evaluations, which is likely to make them more susceptible to interpersonal consumption influences **(Link C).** Increased susceptibility to consumption influences, in combination with peer pressure and consumption pressures (through heavy branding and advertising) may heighten the focus on materialistic values and thus may contribute to an increased need and want for specific (often expensive, branded) goods (**Link D**). A materialistic value orientation in turn, is likely to detract from intrapsychic and personal development and thus may contribute to reduced psychological well-being (**Link E**). Simultaneously however, a reduced concept of self, reduced self-esteem and heightened insecurity has been shown to contribute to the development of a materialistic orientation and desire for material possessions **(Link E)**.

2.4.2 Added strength as a result of low-income

If such a cycle is indeed occurring, it may suggest that commercialism and a consumer orientation contributes to the lowering of self-worth and social-psychological well-being of teenagers. Furthermore, the fact that low-income teenagers may have an initial disadvantage, may suggest that the cycle and hence its negative impacts are magnified amongst them. First, it has been shown that low-income teenagers are particularly prone to social exclusion and bullying. This is in turn is likely to curtail the development of a secure sense of identity (**Link A**). Secondly, this already reduced 'base level' of self-concept and identity, may suggest that their 'typical' adolescent insecurities are exacerbated and thus may contribute more strongly to the 'typical' adolescent reduction in self-esteem levels (**Link B is stronger**). Furthermore, considering that low-income adolescents may experience a sense of relative deprivation (in comparison to their high-income counterparts), their motivation to reach the 'status quo' (Henry, 2004) and their need to belong may be enhanced, thereby increasing their susceptibility to consumption influences (**Link C is stronger**). Subsequently, due to their restricted consumption

freedom, the peer pressure to consume may further contribute to their perceptions of deprivation, thereby increasing their want/need for material possessions (**Link D is stronger**). Finally, Link E is particularly important in this cycle because the combination of an increased desire to consume and a lack of resources, may result in heightened feelings of deprivation and thus social comparisons may once again contribute to a reduction in self-esteem and self-concept. Furthermore, because they are likely to have an already reduced self-esteem (in comparison to high-income adolescents) it may contribute more strongly to their want and need for status signalling and expensive goods to disguise poverty (**Link E is stronger**).

This proposition agrees with Kasser and Ryan (1993) who state that "Individuals dispositionally high on broad factors such as neuroticism, or those with low security and sense of well-being, may be more prone to view money as a means of self-enhancement. A cycle may then be initiated that maintains, or possibly deepens, the original sense of contingent worth" (pg 420). For this reason "Children with emotional problems will be helped if they disengage from the worlds that corporations are constructing for them" (Schor, 2004, pg 16).

If the links between the above variables, are confirmed, it may assist in the identification of directed strategies which are likely to break, or reduce the strength of this consumption spiral. For example, as Schor's (2004) study found, "desiring less, rather than getting more, seems to be the key to contentment and well-being" (pg. 172). This is because the very individuals (poor) who cannot *afford to want* branded clothing, do so the most. In other words, those who suffer in the consumption culture may be the ones who are more prone to being involved in it.

2.5 Summary

It seems likely that in comparison to other consumer groups, low-income adolescents may experience the most negative consequences of the consumption culture. As has been seen, their poverty, social context and developmental status, make them particularly prone to the antecedents and consequences of a strong consumer orientation. Thus, the creation of a conceptual framework of the cycle of consumption (vicious cycle model), is likely to provide structure and directions to the investigation of the impact of consumerism on low-income adolescents. The elements in the model (for example self-esteem, self-concept, materialism) can thus be tested using quantitative scales and various analyses which will

provide some indication of their relationship to each other. It will then be possible to ascertain the most important elements of the cycle and hence the elements that require urgent attention. The existing scales used, will be explained in chapters four and five however, as will be seen in the following chapter, it is first necessary to develop a valid and reliable scale to measure self-esteem in British adolescents. Moreover, considering the close link between self-esteem, identity and brands, and the prevalence of consumption in today's society, it is likely that the construct of self-esteem includes elements of consumption (e.g. Isaksen and Roper, 2010b).

Chapter 3. Literature Review Part 2 - Self-Esteem

The previous chapter clearly highlighted the role of self-esteem in the 'vicious cycle' of consumption. Indeed, self-esteem is often considered as an intervening variable in the actions and behaviours of individuals and societies (e.g. Burr and Christensen, 1992; Denissen et al., 2008); it has been argued to be a variable in the realms of anti-social behaviour, group conformity, personal development and performance (e.g. Owens, 1994; Janis and Field, 1959). Indeed, "self-esteem has been shown to have a pervasive impact on human behaviour" (Campbell, 1990, pg. 538). If this is the case, then it is undoubtedly of great importance to not only understand the bases of the formation of self-esteem but also to explore its impact on consumption behaviours. However, as was explained in the previous chapter, many of the studies which examine the relationship between consumerism/materialism and self-esteem (eg. Hill and Stephens, 1997; Elliott, 1995), have used either indirect or questionable measures when considering self-esteem. It seems that, despite the vast evidence for consumerism's relation to self-esteem, few studies provide evidence derived from reliable, applicable and valid measures of self-esteem. For example, despite claiming to prove the causal direction between low self-esteem and materialism, Chaplin and Roedder-John's (2007) evidence is collected using the Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). As will become clear in this chapter, although it is widely used, the validity of the RSES as a self-esteem measure is questionable. Thus, despite their keen interest in the relationship between self-esteem and materialism, Chaplin and Roedder-John (2007) failed to critically assess the tool used to measure self-esteem and thus their results may lack accuracy. Furthermore if, as they suggest, materialism can be counteracted by boosting adolescent self-esteem, it is surely necessary to first have a solid understanding of the determinants and development of self-esteem amongst adolescents. Considering the complexity of the concept of self-esteem and its relationship with constructs such as self-concept, need to belong, susceptibility to influence and materialism, it is clear that a reliable and up to date measure is required to truly ascertain its role in consumerism.

Perhaps a reason for the lack of understanding of the term self-esteem, is due to the confusion caused by the varying and vague definitions assigned to it (Blyth and Traeger, 1983). Despite being one of the oldest psychological concepts referred to in the psychology literature (Rodewalt and Tragakis, 2003), self-esteem is neither sufficiently defined nor measured when it is used as an intervening variable (Wells and Marwell, 1976). Furthermore, as self-esteem is increasingly referred to in social, psychological and educational research (Burr and Christensen, 1992) a 'common sense' perception of self-

esteem seems to have developed. For example, in 1989 a literature search revealed over 6,500 articles specifically containing 'self-esteem' and over 30,000 which used the term 'self' in some way (Kitano, 1989). The resulting "everyone-knows-what-self-esteem-is approach" (Wells and Marwell, 1976, pg. 8) has created a wealth of vague definitions which in turn affect the ways in which the construct is conceptualised, operationalised and consequently measured and interpreted. This can quickly result in a number of different constructs which are (incorrectly) labelled under the same name. For example, in as early as 1989, over 200 measures of self-esteem were identified (Scheff et al., 1989). Moreover, as pointed out by Jackson (1984), a lack of replications and extensions of studies of self-esteem, have made it difficult to determine which findings can be considered worthy of pursuing and which are not.

Despite this large number of studies, "Self-esteem is a deceptively slippery concept about which there is a good deal of confusion and disagreement" (Wells and Marwell, 1976, pg. 5). For this reason, as shown in figure 3-1 below, the current chapter will begin with a review of the dominant conceptions of 'the self' and the resulting theories of self-esteem; including its definition, bases and formation. Furthermore, the debate surrounding the dimensionality of self-esteem will be addressed. Next, theories of the function and purpose of self-esteem will be presented and hence, the importance of its consideration and measurement will be explained in terms of the current research context. This will lead to a review of five dominant self-esteem measures and subsequently, their strengths and weaknesses will be considered in terms of the scale-development issues they present and finally, the need for a new self-esteem scale explained.

It is clear from the aims of this thesis that a new measure of self-esteem is required in order to collect appropriate data. Therefore, a new scale will be developed for specific use on UK adolescents. It aims to tap into dimensions related to social acceptance and materialism. That is, what role do consumer culture, fashion and brands (or the lack thereof) play in determining self-esteem levels in adolescents? By combining a newly developed self-esteem scale with other psychological measures, this thesis will thoroughly examine the interplay between the concepts of self-esteem, self-concept clarity, susceptibility to interpersonal influence, the need to belong and a fear of negative evaluations. First however, the complex nature of self-esteem must be understood.

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│           THE SELF          │
│   -The concept of self      │
│   -Self-enhancement         │
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┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│            SELF-ESTEEM               │
│   -Theories of self-esteem           │
│   -Definitions of self-esteem        │
│   -Formation and bases of self-esteem│
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│      DIMENSIONALITY DEBATES          │
│   -Global versus specific self-esteem│
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│  THE FUNCTION AND PURPOSE OF SELF-ESTEEM     │
│   -The sociometer hypothesis                 │
│   -Relevance to this thesis                  │
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│      REVIEW OF EXTANT MEASURES       │
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│     SCALE DEVELOPMENT ISSUES         │
│   -Social desirability               │
│   -Contextual importance             │
│   -Sample issues                     │
│   -Reliability and Validity          │
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│     THE NEED FOR A NEW MEASURE       │
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Figure 3-1 Structure of the self-esteem literature review

3.1 The Concept of Self

In order to describe and define self-esteem, it is first necessary to understand what 'the self' is and how its conceptions have changed over time. This will enable a more grounded and clear understanding of self-esteem as the construct will be considered in the context of

previous findings, existing perceptions and current knowledge. This will highlight the aspects which have already been examined and confirmed, thereby signalling what remains to be clarified.

3.1.1 James (1890); I versus Me

William James (1890) is often cited as the first psychologist to consider the concept of 'Self' and is best known for his distinction between the self as a <u>subject</u> (*The I*) and the self as an <u>object</u> (*The Me*). 'The I' refers to a person's sense of self as a unique individual, the agent of experience. Conversely, 'The Me' relates to the specific characteristics which a person knows about him/herself and the extent to which they are a content of experience. Thus, when referring to social comparisons, it can be argued that it is 'The Me' which is being referred to. Furthermore, James (1890) argued that identity consists of three essential parts; the material me (the body, possessions and materials felt to be a part of the person), the social me (recognition by others) and the spiritual me (feelings and emotions about oneself). James (1890) believed that, in order to understand the self one must look not only at the three constituents of 'The Me' but also at the feelings and emotions that these constituents arouse. For this reason, James claimed that a person's evaluation of him/herself (now termed self-esteem) is dependent on his/her aspirations and the extent to which these aspirations are fulfilled. Furthermore, James (1890) argues that individuals have 'self-seeking tendencies', employed to preserve the self. An example of such self-seeking behaviour may be witnessed in an individual's collection of material possessions as a means of attaining positive attention from others (Wells and Marwell, 1976). Thus, in terms of the consumption literature, these 'self-seeking tendencies' are likely to be the cause of compensatory consumption and symbolic self-completion (as described by Wicklund and Gollwitzer, 1982).

3.1.2 Cooley (1902); 'The Looking Glass Self'

Cooley's (1902) subsequent conception of the self was based heavily on James's (1890) 'social me'; he presented the notion of the 'looking glass self'. Cooley (1902) argued that it is impossible to separate the self from one's social milieu because the understanding of oneself is largely determined by the way in which we perceive and interpret others' actions towards us; for example reward versus punishment and social acceptance versus exclusion. Thus, Cooley somewhat disagreed with James' 'I' because it refers to a more private conception of the self which, in his terms, was deemed inseparable from others'

conceptions. This notion suggests that the individual cannot exist without the presence and opinions of others. Indeed, this view is also held by evolutionary psychologists such as Leary et al (1995), who claim that the purpose of self-esteem is to mark the extent of social inclusion experienced by the individual. This theory will be thoroughly reviewed in a later section however, despite their differences, it is important to note that Cooley (1902) and James (1890) both agreed that the conception of the self is a social and conscious process.

3.1.3 Self-enhancement

Shortly after the presentation of these theories, Freud developed his psychoanalytical theory (see Freud, 1989). Freud's work focused mainly on his 'self-enhancement thesis' which can be likened to James' (1890) 'self-seeking tendencies'. It refers to the acts and behaviours -carried out by individuals -which are likely to result in positive feelings towards oneself. More recent clinical perspectives of the self, for example Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, have developed this self-enhancement thesis. For example, Maslow considers self-esteem as a pre-requisite of self-actualisation and thus refers to it as a 'dominance-feeling'- referring to feelings of superiority over others. This 'dominance-feeling' however, is more focused on elements of *competition,* whereas James' 'self-seeking tendencies' refer to the *fulfilment of personal aspirations*. As will be seen, this human need for self-enhancement (based on competition or personal aspirations) has plagued the measurement of self-esteem for some time. This is because, if respondents wish to see themselves (and be seen) in a desirable light, the likelihood of honestly reporting low levels of self-esteem will be reduced. The implications of this will be further explored in a later section, after the definition and measurement of self-esteem has been explored.

3.2 Self-Esteem

Although these early conceptions of 'the self' differ, they all agree that the self is conceived in relation to others, and that humans have an ingrained need for self-enhancement; be it through fulfilling one's own aspirations or attaining a feeling of superiority above others. The common denominator and indeed the crucial point of these theories, is that in conceiving one's self, there exists an element of evaluation. In an attempt to clarify the distinction between the conception and evaluation of the self, Wells and Marwell (1976) suggest that the 'person' refers to the individual's physical,

personality, psychological and social characteristics and the 'self' refers specifically to "some specialised cognitive or behavioural subset of the personality" (pg. 39). They argue that the self is the aspect of one's personality which is experienced and reflected upon; the "perceiver and the perceived are the same organism" (pg 39). This means that the self only exists insofar as it is conscious and reflected upon and these reflections are inextricably linked to social interactions. The importance of the evaluative element of self-esteem is clearly explained by Calhoun and Morse (2006) who purport that, when discussing self-esteem, "the key word that must be acknowledged is "satisfaction" (pg. 320). This is why the terms 'Pride' and 'Self-love' are so often used when referring to self-esteem (Allport, 1961).

Self-esteem clearly refers to evaluative aspects; from both the individual him/herself and their social circles. This evaluation procedure was exemplified in terms of possessions in the previous chapter. In order for a material object to positively contribute to self-worth, it must be positively evaluated by not only the owner, but also peer groups and the wider society (McCracken, 1986). Thus to a large extent, the evaluation of an object (including the self) is dependant on the appraisal by others and thus, when defining and explaining self-esteem, the role of others cannot be ignored.

3.2.1 Self-concept versus self-esteem

The first and most important step in examining the self, is to establish the distinction between 'self-concept' and 'self-esteem' (Calhoun and Morse, 2006). Fennell (1999) explains that self-*concept* refers to how a person knows himself (e.g. nationality, occupation etc.) and self-*esteem* specifically refers to the individual's opinion and value s/he places on him/herself. In addition, Campbell et al., (1996) have developed a measure of Self-Concept Clarity (SCC) which specifically assesses the extent to which an individual is clear and confident in their identity. Furthermore, SCC is often conceived as a prerequisite and antecedent of self-esteem (Calhoun and Morse, 2006). Such work illustrates the difference between self-conception and self-evaluation and thus it is clear that, if this distinction is not agreed upon, complications easily arise.

For example, in contrast to the above authors, Shavelson et al. (1976) argue that there is in fact no empirical evidence for the conceptual difference between self-description and self-evaluation; self-concept and self-esteem respectively. They argue that a description of the self will implicitly include an evaluative element and hence they use the terms self-

concept and self-esteem interchangeably. However, Shavelson et al. (1976) do agree that the term self-esteem is a more appropriate term to refer to that aspect of the self which specifically entails evaluation. Therefore, although the self-*concept* is evaluative to an extent (due to subconscious self-enhancement/ self-seeking tendencies), self-*esteem* is founded on these evaluations. For this reason, if some researchers consider self-concept and self-esteem to be the same construct and others understand them to be distinct, there are bound to be confusions encountered when operationalising, measuring and interpreting the self-esteem construct. If one assumes perspective A when interpreting data which is in fact based on perspective B, it is akin to comparing apples and oranges. For this reason, when investigating self-esteem one must be explicit, exact and under no circumstances assume that there is an element of common sense in its conception. Authors with contrasting conceptions of self-esteem, risk making predictions about behaviour and comparing individuals based on distinctly different phenomena (Wells and Marwell, 1976).

3.2.2 Definitions of self-esteem

Considering this confusion, it is not surprising that DeVellis (2003) stresses the importance of accurately defining a construct before conceptualising, operationalising and measuring it. For this reason, the next stage in understanding self-esteem, is to examine the various definitions previously assigned to it. As pointed out by Fleming and Courtney (1984), when a concept is defined too broadly, it loses its scientific utility and if it is defined too narrowly, it may restrict its applicability to various studies. This is indeed why "a clarification and definition of what is meant by self-esteem is essential" (Coopersmith, 1959, pg.93). However, the numerous theories of self-esteem vary in their specificity. These range from simple conceptions regarding self-esteem as an evaluative perception of the self, to more conceptually complex definitions which specify the particular dimensions of it (Blascovich and Tomaka, 1991). This section will present six theories and definitions of self-esteem ranging in conceptual complexity; from simple to complex. The theories presented are those which seemed to be most frequently cited in the literature.

3.2.2.1 Rosenberg (1965)

Rosenberg's (1965) theory of self-esteem stems from a sociological perspective; his investigations of the development of self-image (through evaluation) in adolescents, were couched in the context of the social milieu. Rosenberg (1965) defined self-esteem as "the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself;

it expresses and attitude of approval or disproval" (pg.5). Again the evaluative nature of self-esteem is clear. Rosenberg (1965) conceived the self as an object that could be evaluated independently in the same way as any other; "Putting it baldly, there is no qualitative difference in the characteristics of attitudes towards the self and attitudes towards soup, soap, cereal or suburbia" (Rosenberg, 1965, pg.6). However, if one considers James' description of 'self-seeking tendencies', Freud's 'self-enhancement theory' and Coopersmith's 'defensive self-esteem' it seems highly unlikely that individuals are able to evaluate themselves objectively, in the same way as they evaluate a bowl of soup. For this reason, it is surprising that despite such a bald statement, Rosenberg's (1965) theory of self-esteem continues to be regarded so highly. Although soup does not contribute to social survival, self-evaluations do. The implications of Rosenberg's conceptions of self-esteem will be further discussed when reviewing the efficacy of his Self-Esteem Scale (RSES).

3.2.2.2 Coopersmith (1967)

In a similar vein, Coopersmith (1967) defines self-esteem as a "personal judgement of worthiness that is expressed in the attitude the individual holds toward himself" (pg. 5). This definition is similar to that of Rosenberg's (1965) but does claim that individuals can evaluate themselves objectively. That is, Coopersmith (1967) argues that although self-esteem involves self-evaluation, there is a separate element to be considered; the individual's propensity to defensive behaviour. That is, as a result of defensive attempts to protect identity, the assessment of an individual's self-esteem, may reflect *defensive* self-esteem rather than true self-esteem. This is because individuals may behave in ways which suggest high self-regard, in attempts to signal high levels of self-esteem (Savin-Williams and Jaquish, 1981); a form of self-enhancement. Indeed this defensive self-esteem is prevalent in the 'me-oriented' culture of today, where boosting feelings of self-worth and value are key areas of concern. Thus, as opposed to Rosenberg (1965), in defining self-esteem, Coopersmith (1967) acknowledged the role of the individual as the subject *and* the object, the perceiver and perceived.

3.2.2.3 Cooley's (1902) Looking glass self

Cooley's work focused on the conception of the self and how an individual develops. According to Yeung and Levi (2003), this involves three stages; 1) Imagining how we appear to others, 2) imagining the judgement of that appearance and 3) the development of the self through the judgement of others. Therefore, considering the role of others'

perceptions and evaluations in forming the self-concept, it is likely that Cooley's (1902) definition of self-esteem involves a process whereby the imagined judgements of others are evaluated and subsequently assigned a level of satisfaction. This conception of self-esteem largely involves the opinions of others and thus suggests that measures of the construct must consider the fact that individuals are likely to present themselves in favourable ways. Therefore, as with Coopersmith's (1967) definition, conceptions of self-esteem based on the 'looking glass self' must consider such defensive behaviour.

3.2.2.4 Fennell (1999)

Fennell (1999) regards self-esteem as the value an individual places on him/herself and thus concurs with Allport's (1961) 'self-love' description. However, Fennel (1999) specifies that one's evaluation of the self is based on life experiences which alter one's perception of self-worth. This is a broader conception than that of, for example Cooley (1902), who focused simply on the fact that self-esteem was based on other people's opinions. Fennel's (1999) explanation for the formation of self-esteem will be presented in the following section, however, in terms of the definition of self-esteem, the distinction lies in the fact that Fennel (1999) explicitly acknowledges that there are a broad range of facets that impact an individual's level of self-esteem. Much like consumer culture theory highlights the importance of consumers' experiences on their consumption behaviour, Fennel (1999) recognises the importance of life context in self-esteem.

3.2.2.5 Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton (1976)

A more specific description of the elements of self-esteem was given by Shavelson et al (1976), who presented the 'hierarchical facet model' which depicts self-esteem as a hierarchical arrangement of specific dimensions which all contribute to an overall perceived self-worth. As described by Fleming and Courtney (1984), "At the apex of this hierarchy is general, or global, self-esteem. This general construct depends on these secondary ones, which are in turn determined by lower order components…" (pg. 404). For example if one perceives a certain domain to be important, and one considers oneself as competent in that domain, the secondary construct will increase and subsequently contribute to levels of general self-worth.

3.2.2.6 Harter (1988)

Shavelson et al's (1976) depiction of the direct relationship between global self-esteem and its individual components is contested by some. This may be due to the facts that, as previously mentioned, Shavelson et al, (1976) do not distinguish between the self-concept and self-esteem. For example, Harter (1988) agrees that "perceived competence or adequacy in domains rated as important is strongly predictive of self-worth" (pg. 4). Thus, a clear distinction between these two theories is that Harter (1988), in contradiction to Shavelson et al (1976), points out that the assessment of global/general self-worth is qualitatively different from an individual's judgement of their competence in specific domains (like physical appearance) (Eiser et al., 1995). In fact, Harter (1988) considers global self-worth to be a domain in its own right (as will be seen in her measurement instrument). This is possibly because Harter (1988) distinguishes between specific *competence perceptions* and *evaluations of the self* as a whole. In such a perspective, an individual can have low global self-esteem, but have a high personal opinion of their competence in certain dimensions, for example scholastic competence. In sum, Harter's (1988) conception of self-esteem differs from Shavelson et al (1976) because it does not assume that perceptions of one's competencies are universally and directly related to general feelings of self-worth. However, both authors agree that the facets related to - or contributing to - self-esteem, will vary depending on the specific interests of the individual.

On reflection of these different conceptions of self-esteem, two main elements of self-esteem are clear; the overall evaluation of the self, and more specific judgements of individual dimensions. Furthermore, as was made clear, there is a debate surrounding the structural relationship between these two elements. For this reason, the following section will present some of the most frequently cited theories of the formation of self-esteem and subsequently, the dimensionality of self-esteem will be discussed.

3.2.3 Formation and bases of self-esteem

Cooley's (1902) 'looking-glass self' highlighted the role of other people in the formation of self-esteem. Thus, if self-esteem is considered as an evaluative aspect of the self, it is clear that the evaluations will fluctuate according to the standard of the comparative base or experience upon which judgements are based. Thus, the role of social comparison processes cannot be ignored as they will significantly impact levels of self-esteem. An individual's self-concept (understanding) and self-esteem (evaluation) do not simply appear but are formed through incremental processes and are actively created through

lived experiences including living conditions, specific life events, relationships with peers/family and exposure to media and society in general (Fennel, 1999; Mechanic, 1991). By comparing oneself to such entities, one is able to confirm or disconfirm thoughts of the self through behaviours, thoughts, feelings and others' responses to them. Indeed this helps to explain why adolescents have particularly fragile senses of self-esteem (Chaplin and Roedder-John, 2007); they are constantly engaged in a search for identity and are continually comparing themselves to others and seeking acceptance. For example, if through interactions with peers, an individual is made to feel different or 'the odd one out' he/she may experience a sense of inadequacy which will subsequently impact their self-evaluation (eg. Janis and Field, 1959). Indeed this may help to explain the consumption behaviours of low-income consumers noted by Elliott (1995) and Henry (2004). Low-income consumers consume conspicuously in order to 'fit in' and reach the 'status quo' in order to protect their sense of identity and self-worth/esteem. This clearly illustrates the role of consumption in self-esteem.

3.2.3.1 Fennell's (1999) formation of self-esteem

According to Fennel (1999), a person's experiences (and indeed their perceptions of them) are the bases of self-esteem; they form a 'Bottom Line'. This 'bottom line' is an individual's cognitive representation of him/herself, and with reference to the bottom line, a person creates 'rules for living' which subsequently guide their actions and behaviours. For example, if we refer to the experience of being 'the odd one out' due to a lack of possessions, an individual's rules for living are likely to place emphasis on acquiring and keeping up with the latest fashion possessions, so as to avoid exclusion from social groups. This has been witnessed amongst low-income consumers; they tend to have greater and more socially-expressive consumption motivations (Elliott and Leonard, 2004). Thus, experiences of social (consumption) exclusion may create a 'bottom line' which creates rules for living- i.e. consumption. Furthermore, these rules of living are maintained by trigger situations (for example a peer's comment on clothing style), which reinforce the bottom line and further confirm it. Thus, according to Fennell (1999), the formation and maintenance of self-esteem is a cumulative and cyclical event. Indeed, this is why the effects of clothes-related bullying and consumption pressures are particularly damaging to low-income adolescents, they are continual reminders of a lower affluence (Link E in the vicious cycle model).

3.2.3.2 Rosenberg and Pearlin (1978) four bases of self-esteem

A more specific description of the bases of self-esteem is provided by Rosenberg and Pearlin (1978). Rather than generalising 'life experiences', they distinguish four specific mechanisms which are responsible for the positive or negative evaluations of life experiences and hence the self. These include Social Comparison Processes, Reflected Appraisal, Psychological Centrality and Self-Perception Theory.

The *social comparison process* is based on Festinger's (1954) 'Social Comparison Theory' and highlights the importance of social comparisons in the formation, understanding and evaluation of the self. By comparing oneself to others, an individual sets benchmarks for themselves according to the valued behaviours and achievements of others. This means that a person may have an ideal of how they wish to be (an ideal self) and subsequently, work hard to become that person through various means (for example wearing particular brands). Indeed, this was seen in the previous chapter when discussing the reasons for the efficacy of celebrity endorsement in advertising; celebrities are perceived as moral guidelines. This social referencing process is continual throughout development and can both increase and reduce self-esteem levels. That is, if the expectations of the self are too high and cannot be reached, a person may suffer from lowered self-esteem as a result of personal failure to form a desired identity (Young, 2004). Indeed, the perceived discrepancy between the ideal and actual self has been argued to be a process by which self-evaluation occurs (e.g. Cohen, 1959; Wells and Marwell, 1976). Furthermore, amongst adolescents, this social comparison process is at its height, due to the increased need for conformity amongst them (e.g. Costanzo and Shaw, 1966). For this reason, it becomes clear why teenage self-esteem levels are particularly influenced by their social surroundings. For example, Mechanic (1991) highlights that the consumption culture (with vast advertising and media exposure), portrays an idealistic (and materialistic) way of living to which people compare their own state of living. Thus, with regards to adolescents, it must be noted that "Differences in family status brought about by economic hardship reflected by dress, living conditions, or the father's employment status may be especially significant at this period of development" (Whitbeck et al., 1991, pg. 354. For this reason, the constant exposure to unrealistic and unattainable depictions of 'normal' can damage one's sense of self-esteem.

Reflected appraisal refers to the notion that individuals see themselves as they believe significant others (family, peers) see them. That is, "The child sees himself through the eyes of others, and what he believes they think of him largely affects his self-esteem"

(Rosenberg and Pearlin, 1978, pg. 73). This is akin to the Cooley's (1902) 'looking-glass self'. Furthermore, as with social comparison processes, reflected appraisal is particularly important in the formation of adolescent self-esteem. This is because, as compared to adults, the opinions and perceptions of one's social group determines acceptance and social inclusion (Clarke, 2003).

P*sychological centrality* refers to the importance (centrality) assigned to specific aspects of self-esteem; for example scholastic abilities or physical appearance. The role of such facets in formulating a general self-esteem level, depends on how important they are to the individual- how psychologically central they are. This psychological centrality of factors of self-esteem was addressed by Shavelson et al., (1976) and Harter's (1988) conceptions of self-esteem; they both agreed that the influence of the facet is dependant on its relevance to the individual. Furthermore in a study of the relation between specific and global self-esteem, Rosenberg et al (1995) provide empirical evidence for the importance of considering psychological centrality. Their study showed that the degree to which academic self-esteem affects global self-esteem "is a function of how highly academic performance is personally valued" (pg. 141). For this reason, the fact that adolescents place specific importance on clothing and fashion, suggests that it may be psychologically central to them and thus will impact their global self-esteem.

Therefore, in examining the experiences that influence an individual's self-esteem, it is essential that one considers whether or not, and how much, that experience is psychologically central to the individual or group being examined. This notion of psychological centrality plays a crucial role in developing appropriate measures of self-esteem because age, culture, media and social norms can all determine the dimensions that are psychologically central to consumers. However, Owens (1994) notes that when investigating self-esteem, researchers all too often, overlook the importance of psychological centrality and thus, "We need to become aware of the potential changes in the bases upon which self-esteem is evaluated" (Blyth and Traeger, 1983, pg.95). However, despite the large number of already existing self-esteem scales, none seem to consider the dimensions which are likely to be relevant to adolescents. For example, there are no scales which have attempted to include fashion and possessions in their dimensions.

S*elf-perception theory* (Bem, 1965) maintains that individuals perceive themselves as objects, based on observations of one's own actions and behaviours. This suggests that the way we draw conclusions about ourselves is akin to the way others draw conclusions

about us: through our overt behaviour. This claim once again raises the issue of whether the self is objective or subjective; is the self an agent of experience or an object of experience? Rosenberg (1965) clearly agrees with self-perception theory as he claims that individuals evaluate themselves in the same manner as any other object. Again, this seems unlikely because an individual's interpretation of their behaviour, is bound to be laden with their own personal and private interpretations. After all, their interpretation of behaviour is couched in the framework of their personal thoughts and experiences. However, despite this debate, the self-perception theory is useful in assessing the impact of certain situations on an individual's self-esteem. For example, the level of income in a household may not *directly* impact a child's self-esteem levels (because they are not themselves responsible for the low-income) but the child's level of self-esteem may be affected *indirectly* due to the consequences of the low-income. If a restricted income results in fewer and lower quality possessions for the child, his/her self-esteem is likely to be impacted by *his/her* clothes and others' reactions to them *rather than a parent's salary.* For this reason, "If we hope to appreciate the meaning of social class for the child, it is essential to see social class from his viewpoint, to adopt the child's eye view of stratification, to understand how it enters his experience and is processed internally" (Rosenberg and Pearlin, 1978, pg. 73). This need for a child-centred view in the research process is supported by the author and will be expanded upon in the following chapter.

Rosenberg and Pearlin's (1978) bases of self-esteem, again highlight the need to study self-esteem *in context.* For example, if one is to understand the milieu referred to in social comparison processes and reflected appraisal, one must consider the individual's social frameworks and their frequent social encounters. As noted by Owens (1994), the psychological centrality of any specific domain is likely to be context dependent; it will vary between age groups, nationalities and societies. To exemplify, a teenager attending high school and a college student are likely to have a drastically different social circles and thus their comparative bases and standards will differ. Furthermore, the lifestyle, social trends, cognitive abilities and social lives of individuals will affect what aspects of life are psychologically central or important; a professional footballer's self-esteem may be impacted by poor football ability but it is unlikely that an acrobat's self-esteem will be affected by a similar situation. For this reason, it is clear that when assessing self-esteem, it must be considered within a *relevant* context for the population being studied.

3.2.3.3 The Hierarchical Facet Model (Shavelson et al., 1976)

The 'Hierarchical Facet Model', organizes self-esteem in four levels, with the highest level termed 'General self-concept' (or self-esteem[10]). The second level is broken down between 'academic self-concept' and 'non-academic self-concept' (which includes 'social', 'emotional' and 'physical' self-concept). This second level is then further broken down into sub-areas of self-concept; 'academic self-concept' is divided between English, History, Maths and Science and the three non-academic self-concepts are split into specific sub-areas. That is, 'physical' self-concept is split between physical appearance and physical ability; 'emotional' self-concept is reduced to particular emotional states and 'social' self-concept is split between peers and significant others. Below these sub-areas of the self-concept are nodes representing 'Evaluation of behaviour in specific situations' (Shavelson at al., 1976, pg. 413). These evaluations of specific experiences are the building blocks for the sub-areas of self-concept and are akin to the lived experiences mentioned by Fennell (1999) above. Just as a person forms sub-areas of self-concept based on specific experiences (Shavelson et al., 1976), a person's 'bottom line'(s) is a result of experiences (Fennell, 1999). Therefore, whereas Fennel (1999) highlights the importance of experiences as the basis of self-esteem, the Hierarchical Facet Model, compartmentalises them into nine sub-areas. Thus, the model presents more specific dimensions of self-esteem. However, despite being more specific, the importance of psychological centrality is still considered; the sub-areas of the self-concept are arranged depending on the importance placed on that facet (Fleming and Courtney, 1984). Once again, the importance of context is clear.

3.2.3.4 Harter (1988) Self Perception Profile for Adolescents

Harter's self-perception profile for adolescents (SPPA) (1988) also presents self-esteem as consisting of specific dimensions/domains. However, Harter (1988) argues that global self-worth judgements are distinctly different from the specific domains, as opposed to simply being a sum of them (Eiser et al, 1995). Harter (1988) believes that adolescents' self perceptions are based on eight domains: scholastic competence, social acceptance, athletic competence, physical appearance, job competence, romantic appeal, behavioural construct and close friendship. The ninth domain is global self-worth.

With regards to the specific elements of self-esteem, the above four theories provide some indication of the facets which are relevant to self-esteem and should thus be considered in

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[10] Note that Shavelson et al., (1976) use the term self-concept and self-esteem interchangeably.

its assessment. For example, although they differ in their conceptions, the overlap between the SPPA and the Hierarchical Facet Model suggests that factors such as physical appearance, social acceptance, academic abilities, physical abilities and behavioural traits are staples in the formation of self-esteem. If this is indeed the case, theories and measures of self-esteem which overlook dimensions such as, physical and social acceptance, may not be assessing the complete construct. For example, in the RSES, there is no mention of physical appearance. This might indicate that physical appearance has become relevant to adolescent self-esteem only post 1965, or that the factors in the RSES have not been selected based adolescents' own views. However, considering the highly image-conscious society in which we live, and the great importance placed on possessions and brands as an extension of this, it seems unlikely that today's adolescents are not concerned with their physical appearance.

3.2.4 The dimensionality of self-esteem

"In the social sciences, self-esteem is a hypothetical construct that is quantified, for example, as the sum of evaluations across salient attributes of one's self or personality." (Blascovich and Tomaka, 1991, pg 115). The previous section sought to uncover what some of these salient attributes are, however, the ways in which general/global self-esteem is quantified, has yet to be determined (eg. Shavelson et al, 1976 versus Harter, 1988); indeed there is a persistent debate over the dimensionality of self-esteem (Owens, 1994). The opposing opinions regarding the bases of self-esteem raises questions as to whether it is in fact possible to assess general self-esteem or whether separate, dimension-specific measures of self-esteem are needed; for example academic and non-academic self-esteem (e.g. Rosenberg et al., 1995). Furthermore, if it is possible to measure global self-esteem, which dimensions are to be included and how should their importance (psychological centrality) be determined? Indeed this issue has plagued studies of the self for some time; there seems to be a "persistent debate in the social sciences over the dimensionality of self-esteem, particularly as it applies to global (i.e. situationally neutral and referent-free) self-esteem" (Owens, 1994, pg. 392).

3.2.4.1 Global versus specific self-esteem

Rosenberg et al, (1995) emphasise that there is a distinct difference between global and specific self-esteem; they claim that global self-esteem is relevant to psychological well-being whereas specific self-esteem (such as academic competence) is relevant to behaviour. As a result of this, the authors explain that many social researchers, including

policy makers, often assess the 'wrong' self-esteem. For example, it is of little use to assess global self-esteem when considering the impact of self-esteem on academic performance. This is in clear contrast to the hierarchical facet model (Shavelson et al., 1976) which considers specific self-esteem (dimensions) as direct contributors to *global* self-esteem. However, despite the debate over the distinction of global and specific self-esteem, both are important in attitude formation because the evaluation of any entity will consist of an evaluation of the object as a whole as well as its specific facets (Marsh et al, 1988). Indeed, it seems reasonable to assume that the specific aspects of self-esteem contribute to global self-esteem (Fleming and Courtney, 1984) however, the crucial element of this argument is the need to consider psychological centrality; these specific dimensions are not likely to equally contribute to global self-esteem. As put aptly by Rosenberg (1979), it is not "a *collection* but an *organization* of parts and pieces, and components are hierarchically organized and interrelated in complex ways" (pg. 73).

3.2.4.2 Global to specific or specific to global?

Although it seems sensible to assume that global self-esteem is dependant on specific self-esteem, evidence is needed to confirm this. Rosenberg et al., (1995) claim that theoretically sound arguments can be made for both cases; specific causes global and global causes specific self-esteem. This is because, through structural equation modelling, they found that specific self-esteem had a more powerful affect on global self-esteem than global self-esteem did on specific self-esteem; significant relationships of 0.12 and 0.21 were respectively reported. Furthermore, Rosenberg et al., (1995) found that this relationship was dependant on the value placed on the specific facet of self-esteem. The academic self-esteem of participants who valued academic performance had a greater effect on global self-esteem than amongst those who placed little value on academic performance; 0.23 versus 0.07 respectively. Furthermore, studies have noted that people tend to place less value on those aspects of the self in which they perform poorly (e.g. Harter, 1985). Just as a swimmer might not value his ability to play the guitar, a guitarist is unlikely to place great value on his swimming ability.

3.2.4.3 Conclusions

The issues involved in the dimensionality of self-esteem, calls to question what the best way to measure self-esteem might be. For example, the dimensionality of Rosenberg's (1965) 10-item RSES scale has been questioned on a number of occasions. Despite evidence for a unidimensional structure of the RSES (for example, Hensley, 1977;

Simpson and Boyal, 1975), other authors argue that it consists of two highly correlated factors (e.g. Dobson et al., 1979 and Hensley and Roberts, 1976). The issue of dimensionality is clearly not a straight-forward one. As stated by Eiser et al., (1995) "there may be no single answer to the question of whether self-esteem is better measured as a global or multidimensional construct" (pg. 432). For this reason, it seems that the most realistic and applicable way to measure self-esteem, is to include only the specific dimensions which are of high importance to the sample being studied (for example age groups, racial groups or socio-economic groups). Blascovich and Tomaka (1991) support this view and suggest that researchers use the level of specificity that seems theoretically justifiable and empirically sensitive. This means that before a measure of self-esteem is employed, its applicability and validity for the population must be carefully considered. The following section will critically review a selection of the most popular self-esteem measures, which will highlight the need for the development of a new scale to measure adolescent self-esteem amongst British teenagers.

3.2.5 The function of self-esteem

Research reaching as far back as the 19th century (e.g. James, 1890) has explored the complexities regarding the definition, bases and outcomes of self-esteem. Despite this vast amount of research however, very little attention has been given to the possible purpose of self-esteem in humans; few have questioned why it exists and what purpose it serves. Given the struggle to determine the antecedents of self-esteem, this is somewhat surprising because it seems sensible to consider the antecedents of the construct in the context of its purpose and function. For this reason, suggestions of the purpose of self-esteem must be considered.

3.2.5.1 Theories of the purpose of self-esteem

Leary (1999) has summarised the dominant theories regarding the function of self-esteem. Humanistic psychologists for example, purport that self-esteem serves to align the ideal and the real self. In this view, high and low levels of self-esteem signal the alignment, or lack of alignment between the ideal and real self. The Goal Achievement theory (Bednar et al., 1989) is similar to this in that it conceives self-esteem levels as feedback of the adequacy of   the self. Thus, high levels of self-esteem would indicate goal achievement and low self-esteem is a result of a failure to attain one's goals. Terror management theory was seen in the previous chapter when materialism was conceived as a defensive mechanism resulting from existential security (Rindfleisch et al, 2009). Likewise, in the

context of self-esteem, terror management theory suggests that self-esteem buffers people against their existential fear of death; in this sense, low self-esteem may be congruent with existential fear. The ethological perspective (Barkow, 1980) assumes a more evolutionary stance and suggests that self-esteem is needed to maintain dominance in social groups. This is because, in evolutionary terms, group dominance led to higher chances of mates, reproduction and social continuation. Indeed, such a theory is in line with the theories of self which note the need for self-enhancement and self-seeking tendencies; it explains why people have a need to boost feelings of self. A more recent evolutionary based theory was presented by Leary et al (1995) and is termed the 'Sociometer Hypothesis'. As will be shown, this theory assumes a more social perspective on the function of self-esteem, in that it serves to prevent the "disastrous implications of being ostracized in the ancestral environment in which human evolution occurred" (Leary, 1999, pg. 33). Thus, the historical and evolutionary purpose of self-esteem becomes clear.

3.2.5.2 The Sociometer Hypothesis

The 'Sociometer Hypothesis' refers to the relationship between self-esteem and social inclusion and argues that "the self-esteem system monitors others' reactions and alerts the individual to the possibility of social exclusion" (Leary et al., 1995, pg. 518). Therefore, self-esteem is likened to a fuel gauge, just as low fuel levels will motivate a driver to buy more petrol, a drop in self-esteem levels will motivate behaviors which are likely to restore an individual's inclusionary status. Indeed the sociometer hypothesis explains the emphasis that teenagers place on social inclusion and 'fitting in'; their self-esteem is low and thus their sociometers provide persistent reminders to achieve social inclusion, thereby resulting in, for example conspicuous consumption. Indeed, this sociometer function of self-esteem might account for why, "among adolescents especially, compliance takes precedence over identity" (Auty & Elliot, 2001, pg. 235). Their evolutionary need and desire to belong (Baumeister and Leary, 1995) seems to supersede their personal desire to form an individual identity. In the same way that our ancestors could not afford to be excluded from their social group, adolescents cannot risk exclusion from their peer group.

3.2.5.2.1 The human need to belong

Whereas the ethological perspective pertains to the importance of group dominance, the sociometer hypothesis is based on the innate need for humans to belong to a group; we have an ingrained desire for interpersonal connections and attachments (Baumeister and

Leary, 1995). This is because, in past times, the chances of survival were largely dependent on group membership. In present day however – when hunting and gathering is no longer a part of life- it has been found that belongingness effects higher order elements of human behavior. For example, it alters the ways in which information is processed; information has been found to be organized on the basis of the person/people one has a connection with (e.g. Sedikides et al., 1993; Pryor and Ostrom, 1981). Furthermore, belongingness also has emotional implications; changes in belongingness or inclusion status evoke emotional responses. For example, research has shown that the absence of social bonds has strong links to depression and unhappiness (e.g. Myers, 1992 and Argyle, 1987). Thus the central role of belongingness in human functioning is clear, it effects not only cognitive processes but emotional well-being.

3.2.5.2.2 Evidence for the sociometer hypothesis

Since its conception in the mid 90s, the validity of the sociometer hypothesis of self-esteem has received strong empirical support. For example, the links between the need to belong, social inclusion, and self-esteem have been displayed (e.g. Leary et al., 1998; Leary et al., 1995; DeWall et al., 2009). Denissen et al., (2008) recently provided empirical support for the positive correlations between social inclusion and self-esteem; the relationship was found to exist in the short term (daily fluctuations of self-esteem depend on feelings of inclusion), long-term (general self-esteem levels are related to overall feelings of inclusion), and on an international level (inhabitants of countries in which there is a high level of social interactions, have higher self-esteem than those in less social countries). Leary et al., (2003) also showed the pervasive and subconscious power of the sociometer; their study showed that regardless of an individual's attitude towards social feedback (i.e. whether or not they are concerned about the ways in which others regard them), the strength of the relationship between experiences of rejection and levels of self-esteem, do not fluctuate. This evidence counters that of studies which suggest that the importance given to the regard of others is dependent on the individual's self-esteem (e.g. Shrauger and Schoeneman, 1979). Thus it seems that social approval and disapproval affects the self-esteem of all individuals, even those who "steadfastly maintain that how other people regard them has no effect on how they feel about themselves" (Leary et al., 2003, pg. 623). More specifically, however, it has also been shown that the *quality* and *quantity* of social interactions is related to levels of self-esteem; the highest self-esteem

was found in situations where individuals spent more time in high-quality interactions (Denissen et al., 2008)[11].

3.2.5.2.3 Questions of causality

Despite the evidence of the close relationship between social inclusion and self-esteem, the causal direction of this link has not been confirmed. Thus it has not been clearly deciphered whether self-esteem levels are dependent on the level of social inclusion (as the sociometer hypothesis claims), or whether social inclusion levels are reliant on an individual's self-esteem. For example, some might argue that the link between self-esteem and inclusion is due to the fact that individuals with low self-evaluations are less likely to have the security and motivation to form social connections (e.g. Park and Maner, 2009). Indeed, in a naturalistic setting, Murray et al., (2000) found that self-esteem levels affected people's perceptions of their romantic relationship quality. However, this study does not provide convincing evidence of causality. Leary et al., (1998) found evidence for the fact that social inclusion is causally associated to changes in sociometer, and Srivastava and Beer (2005) and Denissen et al., (2008), both found that changes in social inclusion was associated with a corresponding fluctuations of self-esteem, *but not the other way around.*

3.2.5.3 Relevance to this thesis

Denissen et al (2008) showed that the *quality* of social interactions is more strongly related to self-esteem than the *quantity* of interactions. For this reason, in terms of the teenage sample being investigated in this thesis, a highly social life-stage does not necessarily support self-esteem unless the social interactions are of a high quality. Therefore, one might argue that the detrimental effects of social exclusion are important to levels of self-esteem, but that the quality of existing relationships, are even more important (e.g. Stinson et al., 2008). Indeed, Nezlek et al., (2002) found strong associations between the quality of social interactions and psychological well-being. Furthermore, low quality social interactions are augmented when there is a high quantity of social interactions (Denissen et al., 2008). By this logic, it seems that clothes-related bullying (as discussed in the previous chapter) can have a strong influence on adolescent self-esteem and psychological well-

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[11] The perceived quality of each relationship was measured using a rating scale which included the items: enjoyment, interest, intimacy, feeling important, calm, safe, wanted and respected. The higher the score, the higher the perceived quality of the relationship.

being. Furthermore, due to their rich social environments, any negative impacts of bullying will be magnified.

Furthermore, Denissen et al., (2008) found that there was a strong and significant correlation between the quality of peer relations and quality of family relations. Thus, if one considers Mayo and Nairn's (2009) concerns regarding the relationship between teenage consumption pressures and family relations, it may be possible to preserve family relations "by targeting the quantity or quality of social interactions either through promoting satisfactory close relationships or encouraging individuals to spend more time interacting with a wide variety of friends." (Denissen et al., 2008, pg. 194). In terms of the consumer culture, this might be achieved by reducing the importance placed on possessions by teenagers because "The events that affect self-esteem are precisely the kinds of things that, if known by other people, would affect their evaluation and acceptance of the person" (Leary et al., 1995, pg 34). Material possessions and status symbols are clearly important to adolescents in Britain.

In considering the sociometer theory and its role in understanding self-esteem amongst adolescents, the importance of social interactions are obvious. For this reason, this approach to investigating self-esteem mirrors the CCT approach to investigating consumption; the sociometer hypothesis highlights the importance of assessing self-esteem within the *socially relevant context of the respondents*. Thus, a scale which is able to assess the importance of possessions and brands in teenage self-esteem, may aid the development of more specific and relevant strategies for reducing the negative psychological impacts of consumerism. For this reason, the following section will explore the measurement of self-esteem, including a critical assessment of popular extant scales. This will highlight some major issues which need to be tackled if an effective measure of self-esteem is to be developed.

3.3 The Measurement of Self-Esteem

The social function and role of self-esteem provides clear reasons for the importance of its measurement. Furthermore, evidence has shown that low levels of self-esteem can provide soil for various social problems and anti-social behaviour (Covington, 1992). For example, Owens (1994) explains that youth with low levels of self-esteem are likely to seek status and recognition in non-normative ways in order to be awarded with acceptance

into delinquent groups. Furthermore, low self-esteem is associated with reduced aspirations and achievement motivations (Hill and Stephens, 1997). For example Rosenberg (1965) and Fennel (1999) explain that youth with low levels of self-esteem may seek poor grades in school by purposefully producing careless work with little effort so that when feedback is received, poor grades can be attributed to lack of effort rather than lack of ability. Therefore, the fact that individuals with low self-esteem may avoid cognitive challenges- in employment and/or education- in order to protect their fragile sense of self-worth represents a self-fulfilling prophecy. If self-esteem is considered to be an intervening variable (e.g. Burr and Christensen, 1992), and low levels of self-esteem can result in delinquency, reduced efficacy and anti-social behaviour, it is not only of academic but also societal interest to clearly understand the specific antecedents and consequences of self-esteem formation if we are to find means in which to cope with its resulting issues.

There are a large number of self-esteem scales (Scheff et al., 1989) however, as Burns (1979) notes, the remains a lack of a satisfactory, easily administered and theoretically sound measure. This may be a result of the fact that measures are often developed for specific studies, used and then not given further thought – this means that they are never checked for adequacy (Wylie, 1961). In light of this therefore, Robinson et al., (1991) correctly point out that new measures must provide clear benefits and improvements over existing scales. For this reason, in preparation of the scale development process, the popular, existing scales must be critically analysed in order to understand their weaknesses and strength and determine what is lacking. Thus, in order to gain a well-rounded view of various measurement styles, the following section will review two unidimensional measures and two multidimensional measures of self-esteem. Furthermore, a fifth, alternative measurement style will be reviewed; one that uses observational techniques as opposed to the common self-report style. This is because the vast majority of self-esteem scales are self-report measures (Blascovich and Tomaka, 1991), and despite their popularity, it is extremely difficult for humans to look at themselves introspectively and admit they have low self-worth (Fennell, 1999). For this reason, it may be that self-report measures provide scores for self-corrective, self-deceptive and defensive self-esteem. The preferred measurement style will be based on a review of the success of extant scales.

3.3.1 Existing scales

3.3.1.1 Rosenberg's (1965) Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)

The popularity of this measure has meant that it is not only widely used, but has also become a benchmark for the measurement of self-esteem; indeed, scale developers often seek convergence and evaluate their own scales with the RSES (Blascovich and Tomaka, 1991; Robins et al., 2001). Its popularity can be attributed to its brevity, ease of administration and scoring. The RSES was originally designed as a straightforward measure of adolescents' feelings of self worth which takes into account the social development of the self. The scale consists of a series of 10 statements about the self (for example, "I take a positive attitude towards myself") and respondents are asked to mark- on a four point likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree- how much the statement applies to them. The scores range from 10-50 with higher scores indicating higher levels self-esteem. The reliability of the SES has been demonstrated by Fleming and Courtney (1984) who obtained a Cronbach's α of .88 and reported a test-retest correlation of .82 with a one week interval. These results are suggestive of a repeatable and reliable measure. The RSES has been correlated with general self-regard; r values of .78 were found by Fleming and Courtney (1984). Furthermore, the RSES has shown to be related to low self-regard, anxiety, depression, materialism, social inclusion and self concept clarity. Thus, as Gray-Little et al., (1997) argued, it seems that the RSES adequately assesses feelings of self-worth and hence "deserves its widespread use and continued popularity" (pg. 450).

However, despite the above evidence, the efficacy of the RSES has been called to question for a number of reasons (e.g. Isaksen, 2006). For example, it is claimed that the scale is too face valid and hence is prone to socially desirable responses (Blascovich and Tomaka, 1991). To illustrate, one of the scale item reads "All in all I am inclined to feel that I am a failure". Such a statement is not socially desirable and thus – especially amongst insecure adolescents- may activate self-enhancing strategies and as a result, scores may exhibit defensive, rather than true self-esteem. As Savin-Williams and Jaquish (1981) state "self-report measures might be unduly influenced by the individual's awareness, unconscious defences, current emotional state, need for social acceptance, or to meet social desirability standards." (pg. 333). However, despite this, Blascovich and Tomaka (1991) found that RSES score distributions had a tendency to be negatively skewed; participants appeared to have low self-esteem when in fact it was relatively high. This discrepancy in findings does not support the consistency of the scale.

Furthermore, the RSES was created over 40 years ago on an American sample and the context and specific facets upon which self-esteem is based, have most likely changed drastically. As noted, the scale fails to consider physical appearance, a particularly central tenant in the lives of teenagers. Indeed, Hoare et al., (1993) found physical attractiveness to be strongly related to global self-esteem. This reinstates Blyth and Traeger's (1983) argument about the importance of the awareness of the changes to the bases of self-esteem when it is being assessed. However, despite these questionable qualities of the RSES, it remains the most popular scale for self-esteem measurement; for example, between 1967 and 1991, Blascovich and Tomaka (1991) found that, on average the RSES was used 61 times a year. Furthermore, a large amount of consumer behaviour studies employ the RSES when examining self-esteem (For example Rose et al., 1997 and Chaplin and Roedder-John, 2007). It is questionable whether the researchers who choose to use the RSES are simply unaware of its weaknesses; it seems that in the case of self-esteem measurement, convention and ease of use has overshadowed the importance of the sensitivity of the measure.

3.3.1.2 Coopersmith's (1967) Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI)

Blacovich and Tomaka's (1991) analysis found the Coopersmith SEI to be the second most popular self-esteem measure; on average, between 1967 and 1991, it was used 54 times a year. The SEI was originally designed for children with the aim of measuring evaluative attitudes in four specific domains; peers, parents, school and personal interests. Once again, the common dimensions of social environments, academic abilities and psychological centrality are considered. The original scale consisted of 50 descriptive statements worded in the first person; each item reflects either high or low self-esteem and respondents are asked to mark whether the statements are 'like me' or 'unlike me'. One point is given to each response to statements reflecting high self-esteem and scores range from 0-50 with high scores indicating high self-esteem. Despite the original contention that the SEI was a unidimensional measure of self-esteem, Coopersmith (1975) created 'SEI Form B' consisting of the 25 items with the highest item-total correlations. Thus the SEI form B was thought to represent a truly unidimensional measure of global self-esteem.

However, despite the claimed unidimensional nature of SEI form B, Ahmed et al., (1985) performed a factor analysis of it and found four separate factors: view of life, family relations, tolerance and confusion and sociability. The difference between these factors

and Coopermith's (1967) original factors, suggests that the scale may not be reliable and hence interpretations of results may vary between samples; for example, which factors are being measured? Furthermore, various, later reports claim that the SEI consists of 4, 9 or even 10 factors (Blascovich and Tomaka, 1991). The various number of factors found, strongly suggest that the SEI is multidimensional and may not be consistently measuring the same construct throughout its uses. The confusion of the dimensionality of the scale is common amongst measures claiming to assess global self-esteem (Fleming and Courtney, 1984). This may suggest that a unidimensional measure of self-esteem is not appropriate due to the complexity of the construct. The importance of each dimension is context dependent between populations.

However, despite these issues, reliability measures of the SEI have produced Cronbach α values of 0.75 (Ahmed et al., 1985) and test-retest correlations ranging between .62 and .88 for both versions (the original and SEI form B) (Blacovich and Tomaka, 1991). Furthermore, Demo (1985) found a 0.55 correlations between the SEI and the RSES. However, despite the apparent reliability and validity of the SEI, it – like the RSES- also suffers from negatively skewed results; most people score above the mean. Furthermore, the SEI has also been shown to be prone to socially desirable responses. As with the RSES, this may be due to the wording of the scale items (too face valid[12]), or the restrictive two-option response scale. Indeed Coehlo and Esteves (2007) point out that a small range of response options does not allow for adequate variability in the range of scores. Considering that a desirable scale quality is variability (DeVellis, 2003), this is clearly a weakness as it risks failing to differentiate subtle differences in the attribute being measured. Considering the issues of social desirability already plaguing self-esteem measurement, it is extremely important that any measure used, is able to discriminate between small response variances.

3.3.1.3 Harter's (1988) Self-Perception Profile

As was clear in the definitions of self-esteem, Harter's (1988) conception of the construct is multidimensional and includes a set of 9 distinct dimensions; scholastic competence, social acceptance, athletic competence, physical appearance, behavioural conduct, job competence, romantic appeal, close friendship and a final domain of global self-worth. It is believed that measuring an adolescent's perceived competence in specific domains in addition to measuring a global self-esteem will "provide a richer and more differentiated

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[12] For example, "I often wish I were someone else"

picture than those instruments providing only a single self-concept score" (Harter, 1985, pg. 5). The Harter (1988) self-perception profile for adolescents (SPPA) is a revision and expansion of the Harter (1985) Self-perception profile for children. Each of the domains is assessed with 5 scale items (45 in total). The SPPA employs a 'structured alternative format' as a response scale. That is, all of the scale items depict behaviours with both a negative and positive alternative and respondents are asked to indicate which of the two behaviours is 'like me' and to what extent. For example "Some kids like the kind of person they are (positive) BUT Other kids often wish they were someone else (negative)"; respondents are then asked to mark, *for one of the statements,* whether it is 'really true for me' or 'sort of true for me' (see the structure of the SPPA in Appendix I).

The reason behind this alternative response format was to avoid socially desirable responding. That is, by presenting both the negative and positive alternatives, the questions imply that both are common and acceptable and thus makes it less likely for respondents to assume that only the positive is tolerable (Eiser et al, 1995). Indeed, by displaying both of these alternatives, participants may be less likely to display defensive self-esteem as they feel less threatened by the scale items. Furthermore, the need for this alternative format is strengthened by the adolescent respondent. As previously mentioned, adolescents are particularly prone to socially desirable responding (Greig et al., 2007). In addition, the response format is thought to be less restrictive than for example the SEI, as it allows for a range of evaluations rather than simply two alternatives. However, there is debate as to whether the structured format is too lengthy and complex for the young respondents (eg Eiser et al., 1995: British sample) and there are doubts as to whether it truly prevents socially desirable responding (e.g. Wichstrom, 1995: Norwegian sample). However, Hoare et al (1993) used the self-perception profile for children (Harter, 1985) on a sample of Scottish schools children and noted that the scale was both easy to administer and an appropriate measure of self-esteem. Clearly the suitability of Harter's 1985 and 1988 scales on non-American samples is debatable.

Although the distinctiveness of the nine domains of the SPAA have been displayed by factor analysis (Harter, 1985), there is contention as to whether the factor loadings truly represent distinctly different domains. For example, although Harter (1988) reports clean factor separations, Eiser et al, (1995) found a large degree of overlap between the factors/domains; only scholastic competence and athletic competence proved to be distinct domains. Once again this supports the importance of academic and athletic ability and agrees with the distinctions of the hierarchical facet model. Furthermore, Eiser et al (1995)

found that there was a high degree of overlap (thus inter-correlations) between factors; physical appearance and romantic appeal - close friendship and social acceptance – behavioural conduct and scholastic competence. Similarly, Wichstrom's (1995) analysis of the SPPA failed to distinguish between the domains of physical appearance and global self-worth; providing support for the centrality of physical appearance amongst adolescents. Moreover, 12 out of the 45 items loaded on more than one factor with loadings over 0.30. Eiser et al, (1995) comment on the repetitive nature of the scale items and suggest that this may have contributed to Harter's (1988) high factor loadings and internal reliability reported for the scale. Finally, the relevance of the eight domains is highly questionable. This is because, as pointed out by Eiser et al, (1995), Harter (1988) provides no theoretical rationale for the selection of the specific domains included in the scale. Furthermore, as is the case with the RSES, the SPPA was created in America, a considerable time ago and thus, considering the variability and the importance of psychologically central factors, the dimensions within the scale, may be seen as a weakness.

Although there is support for the use of the Harter scale for the Scottish sample, Eiser et al., (1995) state that "Unfortunately, Harter (1985) did not provide an independent assessment of self-esteem so that the construct validity of the questionnaire is not known" (pg.20). It is felt that the use of the word *unfortunate* greatly undermines the importance of assessing construct validity in measurement scales. As Churchill (1979) states in his key paper on scale development "Construct validity, which lies at the very heart of the scientific process, is most directly related to the question of what the instrument is in fact measuring" (pg. 70). Thus, because Harter's (1988) SPPA scale is an expansion of the 1985 scale for children, it is possible that the SPPA is not truly assessing self-esteem. If the SPPA has not been validated against any other self-esteem scales, how can it be sure that it is a measure of self-esteem at all?

3.3.1.4 Fitts (1965) Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (TSCS)

Another multidimensional measure, is the Tennessee self-concept scale (TSCS) which includes both the global and specific facets of self-esteem. According to Blascovich and Tomaka's (1991) analysis, it was the third most popular measure of self-esteem between 1967 and 1991. This, as with the RSES, is likely to be a result of its simplicity. The TSCS is designed for individuals above the age of 12 and consists of 100 self-descriptive items and asks respondents to mark on a five-point scale whether the statement is 'completely

false', 'mostly false', 'partly true and partly false', 'mostly true' or 'completely true'. Each item is scored from one to five, yielding total scores ranging from 100 to 500 with higher scores indicating more positive self-concept (Blascovich and Tomaka, 1991). Roid and Fitts (1988) claim that the TSCS consists of 29 specific domains, for which an independent score can be calculated. However, the five most commonly referred to are physical self, moral-ethical self, personal self, family self and social self. Indeed these domains are in line with the most frequently reported domains seen in other scales (e.g. SPPA and SEI above). However, Marsh and Richards (1988) could only provide empirical support for the domains of family self, social self and physical self; thereby indicating that some of the domains, almost certainly, bear little or no weighting on general self-esteem scores.

Roid and Fitts (1988) report the internal consistency of the TSCS with a Cronbach's α of 0.94 and report test-retest correlations (over 6 weeks) ranging from 0.62 and 0.94. In addition, Van Tuinen and Ramanaiah, (1979) found that the TSCS correlated at a level of .75 with Coopersmith's SEI; thereby suggesting construct validity. However, as opposed to the SPPA, the score for global self-esteem in the TSCS is calculated by summing the scores for each of the 100 scale items. This may prove problematic for, as discussed in previous sections, the psychological centrality of, or emphasis placed on any single domain will vary between age groups, cultures and nationalities. Furthermore, the distinction between self-concept and self-esteem is not obvious in the TSCS. That is, the fact that self-*descriptive* items are added to produce a self-e*valuative* rating, fails to recognise the presence of defensive representations of the self. Thus, by simply adding the values of the responses, the TSCS risks a limited usability and applicability of its results.

3.3.1.5 An alternative measure

The debate of dimensionality clearly showed considerable issues in terms of the construction of self-report measures. Furthermore, the applicability of the use of self-report measures for self-esteem assessment have also been questioned. For example according to Savin-Williams and Jaquish (1981), such measures "assume that self-evaluation is a private, subjective matter, not accessible to measurement by external behaviour or through inferences made by others" (pg. 324). They question whether individuals are able to objectively evaluate themselves and therefore, in their comparison of methods of self-esteem measurement, the authors observed adolescents' interactions in order to examine whether observation techniques were in fact able to gauge levels of self-

esteem. Their work agrees with Mischell (1977) who claimed that "The future of personality measurement will be brighter if we can move beyond our favorite pencil-and-paper and laboratory measures to include direct observation as well as unobtrusive nonreactive measures to study lives where they are really lived and not merely where the researcher finds it convenient to look at them." (pg. 248).

 In their investigation, Savin-Williams and Jaquish (1981) developed behavioral checklists to note specific aspects of the teenagers' interactions that signified high or low self-esteem. The checklist contained 20 items – 10 behaviors indicating high and 10 behaviors indicating low self-esteem. The items on the checklist were generated through interviews with adolescents and youth workers whereby they were asked how they felt a person with high or low self-esteem could be identified. This process of item generation is recommended by Churchill (1979) and is inline with Mischell's (1977) theory of 'Subject as Expert and Colleague'; "it would be wise to allow our 'subjects' to slip out of their roles as passive 'assessees' or 'testees' and to enroll them, at least sometimes, as active colleagues who are the best experts on themselves" (pg. 249). In terms of the bases of self-esteem, such a technique would be extremely beneficial in finding out what domains of self-esteem are relevant to the sample being studied. That is, by regarding the respondents as experts on themselves, one is most likely to ascertain what elements are psychologically central to them. Therefore, Savin-Williams and Jaquish (1981) increased the contextual relevance of their behavioural checklist by questioning the respondents themselves. Subsequently, these checklists were used to observe the adolescents' behaviour and the results were compared with alternative self-esteem measures, namely peer ratings and self-report ratings.

The result of the comparison of methods showed that whereas peer ratings and observation scores correlated at 0.85, there was no relationship between self-rating scores and observation scores (Savin-Williams and Jaquish, 1981). This result shows that peers seem to be good judges of character, but it may also suggest that the observational method is not in fact an adequate measure of self-esteem; it failed to show construct validity. However, the authors suggest that the discrepancy between the observations and the self-report methods was due to 'defensiveness' of the respondents. That is, Savin-Williams and Jaquish (1981) argue that "perhaps the self-report measures reveal what an adolescent is willing or able to share concerning his/her self-evaluation" (pg. 333). This argument adheres to Coopersmith's (1967) distinction between true and defensive self-esteem. Although self-report measures did not correlate with observational scores, peer ratings and

observations correlated highly which suggests some usefulness for observational methods. For this reason, Demo (1985) argues that there is a need for a variety of methods to be employed when measuring self-esteem. That is, simply because the most dominant measures hereto have incorporated self-report scales, does not mean that observation cannot and should not be used. However, it is important to recognise the comparability problems which might arise when different methodologies are used; one must be certain that the same construct is being measured.

Savin-Williams and Jaquish (1981) are clearly advocates of the thought that self-report measures are simply not appropriate for self-esteem measurement. However, if we wish to conduct large scale studies involving self-esteem measurements, it will be necessary to develop a measure which is sensitive and realistic as well as practically suited for the purpose. Considering the strengths and weaknesses of the above outlined measures of self-esteem, the following section will consider these issues in order to aid in the development of the new self-esteem scale. In other words, the most effective aspects of the above scales will be employed whilst the contentious elements will be improved upon, if not avoided. This scale will learn from the flaws of others.

3.4 Scale Development Issues

"Self-esteem is nearly as ubiquitous a construct as intelligence, but there is less agreement about how to measure it" (Blascovich and Tomaka, 1991, pg. 116). This statement is clearly supported by the above review of some of the most popular self-esteem scales. Although there are similarities and overlaps between these scales, there are also differences in terms of their strengths and weaknesses. For this reason, if we wish to create a valid, applicable and usable measure of self-esteem, careful consideration must be given to these differences to ensure that the new scale accounts for all the 'slippery' aspects of self-esteem as it best can (Wells and Marwell, 1976). Indeed, "Self-esteem is an ephemeral subject difficult to deal with empirically." (Coopermith, 1959, p. 93), and for this reason, methodological issues are of great importance; a carefully considered and well-researched approach to scale development is more likely to result in a valid and usable scale. Limitations must be accounted for but one must also use techniques which are realistic in terms of time and resources constraints. The following sections will consider the limitations of the scales reviewed and will suggest means and ways through

which these can be avoided. As a result, this critical analysis will provide the rationale for the steps taken in the scale development process (as outlined in the following chapter).

3.4.1 Socially desirable responses

The need for the measurement of social desirability bias (SDB) in scale development has been highlighted by several authors in both the psychology and marketing literature (e.g. Mick, 1996, Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). In particular, King and Bruner (2000) state that "today, social desirability bias is considered to be one of the most common and pervasive sources of bias affecting the validity of experimental and survey research findings…" (pg.28). Furthermore, the need for the detection of SDB is specifically important in those scales which are likely to have socially acceptable answers. Indeed, there appears to be a general conception that low self-esteem is an undesirable trait (Blascovich and Tomaka, 1991) and hence respondents of self-esteem measures may be motivated to present themselves as having (unreal) high self-esteem. Furthermore, when considering respondents who are likely to be socially motivated (for example teenagers), the issue of social desirability increases (Greig et al., 2007). Indeed, "self-report measures might be unduly influenced by the individual's awareness, unconscious defences, current emotional state, need for social acceptance, or to meet social desirability standards." (Savin-Williams and Jaquish, 1981, pg. 333). In light of the complex, personal and subjective nature of self-esteem, SDB is clearly an important factor to consider in measurement and interpretation; the risk of assessing defensive self-esteem is imminent. For this reason it is important to minimise the perception that there are specific, acceptable answers. Interestingly, investigations by Wells and Sweeney (1986) suggest that self-esteem scores are not in fact greatly affected by self-enhancement biases. On the contrary, they claim that individuals "will make self-ratings that are compatible with their level of self-esteem" (pg. 1). However, considering their small, all-male sample, it is possible that this will not be the case amongst more diverse samples.

It seems that SDB is mainly tackled through the nature and wording of the scale items and the format of response scales in self-esteem measures. For example, the RSES and SEI provided examples of scale items which are direct, self-evaluative and introspective questions which can be considered to be excessively face valid. Thus, the likelihood of SDB in scale scores can be reduced by creating scale items which are less face valid and present *indirect* signals of self-esteem. Furthermore, Felson (1981) suggest that bias may be reduced by generating scale items which asses concrete attributes as opposed to more

ambiguous traits which are less verifiable and thus reduce the likelihood of respondents being proven wrong. Despite the fact that self-esteem is a relatively ambiguous trait, assessing it with more specific and concrete items may assist in gaining a clearer indication of its true level. In addition, the specific questions asked must be relevant to the culture and population being studied; once again the psychological centrality of the individual facets must be considered. For this reason, in creating a measure of self-esteem, particular attention must be paid to the type of questions, their wording and face validity.

In addition, as was seen in the SEI, a restrictive and forced-choice response scale may imply that there is a 'right' or 'wrong' answer (as there is no neutral option) and thus result in responses which are perceived as the most desirable and acceptable. Discussions regarding the appropriate style and breadth of response options will be presented in the following chapter. However, as was seen with Harter's (1988) structural alternative response format, the complexity of the response style must be kept to a minimum; particularly when considering a young sample- as in this study. For this reason, the suitability of the response scale should be determined not by the scale developer themselves, but in conjunction with the preferences of potential respondents; they are after all, the experts. Finally, in order to test the effectiveness of the preventative SDB strategies employed, they must be pilot-tested before the questionnaire is used as a measurement tool; the use of a developmental sample is vital. As will be seen, this is taken into account in the scale development process.

3.4.2 Signs of the times

The importance of social dimensions and contexts in self-esteem development means that societal trends may impact significantly on its assessment. Indeed, this is a main criticism in the applicability of popular self-esteem scales such as the RSES, SEI, TSCS and SPPA. All of these scales, including Savin-Williams and Jaquish's (1981) alternative measures, were created between 1965 and 1988. Thus the fact that investigations assessing self-esteem in 21st century are still employing these scales is surprising. For example, Mechanic (1991) points out that having responsibilities pertaining to a collective social goal can increase self-respect and hence esteem in individuals. However, a decline in intellectual and physical skills amongst youth may be explained by the increase in materialistic orientations, which implies that their role in self-esteem development is reduced. Furthermore, it has been claimed that children and teenagers now have fewer demands placed on them and thus have more idle time which leads to boredom and less

goals to work towards; this results in a reduction of special skills and hence self-esteem (Csikszentmihalyi and Larson, 1984). For example, whereas previously, children may have worked to support the family, they now work to buy more. The growth of the consumer culture seems to have altered the specific bases of self-esteem formation.

However, of the scales reviewed, Savin-Williams and Jaquish's (1981) work seems to be the most considerate of these changes in self-esteem development. This is because prior to assessment, they specifically questioned adolescents regarding the dimensions of self-esteem. Thus, by including the respondents themselves in the scale development process, one is likely to gain insight into the aspects which are important (psychologically central) to their conceptions of self-esteem. Considering the specific interest of this thesis; consumerism and branding's impact on self-esteem, it is vital that these are considered in terms of the bases of self-esteem. As has been seen, none of the above scales include these dimensions in their assessment- this once again highlights the need for a more up to date measure of self-esteem that considers the '(self-esteem) signs of the times'.

3.4.3 Sample population issues

The importance of considering the current trends and cultures is similar to the importance of considering the respondents for which a scale is developed. People's perceptions of themselves vary across cultures, ages and life stages. For this reason, it is extremely difficult (if not impossible) to create a single, universal measure of self-esteem. This is because psychological centrality, social comparison, reflected appraisal and self-perception are all influenced by the surrounding population and social context in which the individual resides (Rosenberg and Pearlin, 1978). Taking the example of the importance of material and consumerist values for example, this is highly likely to be of relevance to high and low income teenagers in Britain, but is unlikely to have the same importance amongst adolescents in poor countries (recall the effects of living in a society with great disparity in socioeconomic measures).

Cultural differences between respondents are not only important in terms of the scale content, but also for the nature of the assessment in general. For example, Eiser et al (1995) note that the lengthy nature of the Harter's (1988) SPPA, based on *an American* sample, may not be suitable for British respondents because they are less tolerant and "less disposed to compartmentalize their self-evaluations in to separate domains" (pg 432). Thus both the nature of the scale and the domains included in self-esteem assessments

must be considered when choosing or developing an appropriate scale. Furthermore, in comparing self-esteem data, such issues must be noted; for example, Wells and Sweeney's (1986) data is based on an all- male sample and thus cannot be used for comparisons with data on females for example. In addition, Hoare et al (1993) altered the SPPA to suit a Scottish sample and when assessing its validity, compared their results (on a Scottish youth sample) in 1993, with those of an American adolescent sample in the 1980s. Indeed, the validity of such studies is questionable.

In terms of the current study, the age and maturity of the sample population, is extremely important and is a central contributor to the need for the development of the new scale. That is, due to the previously discussed attributes of British adolescents (e.g. conception of self-esteem, relevant dimensions and literacy levels), it seems illogical to attempt to assess self-esteem using a scale which is based on American undergraduates (as with the SEI). In addition, Blyth and Traeger (1983) note that self-esteem levels change with the development of the body, cognitive abilities, social relationships and environmental influences. Thus, a child's scale will not be appropriate for an adolescents and an adult scale will not be suitable for adolescents. For this reason, Sears (1986), and more recently Peterson (2001), have both noted the issues involved in creating psychological measures on convenience samples such as college students[13]. For example, Sears (1986) points out that since the 1960s, college student samples have become a part of the dominant methodology in studies of social psychology.

Peterson (2001) reports the increase in the use of college student samples: for example, in the 25 years prior to 2001, the use of college student samples in articles in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, had risen from 23% to 89%. Similarly, Sherman et al (1999) reported that 86% of studies in the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* were based on college samples. The differences between college student samples and adolescents is an issue because "research results using college student subjects may differ from research results produced using non-student subjects, just as research results based on seven-year-old subjects may differ from research results based on 70-year old subjects" (pg.459). Again, the comparison of studies based on vastly different samples, is akin to comparing apples and oranges; the results are tenuous at best. For this reason, the sampling issues highlighted here, clearly reflect the immediate need for including British adolescents in the development of a scale which is to measure their self-esteem.

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[13] They are considered as convenient samples as most researchers are University based and thus have large cohorts of students who are easily accessible.

3.4.4 Reliability, validity and the use of concurrent measures

It is not only important to ensure that the dimensions of a self-esteem scale are relevant to the context and population of the respondents, but in terms of the reliability of the scale, it is also important to ensure that the factor structure of any scale remains stable. Indeed, the stability of the structure of self-esteem was clearly an issue in Coopersmith's (1967) SEI which, on different occasions, showed various numbers of factors amongst the scale items. Such differences in factor structures suggest that the stability of the scale must be assessed thoroughly before employing it and basing research results on it. For this reason, it is important to employ a number of pilot/developmental studies prior to the final administration of a scale. This is because, testing and re-testing will ensure that the factor structure identified in a new scale, remains stable across administrations and thus affirms the reliability of the scale. Several 'rounds' of data collection may help to determine the most stable and applicable factor structure within a scale.

In addition to scale reliability, the assessment of construct validity in a scale is vital (e.g. Churchill, 1979). Indeed, Fleming and Courtney (1984) note that too many publications in self-esteem are published without enough construct validity. For example, criticisms of the suitability of Harter's (SPPA) were partially due to the lack of the assessment of construct validity; Harter (1985/88) did not compare the results of her measure with any other established measure of self-esteem. For this reason, various other measures of self can be used to ensure that the construct measured truly is the construct being investigated. For example, the established relationships between self-esteem and personality constructs such as self-concept, need to belong and susceptibility to influence, can be used to ascertain whether the results produced from the scale are as expected. For example, Campbell (1990) notes that "self-esteem is not an isolated trait, but one that is correlated with a number of other personality traits" (pg. 539). More specifically, Calhoun and Morse (2006) argue that self-concept is a logical antecedent of self-esteem. Therefore, measuring self-concept clarity and other such personality traits will provide an indication as to whether a self-esteem measure is truly measuring self-esteem; based on the relation between their scores. For this reason, as will be seen in the following chapter, a number of concurrent measures will be used to assess construct validity in the new self-esteem scale.

3.4.5 Feasibility and pragmatism

There are clearly a great deal of considerations involved in the creation of a usable, applicable and adequate measure of self-esteem. It has hereto been argued that often-

times, practicality and ease has overshadowed methodological rigour in measuring self-esteem. For example, as aptly stated by Robinson et al (1991) "The job of combining the literature to pick a proper instrument consumes needless hours and often ends in a frustrating decision to forego measuring that characteristic, or worse, it results in a rapid and incomplete attempt to devise a new measure" (pg. 1). Indeed, these rapidly devised self-esteem measures are most likely the reason behind the large volume of inadequate scales. Thus, when developing new psychological measures, Robinson et al (1991) reiterate that researchers must demonstrate "sound improvements over previous measures" (pg. 6).

In addition, despite the importance of improving the quality of a measure, it is vital that the methods employed do not produce scales which are overly complex and impractical; it is a fine balance. For example, as was seen with Harter's structural alternative response format, attempts to avoid socially desirable responses can result in overly complex and laborious assessment methods (Eiser et al, 1995). Similarly, although Savin-Williams and Jaquish's (1981) observation method may provide a well-rounded assessment of self-esteem, such a method is highly impractical for use on large sample sizes. A scale intended for large scale use must be simple enough to deem it feasible as a measure. For this reason, it may be necessary to base the development of a new scale on the in-depth analysis of a sample with similar characteristics to the target respondents.

Self-esteem is a complex construct which is difficult to measure reliably. However, the researcher feels that there are certain difficulties that can be overcome through relatively simple means. There is no feasible way of accounting for all the complexities of self-esteem measurement, but by carefully considering the dominant issues presented above, a scale which considers self-esteem in the correct and updated context for which it will be used can be created. For the current study this context refers to British adolescents from various socioeconomic backgrounds, living in a culture of consumption. This perceived need for an updated, socially contextual self-esteem measure, once again reflects the researcher's post-positivist position. This is because, as Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) explain, post-positivists believe that there exists some reasonably stable relationships among social phenomena and these can be used to predict future events; hence the use of quantitative measures to test the vicious cycle model. Furthermore, the development and inclusion of the vicious cycle model can be seen to represent the element of these 'reasonably stable relationships' which the author hopes to build upon. The researcher believes that by examining the (reasonably stable) relationships between the social

phenomena (self-esteem, self-concept, susceptibility to influence and materialism), she will provide future research with a 'skeleton' of adolescent consumption behaviour which can subsequently be built upon according to the relevant context.

It is felt that the creation of a new scale to measure British adolescents' self-esteem will contribute to a deeper understanding of the impacts of consumerism and brand culture on their psychological well-being. Specifically, the comparative nature of this study (between and high and low-income adolescents), will help to determine whether the actions of marketing, branding and advertising are heightening the already negative consequences of living in poverty in a rich country. The following chapter clearly outlines the steps taken in creating this new measure of self-esteem.

Chapter 4. Scale Development; Methodology and Results

The previous chapter clearly displayed the complexities and controversies encountered when defining and measuring self-esteem. There is clearly a need for a re-investigation and clarification of the construct. Furthermore, if the research aims and questions of this thesis are to be answered, a new self-esteem scale is a prerequisite. Specifically, a scale which considers the context in which British adolescents live and thus includes the important aspect of consumerism and material possessions. As shown in figure 4-1, this chapter will address this need and will be divided into two main sections. Due to the adolescent sample, the first section will address the specific methodological considerations faced when working with a child sample. These will include both practical and ethical issues and the steps taken to overcome these will be explained. Subsequently, the second section will focus on the theory and several stages of the development of the new self-esteem scale. The rationale behind some of the steps taken were outlined in the previous chapter, in light of the 'slippery' concept of self-esteem. The chapter will conclude with the presentation of the new self-esteem scale and the subsequent chapter will outline the final data collection stage, including the assessment of self-esteem.

PART 1: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

WORKING WITH CHILD RESPONDENTS
-*Children as active beings*
-*Legalities and ethics*

THEORY OF SCALE DEVELOPMENT
-*Combining qualitative with quantitative*
-*Use of focus groups*
-*Elicitation techniques*

PART 2: SCALE DEVELOPMENT PROCEDURE
-*Shown in figure 4-2*
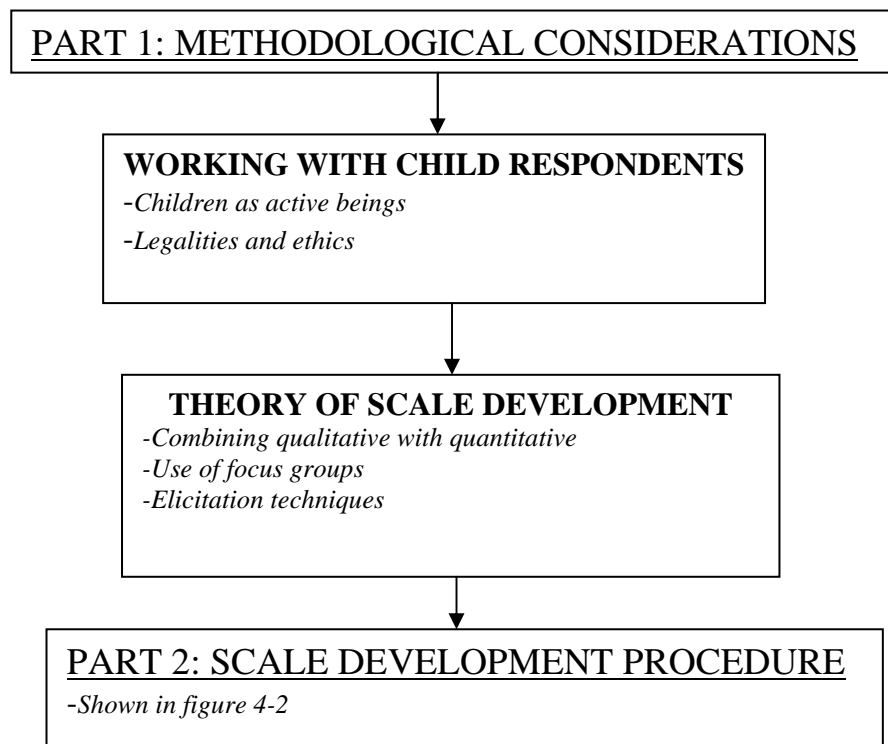
Figure 4-1 Structure of scale development chapter

4.1 Methodological Considerations of Working with Children

The decision to work with children/adolescents brought with it a number of issues requiring special consideration. As highlighted in the previous chapter, the adolescent sample meant that reliable and commonly used adult scales (of which there are many) could not be employed with complete confidence. That is, due to contextual, cognitive and developmental differences, children do not (and cannot) respond to research tasks in the same way as adults (Solomon and Peters, 2005). For this reason, extensive literature was consulted prior to designing the study, in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the intricacies of working with this special, adolescent sample. A few examples of texts include: MRS (2006); Fraser et al, 2004; Greene and Hogan, 2005; Christensen and James, 2000; Barker and Weller, 2003). These sources cover crucial issues such as the conceptual and philosophical underpinnings of child research (e.g. Fraser and Robinson, 2004; Christensen and James, 2000); ethical considerations of working with children (e.g. Hill, 2005a, Morrow and Richards, 1996); the nature of the research relationship between adults and children (Robinsons and Kellet, 2004); legal issues affecting the research relationship and the storage/use of data (Greig et al, 2007); effective and appropriate methodologies and analytical techniques for child research (Greene and Hogan, 2005; Christensen and James, 2000); and specific techniques and practical advice on eliciting information from children and young people (e.g. Barter and Renold, 2000; Hazel, 1995). This extensive review greatly enriched the researcher's understanding of child research and enabled a carefully considered and suitable methodology to be applied to this thesis.

4.1.1 Children as active beings

The perception of children in sociological research has changed in the past 10-20 years. As Barker and Weller (2003) point out, earlier research with children was (and still is) often criticised for "conceptualizing the child as incompetent, unreliable and incomplete, as mere objects to be studied" (pg. 208). In Van der Hoek's (2005/06) words, children are often perceived as "human becomings instead of human beings" (pg.1). As a result of such perceptions, research with children is often based on data collected from parents, guardians and teachers. However, the 'new sociology of childhood' points out that children are not merely future adults, but active beings who lead unique lives with unique experiences and independent needs, wants and perceptions (Corsaro,1997). Indeed this ontology is also held by the UN (1989) Convention of the Rights of the Child; Article 12 states that "Every child has the right to say what they think in all matters affecting them, and to have their views taken seriously". Thus, in terms of investigating the impacts of

consumer culture, it is clear that adolescents themselves – and not their parents or teachers- are the ones who are best suited to answer this. Indeed this 'new sociology of childhood' has had significant impacts on the ways in which research with children is approached, carried out, analysed and perceived (Lewis, 2004). For this reason, the methodology employed in this thesis is strongly focused on collecting and analysing data directly from the children themselves. Thus, as opposed to using a (potentially dated and unreliable) pre-existing measure of self-esteem, the development of the new self-esteem scale will be founded on the language, opinions and perceptions and understanding of British adolescents. This 'by kids for kids' approach to scale development, can be likened to Mischell's (1977) conception of "Subjects as experts and colleagues" as was seen in the previous chapter. The central role of adolescents in the development of the new self-esteem scale will become clear throughout this chapter.

4.1.2 Legal and ethical issues

Despite the benefit of the child-centred approach to research, there are also various legal and ethical issues to consider when researching with children. For this reason, the Market Research Society's (MRS, 2006) 'Conducting Research with Children and Young People' was consulted for the appropriate guidelines. According to this code of conduct, children are defined as those individuals under the age of 16 and thus guidelines are in place to protect them "physically, mentally, ethically and emotionally and to ensure they are not exploited" (MRS, 2006, pg 2). The target age for the current research ranged from 14 to 16 year olds and thus these guidelines were closely followed during the research process.

The issue of consent is important. Consent is required for any interviews or questionnaires presented to the child and are provided by the 'responsible adult'; in school these are teachers and head-teachers. However, it is important to note that the consent is needed for *approaching* the child and the child him/herself must be given the opportunity to decline in taking part in the research (MRS, 2006). Thus, for data collection, consent was first obtained from the responsible adult and subsequently, participants were reminded that they could opt-out of the research at any time. In addition, a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check was acquired by the researcher; this is a legal requirement for any person wishing to work with or around children.

Amongst ethical considerations, care must be taken to adjust the language of any surveys to ensure that they are appropriate for the literacy levels of the respondents and are not

patronizing in any way (MRS, 2006). As will be seen below, this was accounted for during the scale development and data collection procedures. Furthermore, the MRS (2006) explicitly states that special care is needed when interviewing children about "Issues which could upset or worry the child (e.g. his or her relationships with other children" and "Those relating to potentially sensitive family situations (e.g. parental relationships, income…" (pg.7). Given the focus of this thesis - issues surrounding self-esteem, poverty and social inclusion- special care was taken when developing scale items so that the phrasing of questions were not confusing and discussions were not centred entirely on sensitive issues. The strategies employed to achieve this, will be made clear throughout this chapter.

4.2 Theoretical Aspects of Scale Development

The scale development procedure was led by three key texts; the seminal scale development paper by Churchill (1979), the more recent 'Scale Development' by DeVellis (2003) and 'Multivariate Analysis' by Hair et al., (2006). These texts provide guidance for the scale development process and consider all the stages ranging from the appropriate definition of the construct, to the final stages of evaluating, optimizing and administering the scale effectively. The following sections will outline the rationale behind the specific methodological tactics employed in this research.

4.2.1 Qualitative and quantitative methods; clarifying the philosophical stance

Based on the fact that a 'by kids, for kids' approach was to be used, both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed in the scale development process. That is, the definition of self-esteem and the generation of scale items were derived from previous theories and scales <u>in combination with</u> in-depth qualitative data from the teenagers themselves. This not only meant that the construct was defined in their *own* terms, but also in their *own* language. Subsequently, statistical techniques were employed to reduce, purify and confirm the scale. This use of qualitative data to inform scale development is often used and indeed strongly recommended by the scale-development literature (e.g. DeVellis, 2003) and is hence in line with the post-positivist perspective assumed by the researcher. Furthermore as will be seen, the statistical analyses (employed in the scale development procedures) were also interpreted using a large amount of qualitative interpretation by the researcher. Indeed, as expressed by Wilk (2001), "there is no

particular reason why a positivist or a humanist cannot use any of the whole range of methodologies available in a way completely consonant with their own goals and assumptions". Indeed "qualitative information may easily be verified and reduced to numerical form in the most positivist way" (Wilk, 2001, pg. 310), for example to create a measure of self-esteem.

The paradigmatic positioning of this research is reflected in the post-positivist and CCT beliefs which guide the research. For example, the fact that the results of the statistical analyses were interpreted with the help of qualitative data (when both developing the scale and employing it), characterises the post-positivistic contemporary approach to quantitative inquiry (Reichardt and Rallis, 1994). Furthermore, the belief that there exist certain underlying (and reasonably stable) mechanisms/relationships within social phenomena is reflected in the development of the vicious cycle model; however the need to interpret these in a context specific manner (i.e. using a scale suited to British adolescents), illustrates the post-positivistic stance of the author. In other words, the post-positivist believes that "Causes are identifiable in a probabilistic sense that changes over time". (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998, pg. 23). Moreover, these efforts to determine the causal relationships within the vicious cycle model and subsequently generalise them (to high and low-income adolescents), adheres to the post-positivist approach to knowledge accumulation; it seeks to add to the 'edifice of knowledge' (Guba and Lincoln, 2005). Indeed this effort to add to the edifice of knowledge is perhaps most clearly reflected in the researcher's motivation to create an up-dated (and much needed) measure of adolescent self-esteem.

Furthermore, as will become clear throughout the following chapters, this research assumes a subjectivist epistemological stance which maintains that knowledge cannot be separated from the knower (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Indeed, as described by Reichardt and Rallis (1994), the 'value-ladenness of inquiry' and the 'theory-ladenness of facts', are central tenets of post-positivism. Thus, it is believed that research will always be influenced by the researcher's personal values and the theory or frameworks on which the research is based. However, despite the uncertainty in the existence of an absolute and objective truth, the post-positivist continually strives for objectivity and thus employs strategies aimed at controlling the impacts of their own values and theories used. For this reason, Guba and Lincoln (2005) argue that the inquirer must assume the role of the 'disinterested scientist'; to confirm this role, post-positivists typically use conventional benchmarks of rigour such as extensive reliability and validity testing. As will be seen in

the following sections, the methodology of this study incorporates several strategies which clearly reflect the researcher's attempts to approach objectivity. However, the fact remains that self-esteem must be examined in terms of the conceptions and understandings of adolescents themselves; they are the experts and therefore a scale based on an American college student sample in the 1960s cannot be used to assess the self-esteem of British adolescents in the 2000s.

4.2.2 The use of focus groups

The qualitative element of scale development was conducted in the form of focus groups. Indeed there are several benefits of using focus groups for scale development, as have been noted by Morgan (1988) and Churchill (1979). For example, definitions, dimensions and potential scale items can all be derived from focus groups and this is clearly in line with the 'by kids for kids' approach. In addition, the social nature of focus groups was specifically appropriate for the construct being studied (self-esteem) as well as the sample of respondents; they are both highly dependent on social contexts. The many benefits of using focus groups are outlined below.

4.2.2.1 In-depth understanding of the adolescent conception of self-esteem

Focus groups have traditionally been used in clinical and social psychology for their ability to tap into deeply rooted thoughts and feelings through group discussions (Stewart et al., 2007). This is because, as Zaltman (2003) notes, human thoughts and emotions are located deeply in the neurological substrata and access to these 'mental zones' is most successful through the use of subtle and indirect questions. Furthermore, the social interaction created by the focus group is likely to "produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group" (Morgan, 1988, pg. 12). Therefore, as opposed to asking individuals direct questions about self-esteem, focus groups allow researchers to pose open questions which stimulate discussions and lead to more in-depth data. Considering the highly personal nature of self-esteem and the vulnerable sample, the sense of ease provided by focus groups, was a substantial motivation to employ them in this methodology. That is, focus groups were employed not only for their pragmatic benefits such as large quantities of data (Stewart et al., 2007), but also for the methodological benefits that the social dynamics provide (Flick, 2002).

Examining social phenomena through focus groups, allows the data to go beyond the level of the researcher's understanding. That is, focus groups have the "advantage of providing

a validity check on the researchers' understanding of the problem and its relevant dimensions" (Stewart et al., 2007, pg. 91). Once again, this level of understanding is extremely important when working with a young sample; as has been seen, adolescents are different from adults in many ways. Similarly, by using one-to one interviews to understand such a complex construct, the researcher has a greater potential risk of 'pushing' his/her own agenda – based on their own understanding (Krueger, 1994). However, in focus groups, respondents have the freedom to lead the discussion in directions relevant to themselves, without much guidance from the researcher. Furthermore, the group setting provides a natural moderator; extreme or false statements are likely to be rebutted by the members of the focus group (Fidgeon, 2006). Considering the tendencies for socially desirable answers amongst adolescents, such a natural moderator may prevent individuals from expressing what they think the researcher wants to hear- they will rebutted by other group members. Indeed, as will be seen, the power difference between adolescent respondents and adult researchers is an important factor to consider in data interpretation in particular.

It is not only the understanding of the construct which can differ between the researcher and participants, but also the language used to describe and explain it. Indeed this is why the MRS (2006) guidelines specify the importance of the language used in child research. For example, Barker and Weller (2003) emphasise the importance of being aware of "the alternative language of youth" (pg. 221). Efforts must be made to understand the specific terms and colloquialisms which children and adolescents might use. In terms of developing a new scale, this is especially important in qualitative analysis and item generation because there is a significant risk of misinterpretation. For example, as will be seen later, in conducting the focus groups, it became clear that the word 'sick' is often used by adolescents as an adjective as an alternative to 'cool' rather than its traditional use. Similarly, there were instances whereby respondents were confused by questions involving 'brands'; this was because, in some parts of the country, they were known as 'labels'. Therefore, examples such as these bear clear implications on the wording of scale items – it must be suited to their alternative language. For this reason, it is reasonable to assume, considering the lack of adolescent input in previous self-esteem scales that the emphasis given to qualitative data in this study, will be of great value and benefit for the validity of the final scale.

4.2.2.2 Appropriate for child context

In addition to the in-depth data available from focus groups, their collectivist nature (Madriz, 2000) is particularly suited to investigations of self-esteem; a socially constructed phenomenon (Leary et al, 1995; Wells and Marwell, 1976). That is, whereas individual interviews isolate participants from social interaction, focus groups were thought to allow self-esteem to be explored in its natural, social context (Bohnsack, 2004). Furthermore, individual interviews were used in a previous investigation involving children (Isaksen, 2006), and were found to be restrictive; the participants were extremely shy in the interviews and shared only limited information with the researcher. As Madriz (2000) highlights, one-to-one interviews may be intimidating due to the perceived 'interrogative' atmosphere whereby the participant feels pressured to defend his/her opinions. Agreement from group members (in the focus group) is likely to comfort respondents and encourage further contribution to the discussion. Thus, considering the adolescents sample of this study, the interrogative atmosphere in individual interviews would have been emphasized due to the age, status and power difference between the participant and researcher (Alderson,1995). Indeed, an adolescent's typical interaction with an adult in school is likely to be with a teacher or a parent and is likely to involve disciplinary and/or academic issues. However, the intense nature of the interview style is diffused in focus groups and thus adolescents are likely to feel more at ease. Indeed Ritson and Elliott (1999) agree with this approach; they found that using group interviews with adolescents meant that they shared more ideas with the researcher and thus increased the richness of the data because the respondents provided different interpretations of the same aspects.

4.2.3 Additional elicitation techniques

Children and teenagers can be challenging participants when attempting to initiate discussion, they are simply not used to being asked their opinions and are typically shy (Cloke, 1995). For this reason a number of additional elicitation strategies were used when conducting the focus groups. Firstly, all discussions were initiated with simple, short and arbitrary topics (as suggested by Madriz, 2000). This is thought to relax participants and reduces the paternal or authoritative appearance of the researcher (as recommended by Hill, 2005a). This 'funnel approach' (Stewart et al., 2007) meant that discussions were led from vague and broad topics, to general self-esteem issues and then gradually narrowed to focus on the specific elements of it (i.e. the specific dimensions of self-esteem). Furthermore, a "demonstrative vagueness" (Bohnsack, 2004, pg. 219) was applied when introducing and explaining the purpose of the research. This meant that the topic was left

open to interpretation and thus did not restrict the respondents in their contributions in any way. In addition, advice from several sources (e.g. Reynolds and Guttman, 1988; Smithson, 2000; Fidgeon, 2006; Clarke, 2002) provided guidance on how to phrase questions, how to deal with respondent blocks, group dominators and quiet or shy participants. These techniques were used to "cross the cultural and communicative divide which has characterised the paternal adult-child relationship" (Hazel, 1995, pg.1). Furthermore, vignettes and the 'Twenty Statements Test' were incorporated into the focus groups; these are described below.

4.2.3.1 Vignettes

Vignettes are useful tools for opening discussions, but they are also effective in transferring the discussion of personal topics, on to an external, hypothetical scenario. Considering the adolescent sample and the personal nature of self-esteem, vignettes were chosen for the focus groups. Vignettes (Finch, 1987) are short (200-300 words) stories which help to initiate discussions regarding abstract themes; they provide an external and concrete base on which to focus discussions (Hazel, 1995; Barter and Renold, 2000). As Hughes (1998) aptly states, "vignettes highlight selected parts of the real world that can help unpackage individuals' perceptions, beliefs, attitudes to a wide range of social issues. The relative distance between the vignette and respondent can facilitate this" (pg. 384). An additional benefit of using vignettes, is that they can provide a level of standardisation for the focus groups. This is because the analysis and interpretation of the focus group data, can be taken from a relatively uniform situation (James, 1993). The details of the vignettes in this study will be further explained below.

4.2.3.2 Twenty statements test

In addition to vignettes, an altered version of the 'Twenty Statements Test' (TST) (Kuhn and McPartland, 1954) was distributed to all focus group participants (see Rees and Nicholson, 2004 for a comprehensive review). The TST is an attitude test traditionally used in self-concept research and has also been used in the development of a number of self-attitude measures (Falk and Sonenfeld, 1974). The TST is aimed at attaining a person's true sense of self by avoiding external influences/suggestions from an interviewer. In a TST, the participant is asked to complete 20 different statements each beginning with 'I am…'. The respondent is asked to write statements in any order they occur, regardless of importance or logic. In addition, the TST asks respondents to complete the sentences as though they are giving the answers to themselves and are asked to proceed 'fairly fast'.

The format of the TST has been seen to be effective in three major problems of scale development (Falk and Sonenfeld, 1974); 1) determining what items to include in a measure, 2) avoiding the danger of suggesting responses to respondents, 3) avoiding the problem of items being specific to a limited situation or population. Clearly, these are three issues which are prominent in this research: 1) psychological centrality, 2) Social desirability and 3) reliability and applicability, respectively. For these reason, in addition to its quick and simple administration, the TST was used in this study. The way in which this test was incorporated into the focus groups, will be addressed below.

4.3 Scale Development Process

Having decided upon the appropriate strategies to the research approach, the methodology was confirmed. The following sections will chronologically outline the stages of the scale development process in detail. Figure 4-2 provides a visual overview of the steps taken (p.t.o.).

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│            Focus groups             │
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        ┌──────────────────────┐
        │  Thematic analysis of │
        │     focus groups      │
        └──────────────────────┘
                   │
          ┌──────────────────┐
          │  Item generation  │
          └──────────────────┘
                   │
        ┌──────────────────────┐
        │ Response style selected│
        └──────────────────────┘
                   │
        ┌──────────────────────┐
        │  Round 1: Data collected│
        │  from development sample│
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Figure 4-2 Scale development process

4.3.1 Focus groups

4.3.1.1 Sample

A total of 20 focus groups were conducted in 10 schools across England; 2 groups per school and thus a total of 120 adolescents were involved. Participants were Year 10 students ranging between the ages of 14 and 16; there were a number of reasons for choosing this specific year group. Firstly, previous studies using the vicious cycle model (Isaksen, 2006 and Isaksen and Roper, 2008) employed 13 to14-year-olds and thus it was of interest to examine whether the vicious consumption cycle also pertains to slightly older adolescents. Furthermore, a large number of child-related consumption studies have employed children and adolescents between 10 and 13 years of age[14] but fewer have focused on 14 to 16-year-olds. For example, when examining the relationship between self-esteem and materialism, Chaplin and Roedder-John (2007) compared early and late adolescents; 12-13 year-olds and 16-18 year-olds respectively. The authors claim that self-esteem is reduced in early adolescence and rebounds in late adolescents, however there is little mention of self-esteem levels amongst 14 to 16-year-olds. This seems surprising considering that they may in fact be even more motivated to consume than Year 9 students. Indeed Mintel (2003) reported an increase in pocket-money allowance amongst children above the age of 13 and noted that at 14, peers become the most significant shopping partner. Therefore, if they have reduced self-esteem, more pocket money to spend and are more likely to shop with their friends, it may be that 14 to 16-year-olds are at a 'prime' consumption age.

All of the schools were contacted via written letters and subsequently followed-up with phone calls or emails. Each focus group consisted of six participants, three boys and three girls. Although many sources agree that when conducting focus groups, the genders should be kept separate, the groups for this study were mixed. This is because, as explained previously, the social dynamics of the groups were intended to reflect the context in which self-esteem development naturally occurs; in the presence of both sexes. Furthermore, as Aries (1976) explains, males are likely to become more personally oriented when grouped with female participants and thus, considering the personal nature of the topic, it was decided that mixed groups would be used. The participants were selected by the gatekeepers (usually teachers) on the basis of the researcher's request for a

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[14] For example: Schor (2004) used 10 to 13-year-olds; Nairn and Ormrod (2007) used nine to 13-year-olds; Elliott and Leonard (2004) used eight to 12-year-olds; Roper and LaNiece (2008) used eight to 12-year-olds; and Chaplin and Roedder-John (2005) used eight to 13-year-olds.

representative sample. Gaining and maintaining access to the schools proved to be time consuming and challenging due to the closed nature of schools and communication difficulties. It was continually proven that negotiating access to schools can be "one of the hardest stages of research with children" (Alderson, 2004, pg. 105). Although it is outside the scope of the current research, an in-depth account of the access issues faced, and how they were overcome, can be found in Isaksen and Roper (2010a).

The schools contacted were selected based on their geographical location and socioeconomic status, as well as their willingness to participate in the research. For this reason, the final 10 participating schools were located in various parts of England (North, South and Midlands) and varied in terms of their rural or urban setting (inner city to farm suburbs). Prior to approaching schools, the geodemographics of its main catchment areas were reviewed (according to the ACORN [15] classification of the area, as noted on www.upmystreet.com[16]). These sites provided detailed information on the families living in the area; including ethnicity, average job status and salary. Furthermore, the level of social deprivation amongst the students in the schools, was gauged by the percentage of students eligible for free school meals. According to the Office for Standards in Education's (OFSTED) criteria, a deprived school is one in which more than 35% of the pupils are eligible for free school meals (OFSTED, 2003). For this reason, amongst the 120 teenage participants, there were a variety of socioeconomic statuses and deprivation levels. By basing this qualitative work on such a varied adolescent sample, it was hoped that a representation of the average English adolescent was obtained. Furthermore, as noted, it is thought that a more appropriate and relevant scale can be constructed with such a sample because it avoids a 'one-sided' view of self-esteem. For example, it would be counter-intuitive to distribute a self-esteem scale to a range of adolescents, if it was developed using only a narrow sample of middle-class, white teenagers living in a suburban town in the North-west.

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[15] "ACORN is a geodemographic segmentation of the UK's population. It segments small neighbourhoods, postcodes, or consumer households into 5 Categories, 17 Groups and 56 Types. By analysing significant social factors and population behaviour, it provides precise information and an in-depth understanding of the different types of people in every part of the UK". (CACI, 2010, pg 2). The classification system is presented in descending order whereby the categories range from, for example, 1: Wealthy Achievers, to 5: Hard Pressed. Similarly, the 17 groups range from group A: Wealthy Executives to Q: Inner City Adversity. Likewise, Type 1 refers to Wealthy, mature professionals, large houses and 56 refers to Multi-ethnic, crowded flats.

[16] www.upmystreet.com provides a variety of information pertaining to a local area; including schools in the area, crime rates and neighbourhood profiles. Information for a specific area is found by entering the relevant post code.

4.3.1.2 Process

All the focus groups followed the structure described below. This structured approach to qualitative data collection was assumed in order to allow for the comparison of the views of the respondents and generalise the findings (as recommended by King, 2004). Indeed, in order to generalise the findings between the interviews, they must follow the same structure so that similar aspects are discussed. Each focus group lasted between 50 and 60 minutes. All the sessions were conducted on school grounds and were recorded on a digital recording device. Each focus group was initiated with an introduction from the researcher: "I'm a student from Manchester University and am here to speak to you about some things I'm researching". The research was explained: "I'm interested in self-esteem and I would like to know what you guys think it is and what type of stuff you think might affect it – it would be great if we could just have a little discussion about it for the next hour or so". The respondents were made aware of the digital recorder prior to commencing any discussions. In addition, the participants were reminded that "there are no right or wrong answers, any and all contributions are appreciated and helpful". After explicitly confirming their consent, the students were thanked for their participation and reminded that they were free to ask the researcher questions and were free to leave at any point during the discussion. Subsequently, the recorder was switched on and the participants were asked a series of arbitrary questions, for example "is it nice to get to skip math class to be here?".

In order to start the focus group proper, the first question was asked: "So does anyone of you know or think you know what self-esteem might be?". In cases where no answers were offered, the researcher offered the vague definition of "it's kind of how you feel about yourself, does that make sense?". Based on the answers obtained, the participants were encouraged to elaborate on the more specific elements (dimensions) which make up self-esteem and the various factors which may affect it. The interviewer continued to prompt the students to further explain why they thought a specific factor might affect someone's level of self-esteem. This method of continually asking 'why' was adapted from the 'laddering technique' (see Reynolds & Guttman, 1988) and was used to gain a deeper understanding of the specific reasons for why a particular factor affects self-esteem. This method is also referred to as a means-end-chain approach to questioning because it aims to understand a concept in terms of the deeply held values of the respondents. Again, this enriched the depth and understanding of the teenagers' conceptions of self-esteem.

4.3.1.2.1 <u>Vignettes and Twenty Statements Tests</u>

Following the opening discussions, when it was felt that the elements/dimensions of self-esteem had been exhausted, participants were presented with three vignettes (Appendix B). The vignettes were written by the researcher with guidance from Hazel (1995) regarding what to include and how to format them. They were presented as "some short descriptions of some people that I would like your opinion on". Each vignette consisted of a short, simple description of a teenager including their thoughts, feelings, behaviours and their reactions to a short scenario. The three vignettes were aimed at depicting children with varying levels of self-esteem. Jane represented a girl with very low self-esteem, Felix illustrated someone displaying typically high, yet defensive self-esteem and Amy described someone with a stable, high level of self-esteem. Each vignette was presented separately and followed by the question "What do you think about Jane/Felix/Amy?". This allowed the respondents to highlight and discuss the aspects of the vignette that were most relevant to them and initiated further discussions.

Upon completing the three vignettes, the focus groups were finished with a brief summary of the topics covered in the discussion (by the researcher) and the participants were encouraged to question or add anything before the end. Finally, in the remaining few minutes of the session, a slightly altered Twenty Statements Test was administered. Participants were asked to complete 10 statements starting with 'A person with <u>high</u> self-esteem is/will…' and 10 statements starting with 'A person with <u>low</u> self-esteem is/will…'. It was hoped that the results from this TST would 1) give indications as to how high/low self-esteem can be (widely) identified, thus guiding item generation, 2) give silent respondents a chance to 'voice' their opinions, 3) provide an opportunity to share private/ embarrassing thoughts and feelings and 4) provide insight into the construct of self-esteem in terms of their own frames of reference and language. The participants were reminded that: 1) there are no right or wrong answers, 2) write the first thing that pops in to your head, don't think about the order or if it makes sense, 3)go as quickly as you can. When they had completed the TSTs, they were placed directly in a folder (to ensure participants of anonymity) and the participants were thanked for their participation.

4.3.1.3 Analysis of focus groups

4.3.1.3.1 <u>Manual analysis</u>

A total of 20 hours of data were recorded from the focus groups. Although not all of the data was audible- due to background noise and quiet speakers- the majority was usable for

transcription and analysis. All transcription was performed by the researcher herself, in order to gain maximum familiarity with the data and encourage immersion in to the data. Furthermore, prior to commencing analysis, the researcher listened to and read the interview transcripts several times. Subsequently, the transcripts were manually analysed using template analysis (King, 1998; Miller and Crabtree, 1999); common themes were identified and organized into codes. Indeed, as Miller and Crabtree (1999) explain, "…researchers can develop codes only after some initial exploration of the data has taken place" (pg. 167). This approach is supported by Ryan and Bernard (2003), who argue that people repeat things which are largely agreed upon and significant to them. For this reason, by familiarising herself with the data, the researcher was able to identify and code the dominant themes in the focus groups; those which represented the most important facets of self-esteem. Thus the common and dominant themes within the focus groups, represented the dimensions of self-esteem which are thought to be the most psychologically central amongst them and possibly to the self-esteem of British adolescents at large. The accounts of the participants are believed to provide an insight into their lives outside the interview (King, 2004).

The approach used to analyse the transcripts, template analysis, seeks to analyse and organise qualitative data in codes. According to King (1998; 2004) template analysis suits many epistemological positions because it can aid the discovery of the underlying causes of human action (through the themes noted) and seeks objectivity. For this reason, a conscious effort was made not to 'assume' an understanding of the opinions and experiences expressed by the participants. Indeed, considering the difference between adult and adolescent lives (and hence the importance placed on specific aspects), this was necessary to truly understand self-esteem in their own terms. Furthermore, although the self-esteem literature had been consulted by this stage, the focus group themes were not related to the extant literature at this stage of analysis. This is because the researcher wished to keep an 'empty' and open mind so as to avoid enforcing past theories on the new data. As will be seen, the themes identified were related (and compared) to extant self-esteem theories at the end stages of the item generation process.

4.3.1.3.2 Computer aided analysis

After having identified the dominant themes manually, the data were entered into NVIVO and re-analysed. This served to condense and refine the dominant themes identified in the initial analysis. That is, by using the software to create individual nodes for each theme

and coding the transcripts accordingly, it was possible to identify similar or related themes/nodes and condense them into a single node that could be generalized across the groups. This had the benefit of reducing the number of themes and helped to make more sense of the data because it became smaller and more manageable. Indeed, this approach is supported by Miller and Crabtree (1999) who explain that "a common intermediate approach (to template analysis) is when some initial codes are refined and modified during the analysis process." (Miller and Crabtree, 1999, pg.167; parentheses added)

4.3.2 Results of focus group analysis

The following section will describe the 11 dominant themes/codes identified in the focus groups. As mentioned, it is thought that these themes represent the adolescents' understanding of self-esteem and the specific elements they deem to be central to it. Therefore, the themes described below, will illustrate some of the most psychologically central dimensions/aspects of self-esteem amongst British adolescents. These will be explained and exemplified with direct quotes from the transcripts. In addition, noticeable differences between respondent groups will be noted.

4.3.2.1 Definitions of self-esteem

The answers given to the question of 'what do you think self-esteem is' were similar between the groups. Answers typically mentioned confidence, how you feel about yourself, whether or not someone is happy with themselves and whether they believe in themselves. For example:

A.
Researcher: *Right ok so have you guys ever heard the word self-esteem?*
Group: *Yeah yeah*
Researcher: *Great ok what does it mean to you?*
1: Is it like your confidence?
2: And like how you feel about yourself stuff like that.

B.
1: If you have low self-esteem, isn't it when you don't feel happy and good about yourself, confident in yourself?

Although most of the definitions were expressed in vague terms, there seemed to be a distinct difference in the levels of understanding of the concept. That is, it was noted that, in general, the more affluent groups had a greater awareness of the concept and were more able to discuss it in depth. On the contrary, many of the low-income groups had never heard of the term, remained silent to the initial question, or provided answers such as:

C.
Researcher: OK so let's start – have you guys ever heard the word self-esteem before?
1: heard of it but don't know the meaning.
Researcher: OK no problem – anyone else?
2: heard of it..
Researcher: OK well what do you think it might be? Just take a wild guess.. [silence] anything?
3: about yourself...

Despite the stunted responses in such groups, the researcher's brief and vague explanation of self-esteem, followed by the vignettes, helped to focus the attention to external sources and thus facilitated more responses and opinions. For this reason, it was possible to incorporate contributions from all of the focus groups, regardless of their initial understanding of self-esteem.

4.3.2.2 Feelings about the self

The general notion of 'how you feel about yourself' and whether one is 'happy with yourself' seemed to be a global indicator of self-esteem. That is, a secure self-esteem was thought to be indicated by an individual who is satisfied with themselves; someone who perceives themselves with positive regard (excerpt A). This was often signalled by the way in which s/he refers to themselves. (excerpt B).

A – Commenting on a vignette
1: yeah she's got high self-esteem really, cuz she's happy with herself.. that's it really

B
Researcher: OK but you mentioned that sometimes you can see someone's self-esteem – so what sort of things would you notice about them that makes you think they have low or high self-esteem?
1: little comments they make about themselves...uhm
2: well if they like put themselves down all the time, like 'I can't do this, I'm rubbish' and that kind of stuff.

When questioned about how one might observe positive or negative self-regard, the notion of 'taking care/pride in one's appearance' was often mentioned. Interestingly, how comfortable one is with attention was thought to indicate feelings towards the self. The argument was that individuals with high self-esteem have a positive attitude of themselves and therefore are more comfortable with 'getting attention' than those with low self-esteem who tend to avoid situations which are likely to expose them/ place attention on them (excerpts C and D). However, it was also noted that individuals with an excessive need or want for attention may be displaying 'fake' self-esteem and in fact crave attention as a means of compensating for their own low opinions of themselves (excerpt E). Thus, there appears to be a fine line between the behaviours of individuals with genuine high self-esteem and those displaying fake or defensive self-esteem.

C
Researcher :OK but why would someone with low self-esteem speak quietly?
1: cuz they don't want to draw attention to themselves in case someone.. I don't know why but they don't really want to draw attention to themselves...

D
1: or like if there's a big group of 'em (people) and then like the one person who's got high self-esteem is all happy and that jumping round cuz basically just wanting everyone else to look at her- then you've got one who's just quiet cuz she don't want no one to look at her cuz she don't feel right about herself.

E
1: but then it could just all be an act
Group: yeah yeah yeah
2: because like one of my friends like everybody knew her – down south- everyone knew her .. she was like really pretty, she's blonde, she like knows everybody and everybody likes her but she's got, she's so insecure.. but when she's around certain people – like her closest friends know that she's insecure but like when she's around a big group of people she's like the most confident person you know.. but then behind closed doors she's insecure and does not like the way she looks and can pick every little thing out.. it can be an act ..
1; yeah like they try to hide their problems
2: yeah they like try to hide what they feel...

4.3.2.3 Ability and skill

Possessing ability or a skill seems central to adolescent self-esteem; it seems to provide a platform for evaluation. The ability was usually referred to in terms of academic competence or some form of sport competence. However extra-curricular activities and hobbies such as dancing and singing were also commonly mentioned. It seems that abilities and skills have a dual role in self-esteem. In one way, the knowledge and pride in one's own ability- along with the praise and recognition attained from it - assists in gaining and maintaining self-esteem (excerpt A). However, self-esteem seems to be a prerequisite for performing tasks and developing new skills. For example someone with low self-esteem was thought to be prevented from learning a potential skill/ability as a result of their fear of failure (excerpt B). Furthermore, a fear of failure seemed to differentiate low and high self-esteem individuals, people with high self-esteem were thought to be more ambitious and driven (excerpt C). Thus it seems that possessing abilities and skills can boost self-esteem levels but the acquisition of these skills may also be determined by self-esteem levels. Excerpts A to C illustrate both of these arguments.

A.
Researcher: So what types of things do you think can affect someone's self-esteem? What can make you feel good or bad abut yourself?
1: if they good at anything – cuz people have good self-esteem when they're good at things.. like sports or music or whatever
Researcher: OK and why would that affect self-esteem?
1: cuz people give 'em praise
2: they feel like they've achieved something.

B. – Commenting on a vignette
1: she's like avoiding putting herself, not putting herself out but like making herself available to be criticized or..
Researcher*: so is she perhaps avoiding a challenge?*
1: yeah because it's easier to just like accept you can't do something than prove to yourself you can't do something.
2: or try... tryin something new, cuz it's different. Like what she's used to doing. So she like doesn't wanna like put herself out there and try something different because she's not as confident

C.
1: it(self-esteem) can like affect your work rate and how you work. If you got low self-esteem you're not really bothered in with what you wanna do. If you got high self-esteem you know like what the task is about and you know that you can do it.

4.3.2.4 Praise and recognition of skills

The importance of receiving recognition for one's abilities and skills was clearly noted by all of the groups. It seems that the sense of achievement gained from one's abilities and skills is, only verified by their recognition from significant others; friends and family mainly. In terms of self-esteem, the praise gained from possessing a skill seems to be as important, if not more important, than the skill itself (excerpts A and B).

A.
1: you can give yourself self-esteem but it actually comes from people around you ... cuz if you think about it you can actually give it yourself but you cant give it a lot – so like **'2'** *could say to* **'3'***, 'you're class at football' and that would make his thing (self-esteem) higher' ... – so just making people higher – you can give it (self-esteem) yourself but a lot of it comes from other people's points of view.*

B
1: whether you get praised for stuff – like if you do something and someone says well done then you're gonna feel better – and parents as well.

Furthermore, praise was often sought and gained from academic or sporting achievements. However, it was interesting to note that praise could also be attained by wearing fashionable (and often new), branded clothing. There was a sense that wearing 'good' clothes is a skill to be recognised (excerpt C). However, this was predominantly observed amongst the low-income groups, which suggests that they may place greater importance on clothing and appearance than high-income adolescents.

C.
M3*: yeah cuz if you got new stuff and then you walk past someone and they say oh that's nice stuff – like a good comment, then you like ahh no ones gonna be looking at me in the wrong way now.. you think that it's fine*
F2*: it makes yourself feel good as well cuz you got new stuff and it makes you feel better cuz its new.. yeah*

4.3.2.5 Other people's comments/behaviours/opinions

Whereas recognition from significant others serves as a means of verifying or 'double checking' one's own opinions of oneself, it became clear that opinions of oneself are largely formed as a result of the opinions and behaviours of other people. Not surprisingly, the element of 'other people' was a dominant and indeed over-arching theme in the self-esteem discussions. The majority of the dimensions within self-esteem could be associated with 'other people' in some way; whether it was their comments, their behaviours and their opinions. Indeed, there were many mentions as to how self-esteem levels may be increased or decreased as a result of others. Not surprisingly, bullying was perhaps the most dominant and frequently mentioned example. Excerpts A, B and C clearly demonstrate the power and the ability of other people to determine and alter a person's opinion of themselves.

A
Researcher: So what affects someone's self-esteem?
1: other people
Researcher: in what way?
1: like you can't have good self-esteem if everyone else thinks like bad of you really like just because like if someone tell you you look weird then obviously you feel as if you are but if you're like, say like captain of the rugby team then obviously you're gonna have self-esteem because like everyone thinks that you're good.

B
Researcher: ok so out of all the – like if you'd have to chose one thing that you think can affect someone's self esteem
1: how other people look at you
2: yeah like your image and what people think I'd say

C
1: like if you look in a certain way and you get cussed everyday- every time, everyday – your confidence can go down so your self-esteem will go low each day, you're not gonna feel proud of yourself.. whether or not – you might not feel you have a problem with yourself but other people are judging you in a bad way and not in a good way..

In addition, excerpt 'D' shows that the mere thought and fear of others' opinions is sufficient to alter or prevent behaviour, in this case, generally 'doing stuff'. Indeed this fear of negative evaluation was also considered a marker of self-esteem; those individuals, who are extremely concerned about other people's opinions, were generally thought to have low self-esteem (excerpts E and F).

D
1: I think it's just like what other people will think of them and if like they're not confident enough to do stuff cuz they think people are gonna be like maybe like laugh at them.. or they believe what other people have said about them.. so that makes them think that they're like bad or something

E
1: someone with high self-esteem would be like sociable and confident and would like speak to people but someone with low self-esteem would be like shy and maybe conscious of what people would think...

F
Researcher: *OK then why did you think she has high self-esteem?*
1: because she doesn't care what people think about her – and that's self-esteem like how much people get to you
2: she doesn't care like what she wears and doesn't care what people think – and that means that she's got quite high self-esteem cuz she doesn't care what people say...

4.3.2.6 Physical appearance

Physical appearance was also expressed as a clearly important facet of adolescent self-esteem. That is, physical features – beauty, skin, weight, height, hair - were all mentioned, with the overall conclusion being that 'pretty' or 'good' looking people have higher self-esteem than 'ugly' ones because they are happier with themselves (excerpts A and B). As with previous themes, this was mostly due to the positive feedback that would be received from others. For this reason, being attractive to the opposite sex (and having a boyfriend/girlfriend) was often mentioned as boosting one's self-esteem. (C).

A
Researcher: *Ok is there anything else that affects your self esteem?*
1: just like your whole body image like if you think you're too fat or you think you're too thin or your hair or..
2: or you think you're ugly

B
Researcher: *right OK.. how would that (*appearance*) affect someone's self-esteem?*
1: I dunno just like if like they was all ugly they like wouldn't have high self-esteem about themselves

C
1; and another thing that- if like you're a girl and you have a boyfriend or if you're a boy and you have a girlfriend – that can boost your self-esteem
Researcher: *hmm that's interesting – why would having a boyfriend increase your self-esteem?*
2: cuz like you know someone likes you and someone likes the way you look
1: like complimenting you.

An individual's physical appearance was also considered to be an indicator of their self-esteem. This was because, someone who takes pride in their appearance (for example styling their hair or wearing make-up), is perceived as having a good sense of self-esteem. However, if an individual seems to be overly concerned with their appearance, it was also seen as an indicator of low self-esteem, whereby a desirable physical appearance is used to mask fragile self-esteem (D). As with the recognition gained from being fashionable, taking pride in one's appearance is only perceived positively if it appears that the individual is not too concerned with it.

D– Commenting on a vignette
1: and it says like in the morning ' he takes a long time to prepare himself' – its like if he was really confident he wouldn't really seem to bother.. it sounds as if he spends like a couple of hours infront of the mirror like blow drying his hair or something... I dunno he's putting on like a protective coating...
Researcher: yeah I think that's probably true.... What about you M3 what do you think?
2: well just like what he said, that he's like using it and he's trying to like cover it up, he's not actually got that much self-esteem or anything.. he's just like using it more like a front to make himself look good but he's like inside he's not...

There were also suggestions that physical appearance is of greater importance to girls than boys. For example:

E
1: mm probably yeah – cuz girls probably take more notice in their appearance whereas boys don't really bother that much.
2: yeah if someone said something bad to a girl(about her appearance) it probably take it more to heart than boys.

4.3.2.7 General feelings

An individual's general outlook (negative or positive) on life was regarded as good indicator of general self-esteem levels. Those people who consistently see the 'negative' side of things were thought to have low self-esteem (excerpt A). This was thought to be because a low self-esteem will not only cause negative *self*-feelings but will also cause an individual to hold negative views about life in general (excerpt B). They are unable to 'see the good things' (excerpt C). Conversely, people who are positive and 'look on the bright side' were thought to have high levels of self-esteem; the rationale being, if one feels good in oneself one can look at the world (and specific situations) in a positive light. Similarly, negative feelings/attitudes were also seen to be able to cause low self-esteem; a negative view of the world is transferred to the self and subsequently the individual develops low self-esteem (excerpt C).

A – Commenting on a Vignette
Researcher: *OK and what makes you think she has low self-esteem?*
1: *She's thinking about all the negatives and none of the positives...*

B
1: *I think it's like if you have low self-esteem it makes you less confident in your self and you have all the negative views about stuff*

C
1: *If you've had uhm good or bad past experiences in life – if you're like an orphan you might have low self-esteem.*
Researcher: *OK, I understand but can you explain more specifically why would bad past experiences give you low self-esteem.*
1*: Uhm...you might not be able to see the good things*
2: *You might not be able to trust people*
3*: Yeah you'd see the bad side of life and have a more negative view of it all*

4.3.2.8 Communicating and socializing

A definitive marker of self-esteem was thought to be the extent to which an individual is able and willing to socialise and communicate confidently with others (excerpt A). The groups agreed that individuals, who are comfortable and outgoing in social situations, have higher self-esteem than those who 'keep to themselves' (excerpt B).

A
Researcher: *can you tell the difference between someone with high and low self-esteem?*
1*: someone with high self-esteem would be like sociable and confident and would like speak to people but someone with low self-esteem would be like shy and maybe conscious of what people would think...*

B
Researcher*: do you think by looking at someone, do you think you can tell whether they have high or low self-esteem?*
1*: you can sometimes cuz like the person with the low.. uhm [self-esteem] like they don't feel like comfortable around other people – like the person won't look .. I dunno not scared exactly, but they won't be comfortable and they'll be scared of people's own opinions ....*
2*: and not speak up for themselves*

In addition, those with high self-esteem were thought to be more likely to voice their opinions clearly and confidently (excerpt C). That is, if a person is comfortable in social situations, it indicates that they are comfortable with themselves and less concerned with other people's opinions, which in turn indicates high self-esteem. This ability to communicate also included the manner in which a person speaks; someone who is shy and mumbles is judged to have lower self-esteem than one who speaks loudly and clearly (excerpt C). However, as with the other indicators, an excessively and unnecessarily loud person is seen to be compensating for low self-esteem (excerpt D).

C
Researcher: *Think of someone you know that might have low self-esteem... what makes you think they have low self-esteem?*
1*: The way they talk.. [yeah] they've got an idea, someone with high self esteem will argue their point or make it clear what they're saying – like in class if there was a debate – they'll stand up, if they've got an opinion they'll stand up and face for it but if someone with low self-esteem – if they put their hand out to say something and someone else doesn't agree with it.. then they'll just kind of give up on the idea or the way they actually talk like if they project themselves, like if they just mutter.*

D
1*: sometimes they hide it though and be like dead loud and stuff.. but then like underneath that*
2*: yeah but like you see people who are loud and are like high in self-esteem*
3*: well you can tell pretty much but you can't always tell really cuz like sometimes people are like louder to cover that they don't have like high confidence or whatever don't they...*
R*: ok so why would someone be loud?*
3*: to cover up*
Group*: yeah*
3*: yeah if you're shy sometimes you come out louder don't you?*

4.3.2.9 Friends and popularity

In relation to one's ability to communicate, the number of friends was often mentioned as a marker for someone's self-esteem (excerpt A). Someone with very few or no friends was deemed to have low self-esteem because they lack the support and encouragement that friends can provide. It seems that amongst adolescents, friends provide a support network (excerpt B).

A
Researcher: Why do you think having friends shows a person's self-esteem?
1: cuz, I dunno – if you have good self-esteem then you're confident enough to go out and make friends and confident to do everything else.

B
1: I think it highers your self-esteem if you've got a group of friends that you know you fit in to and who you know are your friends and it gives you confidence like to mix with other people and then if you don't get on with those people then you still got people to get back to who you know are your friends..

This reinforces the notion that self-esteem is not developed in isolation and indeed, if someone has one friend - as opposed to none – it drastically increases the perceptions of that person's self-esteem. This was often commented upon when discussing 'Jane' in the vignettes; she is described as having low self-esteem but the fact that she has a friend, often resulted in the conclusion that she must have 'some' self-esteem (excerpt C).

C
Researcher: What do you think about Jane?
1: I don't think that she's completely got no self-esteem cuz she's got a friend so I think maybe 2[17] cuz she can make friends – so I don't think she completely has no self-esteem.

Having friends seems to be related to being accepted by someone - regardless of whether they are part of the majority. The reasoning seems to be that if one is accepted by peers, one is likely to have a positive self-regard as a result of the positive regard from others (D). For this reason, popular people were also thought to have higher self-esteem (E). However, there was also acknowledgement that popularity does not automatically indicate high self-esteem but rather, can be a source of pressure for the individual (F). It seemed that 'true' friends were a more genuine source of self-esteem.

D
1: it's not so much fitting in it's more like being accepted by other people – like even if it people who don't fit in.. its like having friends who like appreciate, that you know, can see that like its not important what you wear or whatever..

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[17] Here the participant had been asked to rank Jane's self-esteem on a scale of 1-10.

E
1: I think it does – cuz if everyone else thinks that like thinks highly of the popular person – then I think that would be enough to make them have a lot higher self-esteem if like everyone else believe that they're better or whatever.

F
1: sometimes though the less popular people, they like are happier cuz the popular people gotta be like what people expect
2: yeah like meet everyone's expectations

4.3.2.10 Fitting in

The notion of being part of the 'norm' seemed crucial to the well-being and self-esteem of the teenagers. At times it appeared as though it was somewhat of a 'survival' tool; being accepted, being part of 'the norm' and fitting-in, appears to be needed for self-esteem. It became clear that there is a strong element of social cohesion within teenage circles whereby anything remotely outside the acceptable standard is perceived as different, hence unacceptable and thus can lead to comments from others and bullying; leading to low self-esteem (excerpt A). The notion of 'fitting in' applied to a broad range of elements including appearance, accents, behaviours, opinions, academic ability, clothing style and material possessions. Not surprisingly, the most frequently mentioned aspects were appearance and clothing, possibly because these are immediately noticeable and hence easier to pass judgement on. In addition, there were some exceptions - such as sporting ability and fashion sense - which were uniformly seen as areas which are perceived as positive to excel in.

A
Researcher: So you said looks – how would someone's looks affect their self-esteem?
1: Your height. You can be bullied for anything, everything
2: The clothes you wear
1: yeah and it can affect you...
Researcher: ok so when would you get bullied for your looks?
2: say someone's got big ears – they might get bullied for that
1: or say maybe the different clothes you wear, you know like a different style or something.. people think your different so they single you out

The intense focus on 'fitting-in' seemed to be a result of heightened social comparison amongst adolescence; they constantly compare themselves to their peers and 'other people'. It is likely that the close-knit school environment emphasises this social comparison and indeed this was noted by the adolescents themselves. In terms of self-esteem, they seemed to be aware of the fact that the importance of fitting in and conforming to the group norms was especially important to their age-group (excerpt B).

B
1: But Miss – this mainly only happens when you're a teenager – when you're older you really wont care what other people think – cuz you been through it all yourself. Like even if you have low self-esteem you see, if you're old you don't really care what other people think, you know your own opinion. It's just a teenager phase Miss.

Whether one 'fits-in' with one's peers can quite clearly affect an adolescent's self-esteem. However it was interesting to note that the importance and effort an individual places on fitting-in was also seen as an indication of that person's level of self-esteem. Once more, someone who is overly-concerned and makes a conscious effort (tries too hard) to fit-in – by for example altering their behaviour- was seen to have low self-esteem whereas someone who 'dares' to be different was seen to be confident in their selves and hence have high self-esteem (excerpt C).

C
1: just like the way they are in general – like if you, if they go for their own style or their own unique way, then that means that they're confident because they feel confident in themselves that they can do that and not care what anyone says. But if they're not confident then they'll be like just dress the same as everyone else – try and follow the crowd.

Between the high and low-income groups it appeared that there was a difference in the areas where it was important to fit-in to. For example, it was often the case in the higher-income schools that high academic achievement was a desirable trait; more so than in the lower-income schools where it was often frowned upon to be 'too clever'. In addition, it seemed that material possessions and the ability to afford the 'latest' fashionable item (clothes, trainers, phones etc) was especially important in the lower-income schools. There seemed to be a great deal of pressure to possess the right things at the right time; a failure to do so could indicate poverty, a lower social status and thus feeling of being different; once again leading to lowered self-esteem (excerpt D).

D
1: yeah it makes a difference..
2: if you see someone that has loads of stuff and you can't have it yourself...
3: yeah you look at yourself and you think oh I don't look as good as them – like for example your clothes you think oh I cant afford them clothes so then that'll lower your self-esteem

4.3.2.11 Clothing and brands

In light of the consumption culture in Britain, it is not surprising that clothing style and branded clothing were frequently mentioned in the focus groups. This was for a number of reasons; as was seen above, clothing can help an individual to fit-in with peers – by wearing similar styles and similar brands they gain a feeling of belonging and acceptance

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(excerpt A). This was particularly interesting in terms of brands because a brand is traditionally used as a means of differentiating oneself and expressing one's individuality, but it seems that adolescents use the brand as a means of cohesion and social security.

A
1: It's what your friends wear, you wanna fit in with your friends so like you go, like whatever fashion they're wearing, you wanna be like the same you don't wanna be the one who stands out in a way on your own – you wanna be part of the group with them.

Furthermore, the groups made it clear that by wearing the 'wrong' brands and clothes, one risks social exclusion (excerpt B). Similarly, wearing 'good clothes' can boost positive self-feelings (if you look good you feel good) and is also seen as a means of gaining positive evaluations from others (excerpt C).

B
Researcher: So who decides what's the right thing to wear?
1: Us, mates
2; It's everyone innit? Cuz if you got a whole gang of people wearing Lacoste, then you don't wanna rock up in Reebok [giggles]
1: what's wrong with Reebok?
2; I'm not saying there's anything wrong with Reebok but if everyone's wearing one thing...you wanna be like everyone else.
Researcher: OK so say there was one person that had the Reebok shoes and they were going to be with people that had Lacoste shoes – could that affect their self-esteem?
*1: Yeah because the people might start rippin' (*teasing*) them*
Group: yeah yeah...
*3: Yeah like say if everyone's sitting over there (*in a circle*) they'll put their feet there (*shows that person hiding their feet underneath them*), like try and cover their feet or something.*

C
1: Yeah if you're wearing good clothes then you think... well it sort of breeds confidence; it makes you feel confident – it makes you feel better about yourself.

Indeed, it also became clear that possessing the right clothing could be a means of protecting oneself; by wearing the appropriate styles and brands, adolescents can secure themselves from 'comments from others' which provides a sense of ease for the individual (excerpt D).

D
*1: Yeah people with the wrong clothes, they get like taken the mick out of (*teased*) – like "what is that!?" – and then people who have like got all trendy clothes and all that, they don't get the mick taken out of them.*
2: Now that is true...

However, as with the notion of fitting-in, although fashion and branded clothing were recognised as essentials for self-esteem, the emphasis placed on it, was an indicator of self-esteem. Those individuals who were especially fashionable and 'too' focused on 'dressing right' could be seen as having low self-esteem; they were seen to be covering their insecurity and low self-esteem with clothing. Conversely, those individuals who

'dressed in their own style' were judged as self-secure and having high self-esteem because they were not threatened or concerned with what other people might say (excerpt E). Thus, in terms of self-esteem, it seems that being in fashion and wearing the correct clothes (and brands) is necessary to gain positive regard from both the self and others; however the extent to which an individual is concerned with this issue, can mark his/her level of self-esteem. For this reason, in order to be regarded positively, it seems that adolescents need to be fashionable but without appearing too concerned about it.

E
1: I think the way people dress actually says a lot about high self-esteem because like some people who wear the same as like what everyone else wears, that like makes... wearing those clothes gives them high self-esteem cuz they think like 'well I fit in now, I blend in'. But then there's like people who have like genuine high self-esteem and they just like wear what they want and like they wear different stuff...

Once again there appeared an interesting difference between the low and high-income groups' interpretation of brands. When the high-income groups mentioned brands and designer labels, they did so in the context of the brand signifying *style*. Having style and being perceived as stylish would then enhance self-esteem due to the positive recognition received (excerpt F). However, the low-income groups tended to focus more on the *social status* that the brands conveyed. It seemed that possessing the right brand is necessary as a means of disguising poverty; if the popular brand was not worn it was interpreted as a sign of the inability to afford it (excerpt G). Thus, when discussing styles of dress, there was a definite importance placed on avoiding any form of low-cost brand; any association with poverty resulted in mockery, bullying and feelings low self-worth. It was clear that wearing high-priced clothing was a more important element amongst the low-income groups than their higher-income counterparts. Interestingly, this was explicitly noted by several group members from the high-income schools, they recognised the stigma against poverty amongst lower-income groups (excerpt H). Thus, although all the groups placed importance on owning the 'correct' clothing to aid self-esteem, low-income adolescents seem to have the additional pressure of appearing as though they cannot afford it; a pressure that is not of concern to higher-income groups.

F
1: if you like see someone with like designer labels on then you think like "wow they've got style" and then the person with the labels on will get a higher confidence because they know that people think they look good and they can like enjoy it.

G

1: There's a certain type of trainer people expect you to wear. Even if you prefer something else – like I don't like branded trainers like Nike, Adidas, Reebok and all that – you might not like that yourself but then if everybody else is wearing it and you came in with plain white trainers or something, you're more likely to get cussed (teased/bullied). Cuz to other people that's not what your supposed to wear - like they think you're poor. Like you might be richer than them or have more money than them but to them it seems like you can't afford to buy Nike, Adidas and stuff. But there's a lot of people who might not even like Nike and Adidas and all that stuff but cuz the way they know that everyone gets treated and the way everyone's gonna react to them - like if you're not wearing the latest Nike trainers or something like that – sometimes that can affect you as well..

Researcher*: OK so why would that affect their self-esteem?*

2: they can't afford the newest things and other people...

3: they might want it but they can't afford it so if for instance people keep harassing me, keep telling me I can't afford it and all that – its gonna bring their self-esteem down and down..

2: it's just how people judge you – it's like you're happy with yourself but they just can't take you for what you are.

The important and indeed complex role of clothing and fashion in self-esteem was glaringly obvious. Furthermore, it seems that this element of self-esteem is heightened in adolescence as there is constant comparison between individuals whereby self-esteem is boosted if one is at least equal to or better than other members of the peer group. Indeed, this intensified importance of fashion in the teenage years was recognised by the participants themselves (H).

Researcher*: so what's special about teenagers? Does fashion matter more to you?*

1: yeah cuz it's like

2: most people want to compete with each other – who looks the best out of all their friends...

Researcher*: OK compete, can you explain please – how do you compete with clothing?*

3: like keeping up with the latest fashion.

1: like clothes like trainers – stuff like that. It's like if you see your friend in the latest jacket you would wanna like fit in with that person – its like you'll try to get something nearest to that jacket like to like fit in with that fashion.

4.3.3 Verification of themes

As noted, when analysing the focus groups, a conscious effort was made by the researcher to distance herself from her readings and preconceptions of self-esteem in an attempt to approach objectivity. However, it was clearly not possible to completely disregard these influences in one's interpretations. For this reason, there is always a danger of focusing on specific themes- and overlooking others- based on the researcher's knowledge and perceptions. Thus, it was decided that the researcher's interpretations should be compared to those of someone who is unfamiliar with the topic; a form of inter-rater reliability. Therefore, a sample of four transcripts (two from high-income and two from low-income schools) were given to an external judge[18] who had no background in the topic of self-esteem but had a firm understanding and ample experience with qualitative research. The

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[18] A fellow PhD student.

external judge was asked to highlight, what she believed to be the dominant themes within the focus groups; with emphasis on the factors that seem to affect and signal self-esteem levels.

The feedback from the external judge showed a large overlap with the researcher's thematic analysis. Although the external judge did not thematically classify the themes (into 11 sections), all her observations had already been noted by the researcher either as a dominant theme or as an aspect of one of the dominant themes. Therefore, there were no themes which were highlighted by the researcher but not noted by the external judge and vice versa. This agreement between the two interpretations provided assurance that the researcher's knowledge had not greatly impacted her analysis; once again, objectivity was a key motive of this verification strategy.

4.3.4 Conclusions from focus groups and the definition of self-esteem

Separating the findings from the focus groups into 11 dominant themes was no simple task. Although the thorough analysis procedure and the external verification helped to clarify the themes, the large degree of overlap between themes caused confusion at times. Indeed there were common 'threads' running through many of the themes which made them difficult to separate. For example, other people and social comparisons were two elements that were embedded in almost every theme. Indeed this reiterates the problems encountered in defining and operationalising self-esteem; there is no specific factor or set of factors that constitute self-esteem, it is a result of a complex interplay between various elements. It is for this reason that, as far as possible, the most important elements/building blocks must be considered when attempting to define and measure self-esteem.

The overarching factors/themes identified included antecedents, markers and consequences of high and low self-esteem. For example, it was found that other people's comments and behaviours contribute to self-esteem. However the individual's willingness and ability to communicate confidently with others was regarded as a consequence (and hence a marker) of his/her self-esteem. Furthermore, certain themes appeared to refer to both antecedents and markers of self-esteem. For example, having friends contributes to an individual's self-esteem whilst simultaneously being a possible indicator of that individual's level of self-worth. Moreover, there is the additional problem of the clarity of the indicators – which actions indicate a 'true' sense of self-esteem as opposed to overcompensation as a result of low self-esteem. For example, how does one distinguish

between someone who is simply comfortable with attention and someone who craves it as a means of boosting his/her self-esteem? Thus the problem of distinguishing between genuine and defensive self-esteem, was highlighted at this stage.

Despite this issue, the data and analysis of the focus groups greatly enriched the researcher's understanding of adolescent self-esteem. As a result, this allowed for a detailed definition of self-esteem to be formulated. The accurate definition of a construct is extremely important, specifically when one plans to create a measurement scale for it. This is because, as DeVellis (2003) explains, the crucial first step in scale development is to "Determine clearly what it is you *want* to measure" (pg.60) as it helps the researcher to specify the construct and establish what needs to be included in the scale. The definition created was purposefully formed *after* the analysis so as to best encapsulate the knowledge shared by the adolescents themselves. The insight gained from the focus groups was considered in combination with the extant literature and the following definition of 'Adolescent self-esteem' was written:

The value and worth an individual ascribes to him/ herself – high or low. It is a personal, **subjective evaluation** *of the self, resulting from a combination of a) the judgements, behaviours and opinions of significant others including peers and family b) a process of social comparison referring to skills (academic, sport and other), physical appearance, branded clothing and the extent of social acceptance. An individual's self-esteem manifests itself in his/her behaviours and attitudes.*

This definition displays the personal, evaluative nature of self-esteem but also makes it clear that these evaluations are largely the result of social interactions and comparisons within different domains. Importantly, amongst British adolescents, one of the domains consists of brands (especially branded clothing). When self-esteem was clearly defined, the following stage was commenced; operationalising the construct.

4.3.5 Item generation

4.3.5.1 Initial, mass item generation

The development of the scale items was started with a broad, experimental and all inclusive approach. In order to "develop a set of items which tap each of the dimensions of the construct at issue" (Churchill, 1979, pg 68), it was decided that a series of questions should be designed under each of the 11 identified themes. First, a basic statement was

formed, directly addressing the theme; for example 'I am good-looking' was used for the Physical appearance theme. Subsequently, alternatives to that statement were created in order to tap into the same construct but in a slightly different way; for example 'I am happy with the way I look' or 'people probably think I'm good looking'. This was done because, by asking the same question in a series of different ways, "different shades of meaning" can be brought to the construct (Churchill, 1979, pg 68). Furthermore as is clear from the thematic analysis, each theme contained various elements within it and thus a large number of statements were developed for each theme. This inevitably created a large number of redundant items, yet provided the benefit of exploring the phenomenon in different ways (as suggested by DeVellis, 2003).

Due to the sensitive nature of self-esteem, special attention was paid to creating items which were not too face valid and were worded in such a way that made the questions less *directly* personal (e.g. 'people would probably describe me as a quiet person'). This is because indirect questioning has been shown to reduce the risk of social desirability bias (SDB) within scales that are subject to social influence (Fischer and Fick, 1993). Furthermore, considering the imminent risk of socially desirable responding (as discussed in the previous chapter), a conscious effort was made to formulate scale items which did not have obviously socially desirable answers. For example statements such as 'I have no friends' were avoided. This is because such direct statements are likely to arouse defensive answers which may skew the resulting self-esteem scores.

4.3.5.2 Item culling

The initial 'brainstorm' approach to item generation allowed for the free creation of items and resulted in a vast number of statements for every theme. These items were subsequently evaluated in terms of their suitability to the individual themes but also the scale in general. For example, ambiguous and lengthy items were removed as they risk producing responses based on false understanding (DeVellis, 2003). Furthermore, items which were thought to be above the reading level of the sample were removed. Similarly, overly simplistic items were removed for their risk of appearing patronising to the respondents (as guided by MRS, 2006). The reading level of the items was determined in accordance with the language levels used in the focus groups and items which were worded in a manner similar to that which was spoken in the focus groups, were kept. This use of verbatim phrases for the scale items ensures the applicability of the items and is

endorsed by Robinson et al, (1991); in addition, this allowed for the inclusion of the alternative language of youth' as described by Barker and Weller (2003).

Attempts were made to include both positively and negatively worded items because the inclusion of negatively worded scale items helps to avoid 'agreement bias' in a scale (DeVellis, 2003). Furthermore, the items which were retained were compared to the answers provided in the twenty statements test (TST). That is, items which were similar to statements that were frequently mentioned in the TST were given preference over those that were not. After the list was reduced and the most relevant and appropriate items remained, there were a total of 52 statements. This is clearly a large number for a scale but as DeVellis (2003) states, it is not unusual for an initial item pool to contain three or four times the amount of items as desired for the final scale.

4.3.5.3 Expert opinion and verification with theory

As a further measure of content validity, the initial 52-item pool was reviewed by an expert. A psychometrician from The University of York Psychology Department[19] was asked to review the initial scale item pool in order to assess whether the construct of self-esteem was adequately defined, whether themes included were relevant and whether the items generated were appropriate. As a result of the feedback, a number of questions were altered, removed and added. The result was a final item pool of 73 items (Appendix C).

This expert-approved item pool was then considered in conjunction/comparison with the self-esteem theories and measures reviewed previously. This served to reaffirm the connection between extant theories of self-esteem and development of the scale items. The dominant notions within the self-esteem literature and the way in which the scale development process addressed these, can be seen in Table 4-1 below. By directly comparing extant theories of self-esteem with the work conducted thus far, it was possible to identify the similarities and differences between 'the old and the new'. The table highlights how the 'new' conception of self-esteem differs from some well established theories. This refers to not only the definition of self-esteem but also thoughts surrounding its bases, what affects it and thus how it can be indicated/measured. For example, the contrast with Harter's (1988) factors of self-esteem, illustrates the fact that certain elements of self-esteem are not applicable to British adolescents in the 21st century and

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[19] Jane Clarbour was deemed an appropriate expert as she has worked extensively with adolescents and can be considered a specialist in scale development – See Clarbour and Roger (2004): The construction and validation of a new scale for measuring emotional response style in adolescents.

thus should not be included in the scale. These changes to the conception and measurement of self-esteem, adhere to Robinson et al's (1991) conditions for the development of new scales; "sound improvements over previous measures should be demonstrated" (Pg. 6).

Table 4-1 Relation of theory to scale development process

Theories within the self-esteem literature	Ways in which the development of the new scale have addressed and improved these.
James' (1890) notion of the 'I' as a subject and knower versus the 'Me' as a content of experience.	The item pool contains subjective statements referring to the 'I' but also includes situational statements referring to the 'Me' as a result of context.
James' (1890) three 'mes': 1)'material me' 2)'Social me' 3)'Spiritual me'	The three 'mes' were all addressed in the themes and items in the scale. 1) Material me- physical appearance, fashion and clothing. Given the consumer culture the aspect of possessions and clothing were given specific attention. 2) Social me- the extreme importance of 'others' 3) Spiritual me- feelings about the self.
Leary's (1999) Sociometer theory of self-esteem. Cooley's (1902) notion of the 'looking-glass self': the self is inseparable from the social milieu.	These theories which highlight the importance of social elements in self-esteem are agreed with. The importance of 'Others' and their opinions were a constant element in discussions on self-esteem; friends, fitting-in, other people's comments etc. For this reason, a large proportion of scale items included reference to other people or social situations
Coopersmith's (1967) recognition of 'defensive self-esteem' James' (1890) description of 'self-seeking tendencies'	The results of the focus groups highlighted the difficulty in distinguishing between 'genuine' and 'fake' self-esteem. It was recognised that over-emphasising certain behaviours could be a sign of attempts to boost self-esteem; for example attention seeking. In addition, scale items were avoided if they were thought to result in defensive responses.
The notion that self-esteem entails self-evaluation. For example: Rosenberg (1965) approval – disapproval Fennell (1999) evaluation results in self-esteem	This was seen throughout the development process- for example the judgement of self in comparison to others. As can be seen in the definition, it is agreed that this is the core of self-esteem.
Fennell (1999) and Mechanic (1991)- The notion that self-esteem is formed through experiences.	This was acknowledged in the focus group discussions with adolescents who all had different experiences; it was explicitly mentioned in the 'general feelings' theme. For this reason, several of the scale items refer to a number of situations and experiences.
Bednar, Wells and Peterson (1989) recognise goal-achievements as an aid to self-esteem. Hill and Stephens (1997) note that self-esteem can determine aspirations and achievements	These points were recognised in terms of the central role of abilities and skills in self-esteem development and maintenance. Items referring to abilities, goals and aspirations were included in the item pool.
Fleming and Courtney (1984)- an individual's global/general self-esteem levels depends on specific elements.	The notion that several individual attributes contribute to an individual's self-esteem is agreed with. The themes identified in the focus groups were all considered 'building blocks' of self-esteem.

Rosenberg et al. (1995)- empirical evidence suggesting that general self-esteem is affected by specific abilities.	
Rosenberg and Pearlin's (1978), 4 bases of self-esteem: 1) Social Comparison 2) Reflected appraisal	1&2) Social comparison and Reflected Appraisals were recognised in the dominance of comparisons with 'other people' and the importance of their opinions.
3) Psychological centrality	3) The importance of considering self-esteem in terms of the elements that are psychologically central to teenagers was recognised. Indeed this was a focal point of improvements and indeed the reason behind the extensive qualitative data gathered from adolescents from disparate backgrounds; they revealed the most common elements central to adolescent self-evaluation.
4) Self-perception theory	4) The notion that individuals can objectively perceive and evaluate themselves is disagreed with. Indeed it is for this reason that great efforts were made to formulate a scale consisting of items which indirectly tap in to elements of self-esteem rather than directly asking respondents for self-evaluation.
Harter' (1988) 'Self-perception profile for adolescents' includes eight separate factors thought to impact on self-esteem. It also includes a global measure of self-esteem:	Each of these eight factors was discussed in the focus groups in some way. However, as can be seen below, certain factors were addressed across multiple themes and others were grouped together under one broad theme.
1) Social acceptance	1) This was seen throughout the themes, particularly in 'fitting-in' 'friends and popularity' and 'clothing and brands'
2) Close friendship	2) This was acknowledged in 'friends and popularity'
3) Physical appearance 4) Romantic appeal	3&4) These two factors were categorised under 'physical appearance'[20]
5) Scholastic competence 6) Athletic competence	5&6) These factors were all considered under the general 'ability/skill' theme. It seemed that the area of competence was not relevant; merely possessing a skill/ability of some form was sufficient to contribute to self-esteem.
7) Job Competence	7) This factor was not addressed as it was not mentioned by any of the adolescents. However, its impact on self-esteem is regarded as akin to that of possessing an ability/skill.
8) Behavioural conduct	8) This was seen in themes such as 'communicating and socializing' and 'feelings of self' wherein self-esteem levels could be assessed according to particular behaviours.

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[20] In addition, a previous empirical investigation of these factors- on a British sample- revealed that they were not statistically separable factors (Eiser et al., 1995).

Global self-worth	The themes of 'feelings of self' and 'general feelings' relate to global self-worth. However, contrary to Harter (1988), it is believed that these elements *contribute* to self-esteem rather than represent an independent global constructs.
Coopersmith (1967) claims that the judgement /evaluation of the self is expressed in the attitude the individual hold towards him/ herself. A positive attitude signifies a positive evaluation.	The 'Feelings about self' theme noted that self-esteem can be judged by how an individual feels about him/herself. As a result, scale items were designed to assess this.

4.3.6 Response format

The next stage was to determine the most appropriate response format for the scale. For example, should responses be given in verbal or numerical form, how many options should there be and what direction should the response options follow (negative to positive versus positive to negative). It seemed, from the scales reviewed, that the majority of scales assessing beliefs and attitudes employ a likert scale with the statements ranging from negative to positive (e.g. DeVellis, 2003; Rosenberg, 1965; Goldberg et al, 2003). However, there is debate as to the most appropriate number of options to include in likert scales; amongst the scales reviewed, this ranged from between 4 and 7 options. A small number of options (between 2 and 3) is inappropriate as it restricts respondents and loses sensitivity to subtle differences between respondents (Coelho and Esteves, 2007). Conversely, the use of Visual Analogue Scales (VAS) has been described as being highly sensitive to response differences (DeVellis, 2003). Such a VAS response format presents respondents with a continuous, unmarked line between a set of opposing responses (e.g. agree-disagree) and asks them to mark where their opinion lies on that continuum.

Regardless of the most frequently used types of responses, the most appropriate style of response will depend on the construct measured, the social class, the developmental stage and the education level of the respondents (Coelho and Esteves, 2007). For this reason, it was decided that a pilot sample of respondents would be used to assess the preferred style of response for the scale items. Thus, a sample of five respondents (three males, two females; 15 years old) of mixed academic ability were presented with the new scale. Each scale contained five different response styles (Appendix D) and after completing the scale, participants were asked to choose which response style they preferred and why. Some valuable feedback was received. Of the five respondents, three expressed a preference for a Visual Analogue scale, one for an 11-point number line, and one for a two-option response. Judging by the feedback (excerpts A, B and C below), the respondents clearly preferred a broader range of options as it allowed them to express their opinions more accurately. Furthermore, considering the personal nature of the questionnaire it was

important that respondents felt that they could give their true opinion rather than be confined to a set number of options.

A
I preferred the line because I found it easier to show how I felt about each question.

B
"I preferred the last set of questions (with 11 point scale) – *they had a neutral option*"

C
 "I didn't like the two options answer. These are less accurate"

Based on the responses, it was decided that a 10cm Visual Analogue Scale would be used in the questionnaire. This seemed the preferred option for the adolescents and has not previously been used in a self-esteem scale. Despite the additional effort involved for the researcher (measuring lines), it was felt that the preference of the respondents and the accuracy of the sensitivity of such a response scale could not be overlooked. Again, accuracy and appropriateness were chosen over convenience. This choice was also discussed with the psychometric expert (referred to above) and it was agreed that this response style was indeed the most suitable option.

4.4 Administration to Development Sample

Having finalised the initial item pool and decided upon an appropriate response format, the scale was ready to be tested. It was distributed to a development sample in conjunction with a concurrent measure; the Brief Fear of Negative Evaluations Scale (BFNE; Leary, 1983). This scale consists of 12 items and will be thoroughly explained and described in section 4.5.3.1, its addition to the 73 scale items resulted in a total of 85 questions presented to the respondents.

4.4.1 Sample

A total of six schools were contacted for this stage of data collection. They included high and low-income schools[21] from the North, South and Middle England and represented urban and rural locations. Schools were asked to distribute the questionnaire to the Year 10 pupils (15-16 year olds). A total of 550 questionnaires were distributed between the schools.

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[21] OFSTED (2003) defines a deprived school as one in which over 35% of pupils are eligible of free school meals. Thus, the high and low-income schools were classified according to whether the percentage of students on free school meals was below or above 35%, respectively.

In terms of scale development, there seems to be little consensus as to the appropriate sample size required for analysis (DeVellis, 2003). However, Nunnally (1978) suggests that samples over 300 are appropriate as they are more likely to eliminate the concern of subject variance; a sample of over 300 respondents is more likely to represent the 'average' population to be measured. Given the number and variety of respondents, the development sample was deemed to be representative of British adolescents and the likelihood of the results of the analyses occurring by chance was reduced.

4.4.2 Administration procedure

The questionnaires were sent to the participating schools and administered in class by the teachers. All questionnaires were distributed in envelopes so as to ensure students of their anonymity. In addition, all administering teachers were provided with a brief from the researcher which ensured that all respondents were given a set of clear and standardised instructions. The brief included the purpose of the study, "to find out how 15-16 year olds feel about themselves and the things they buy" and encouraged all students to answer questions honestly and at their own pace. Students were reminded that there are no right or wrong answers and anonymity was guaranteed (See appendix E).

The procedure was slightly different in one of the schools; the researcher administered the questionnaires herself. This was because the students from this school were used for the test-retest sample and thus ID numbers were assigned to respondents in order to match their subsequent responses. Although the students' names were used in this sample, it was explained that their responses would only be identified by the number on their questionnaire. The same brief was given as in the other schools.

4.5 Analysis and Results of Development Sample

A total of 425 usable questionnaires were returned and the data were entered in to SPSS (version16.00). The scoring of the negatively worded questions was reversed and the data were screened for errors. The average age of the sample was 15.43 years and the male: female ratio was approximately 50:50. 60% of the respondents were classed as high-income and 40% as low-income.

4.5.1 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA); item reduction

In order to establish the number of specific dimensions of self-esteem and to reduce the number of items in the scale (thus avoiding respondent fatigue), EFA was employed. The data were subjected to principal component analysis (PCA) (as recommended by Field, 2000) and the suitability of the data for PCA was affirmed: the Kaiser-Meyer-Oklin value of .87 exceeded the minimum value of .6 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Bartlett 1954) reached statistical significance (p=.000). The first extraction was performed on the total sample and produced a scree-plot which suggested the presence of four distinct factors- as can be seen in Figure 4-3. Cattell's (1966) scree test was chosen to determine the number of factors because Kaiser's eigenvalue-1 criterion has been argued to extract too many factors (Pallant, 2007).
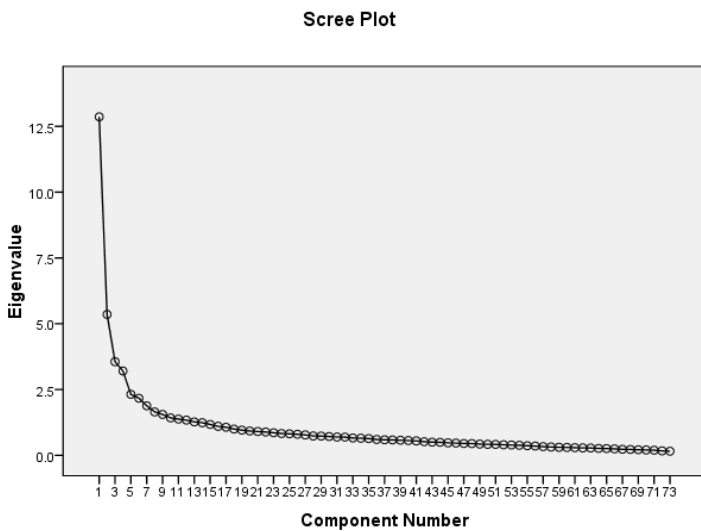
Figure 4-3: Scree-plot of initial factor extraction.

In order to explore and confirm the four-factor solution that was found, the total sample was split and PCAs performed on three separate samples; 60% of the total (256 cases), the remaining 40% (169) and the total sample (425). By comparing the results of the PCAs on the three samples, it was possible to reduce the number of items and identify those which were stable across each of the samples. In terms of psychological centrality, this was thought to identify those which were relevant to most respondents. Indeed, the item reduction process assumed an iterative and exploratory approach which combined statistical indicators with qualitative interpretation so as to produce a final set of scale items which were both logical and statistically sound. The various steps taken for item reduction are outlined below.

4.5.1.1 Step 1

Based on the findings from the scree-plot, the data from 60% of the sample were rotated to a four-factor Oblique (Direct Oblimin) solution with a minimum loading exclusion criterion of .40[22]. As item reduction was the priority, the pattern matrix was examined and those items which failed to load on any single factor (21 items) were removed and the rotation was re-run with the remaining 52 items. The resulting pattern matrix was once again examined and any items which were seen to cross-load in this solution were removed (6 items). Finally, the remaining 46 items were rotated again and the pattern matrix re-examined. Given the significant reduction in scale items, it was felt that the remaining 46 items should be subjected to further scrutiny by comparing the loadings of the factors on the three separate samples: 60%, 40% and the whole sample. This would allow the identification of the most robust items while enabling further item reduction.

4.5.1.2 Step 2

The pattern matrices (resulting from the remaining 46 items) produced from the three samples (40%, 60%, total sample) were compared and items loading on all three were retained; a total of 28 items. The decisions to retain or exclude the remaining items (those not loading on all three samples) were based on a combination of their loading strength, their stability to load on the same factor across samples and whether or not they were deemed relevant to a particular factor (face validity). For example, item 19 - "I have lots of good friends that I can go to for help" - failed to load on any factor when run on the whole sample and loaded on two separate factors in the 60% and 40% samples; hence this item was deemed unreliable and was removed. However, item 69- " I am proud of my abilities/skills" – was retained as it loaded on the same factor in both the whole and 60% samples. The fact that this item failed to load on the 40% was overridden by its stability and face validity; indeed abilities and skills were shown to bear great importance in adolescent self-esteem.

After scrutinising the items which did not load on all three samples, a total of seven items were removed; this resulted in 39 scale items which were once again rotated on the whole sample. The resulting pattern matrix can be seen below (Table 4-2). With the number of scale items reduced to a manageable size (39), the make-up of the individual factors/components were closely examined in order to determine what dimension of self-

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[22] KMO = .809; Bartlett's test of sphericity; p=.000

esteem each of the four factors represent. The interpretations of each factor are described below (the individual scale items in each factor can be seen in Table 4-2.

Table 4-2 Pattern matrix for reduced 39 scale items (based on whole sample)

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
62.If someone takes the mick out of me I think about it for a long time afterwards *	.646			
54.When my friends are wearing a brand that I don't have, it makes me feel bad *	.632			
21.When I look at other people I feel as though I'm not good enough *	.595			
6. I often change the way I dress to look like my friends *	.583			
12. I sometimes change the way I act to be more like my friends *	.570			
37.When I'm with a group of people I often worry about the right things to talk about *	.567			
63. It is very important for me to fit in with other people *	.566			
41.I often feel like I do everything wrong *	.545			
50.I can't afford to dress like most other people my age *	.528			
20.When I'm talking to people I'm often too scared to tell them what I think *	.524			
25.I wish I had more friends *	.522			
58.I often feel like I'm the odd one out in a group *	.498			
33.I care about what other people think of me *	.484			
60.I often feel bad about things and feel depressed a lot *	.481			
40.I can't afford to wear labels/brands *	.452			
44.When I go clothes shopping I only buy good brands		.783		
71.I wear a lot of branded (named) clothes		.782		
35. I usually have the latest designer labels (names/brands)		.777		
26.I feel better about myself when I am wearing clothes with a label (name/brand)		.686		
59.When I buy clothes I don't care if they're in fashion or not *		.634		
13.I don't wear clothes that are out of fashion		.566		
32.I feel good about myself			.729	
61.I am happy with the person I am			.647	
18.I always try my best			.627	
15.My family make me feel proud when I have achieved something			.616	
27.I believe that I can do anything if I try			.603	
66.I am happy with the way I look, I don't want to change anything about myself			.592	
69.I am proud of my abilities/ skills			.568	
67. There are some things that I am good at			.480	
52. My friends make me feel proud when I have achieved something			.410	
56.People would probably describe me as a sociable and outgoing person				.763
16.People would describe me as a quiet person *				.621
45.I make friends easily				.568
31.I am not a shy person				.554
36.I am a confident person				.550
49.I feel good when people notice me and pay attention to me				.518
7.When people describe me they would probably say I have a lot of friends				.483
68.If a group of people are talking, I find it hard to join the conversation *				.457
11.I fit in with the people around me				.440

* Items which are negatively marked (reverse scored)

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Factor 1: Social comparison (effects of).

This factor is concerned with feelings and behaviours which occur as a result of social comparisons. For example, the three most heavily loading items on this component clearly refer to *reactions* from social comparisons and the remaining items can all be seen to relate to 'other people'.

Factor 2: Brand Ownership

The items loading on this factor clearly refer to the ownership of brands and also indicate the level of importance placed on possessing them. For example, a highly positive response to item 44 would indicate a strong focus on owning branded clothing.

Factor 3: Self-evaluation

This factor encompasses a range of items referring to physical appearance, abilities, self-belief and recognition of achievement. Despite this variety amongst the items, the central theme is their relation to the ways in which someone *evaluates* themselves; or in the case of 15 and 52, the way that others evaluate them.

Factor 4: Social ability/ extraversion

All the items loading on this factor clearly refer to how sociable and extravert an individual is. It would be expected that high scorers on this factor would be those with a high level of social skills and ability.

4.5.1.3 Step 3

Once again, in order to confirm the factor structure, the above structure (Table 4-2, from the whole sample) was compared to that produced with 60% and 40% of the sample. This factor structure (with fewer scale items) was more stable across the three samples than the previous one; thus implying that the retained items are more stable markers of their relevant factors than those which were removed. Although there was a large degree of coherence amongst the items loading within each factor, there were certain items which seemed – in terms of face validity - less relevant to the component. For this reason, the suitability of items within each factor was further assessed by examining the Cronbach's alpha values of the items within each factor. However, as with the previous item refining stages, decisions to retain or remove items were based on an iterative process; a combination of Cronbach's alpha, qualitative interpretation of individual items and re-examinations of factor structures. This combination of assessing 'internal item qualities'

(through alpha values) and 'judgemental item qualities'(through interpretation) is advocated by Stanton et al (2002); indeed, "There is no good reason to view judgemental qualities as any less important than other criteria in decision making about item retention" (pg. 173).

Given the detailed nature of this procedure, the details of the reduction process will be fully explained for Factor 1 and 2 only. This is due to the fact that these factors neatly exemplify the combined use of qualitative and quantitative interpretation in item reduction. Subsequently, the Cronbach's alpha values are provided for Factors 3, 4 and the total scale. The pattern matrix of the final scale is displayed in Table 4-5.

Social comparison (effects of)

The Cronbach's alpha for the 15 items on this factor was .856. This figure exceeds the acceptable value of .7 (DeVellis, 2003) and suggests that the items tap into the same underlying construct of social comparison. However, in order to reduce the factor to specifically address the *effects* of social comparisons (as suggested by the top loading items), a number of items were removed and the reliability of the factor was re-assessed. Firstly, items 40, 33, 63 and 50 (can be seen in Table 4-2) were removed as a) they did not directly refer to the *effects* of social comparison and b) the 'Cronbach's alpha if item deleted' figures suggested that their removal did not have a large impact on the reliability of the scale. The removal of these four items resulted in an alpha value of .853. The remaining 11 items were reviewed again and items 6, 12, 25 and 20 were removed. It was felt that items 6, 12 and 25 presented a high risk of socially desirable responding and item 20 was similar to item 37; as item 37 had a higher factor loading than 20, it was the preferred option. The remaining 7 items resulted in an alpha value of .833 and are listed below. Although this value is lower than the combination of the original 15 items, brevity and face validity were selected above minor differences in reliability scores.

Table 4-3 Effects of social comparison items; Cronbach's alpha .833

62. If someone takes the mick out of me I think about it for a long time afterwards*
21.When I look at other people I feel as though I'm not good enough*
37.When I'm with a group of people I often worry about the right things to talk about*
41. I often feel like I do everything wrong*
54. When my friends are wearing a brand that I don't have, it makes me feel bad*
60. I often feel bad about things and feel depressed a lot*
58. I often feel like I'm the odd one out in a group*

* Negatively marked items (reverse scored)

Item 60 illustrates the case of an item which involved a large degree of interpretation. Upon first inspection, item 60 did not seem to directly refer to social comparison and thus was considered for removal. However, given its relatively high item-total correlation (.612), and the fact that the reliability value would decrease to .805 if it was removed, it seems that feeling 'bad' and 'depressed' is related to social comparison. Indeed this relationship is in-line with the previous qualitative findings which suggested that other people and social comparisons can strongly affect an individual's self-esteem. For these reasons, item 60 was retained on factor 1.

Brand Ownership

This factor was the most consistent through the item refining stages as it continually loaded on all three samples (whole, 60% and 40%). However, a reliability analysis for all six items produced an alpha value of .271. Removing the lowest loading items (59 and 13) increased this value to .638. This value further increased with the removal of item 44; to .777. However, considering the stability of the factor structure and the added stability benefits of having four items per factor (as suggested by Guadagnoli and Velicer, 1988), it was retained. Furthermore, the removal of item 44 can be argued to decrease the alpha value due to the fact that it taps in to a slightly different domain of brand ownership; the acquisition process itself. Once again, a qualitative interpretation of this item provides a stronger rationale for its retention than statistical values. Although this may at first seem unconventional, it has recently been argued that large alpha values may be indicative of a "failure to adequately sample content from all parts of the construct domain" (Stanton et al., 2002, pg. 171).

Table 4-4 Brand ownership items; Cronbach's alpha .638

71. I wear a lot of branded (named) clothes
26. I feel better about myself when I am wearing clothes with a label (name/brand)
35. I usually have the latest designer labels (names/brands)
44. When I go clothes shopping I only buy good brands

Self evaluation and social ability/extraversion

Three items were removed from the Self-evaluation factor, resulting in an alpha of .780. Three items were removed from the Social Ability factor, resulting in an alpha of .709. The combined alpha for the final 23 item scale was .845. Appendix F provides details of item-total correlations and 'Cronbach's alpha if item deleted' values.

4.5.1.4 Step 4

A final PCA with oblimin rotation was performed (on the total sample) to confirm the stability of the factor structure. The four factor extraction explained a total of 50.89% of the variance. The 'Effects of social comparison' accounted for 25.5%, 'Brand ownership' for 10.41%, 'Social ability/extraversion for 7.96% and 'Self-evaluation' for 6.97 [23]. Considering the parsimonious nature of the scale, the fact that the four factors account for 50% of the variance, was deemed successful. Furthermore, it is interesting to note here that the loadings of factors three and four switch in the final solution. That is, in this final solution, the Social ability/Extraversion factor accounts for more variance than the Self-evaluation factor; indeed this mirrors the extreme importance adolescents place on social factors and 'other people' when forming self-esteem.

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[23] See Appendix G for the structure matrix and scree plot.

Table 4-5 Pattern matrix for final 23 item solution

	Component			
	Social Comparison Effects	Brand Ownership	Social Ability	Self-Evaluation
62. If someone takes the mick out of me I think about it for a long time afterwards*	.756			
21.When I look at other people I feel as though I'm not good enough*	.729			
41. I often feel like I do everything wrong*	.686			
60. I often feel bad about things and feel depressed a lot*	.676			
37.When I'm with a group of people I often worry about the right things to talk about*	.657			
54. When my friends are wearing a brand that I don't have, it makes me feel bad*	.619			
58. I often feel like I'm the odd one out in a group*	.615			
71. I wear a lot of branded (named) clothes*		.806		
26. I feel better about myself when I am wearing clothes with a label (name/brand)*		.775		
35. I usually have the latest designer labels (names/brands)*		.708		
44. When I go clothes shopping I only buy good brands*		.696		
56. People would probably describe me as a sociable and outgoing person			.743	
16. People would describe me as a quiet person*			.629	
45. I make friends easily			.545	
7. When people describe me they would probably say I have a lot of friends			.520	
31. I am not a shy person			.517	
11. I fit in with the people around me			.498	
69. I am proud of my abilities/ skills				.725
32. I feel good about myself				.697
67. There are some things that I am good at				.632
61. I am happy with the person I am				.605
66. I am happy with the way I look, I don't want to change anything about myself				.594
27. I believe that I can do anything if I try				.590

*Negatively marked items.

4.5.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Having identified the four (potential) factors constituting self-esteem, through *exploratory* factor analysis, the next stage of the scale development procedure was *confirmatory* factor analysis (CFA). Indeed DeVellis (2003) and Hair et al., (2006) both agree that this is the next necessary stage. This is because CFA assesses the suitability of the factors as potential indicators of self-esteem within a Structural Equation Mode (SEM). By creating

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a SEM (as shown in figure 4-4) it was possible to asses whether self-esteem is in fact a multidimensional construct consisting of Self-Evaluation, Brand Ownership, Social Comparison effects and Social Ability. Considering the rationale for the development of the new self-esteem scale – the need for up to date and relevant dimensions, such as Brand Ownership- this step was deemed particularly important. The 23-item scale was subjected to CFA using Maximum Likelihood Estimation (N= 393). Amos Graphics (v16.00) was used to create the SEM (Figure 4-4)
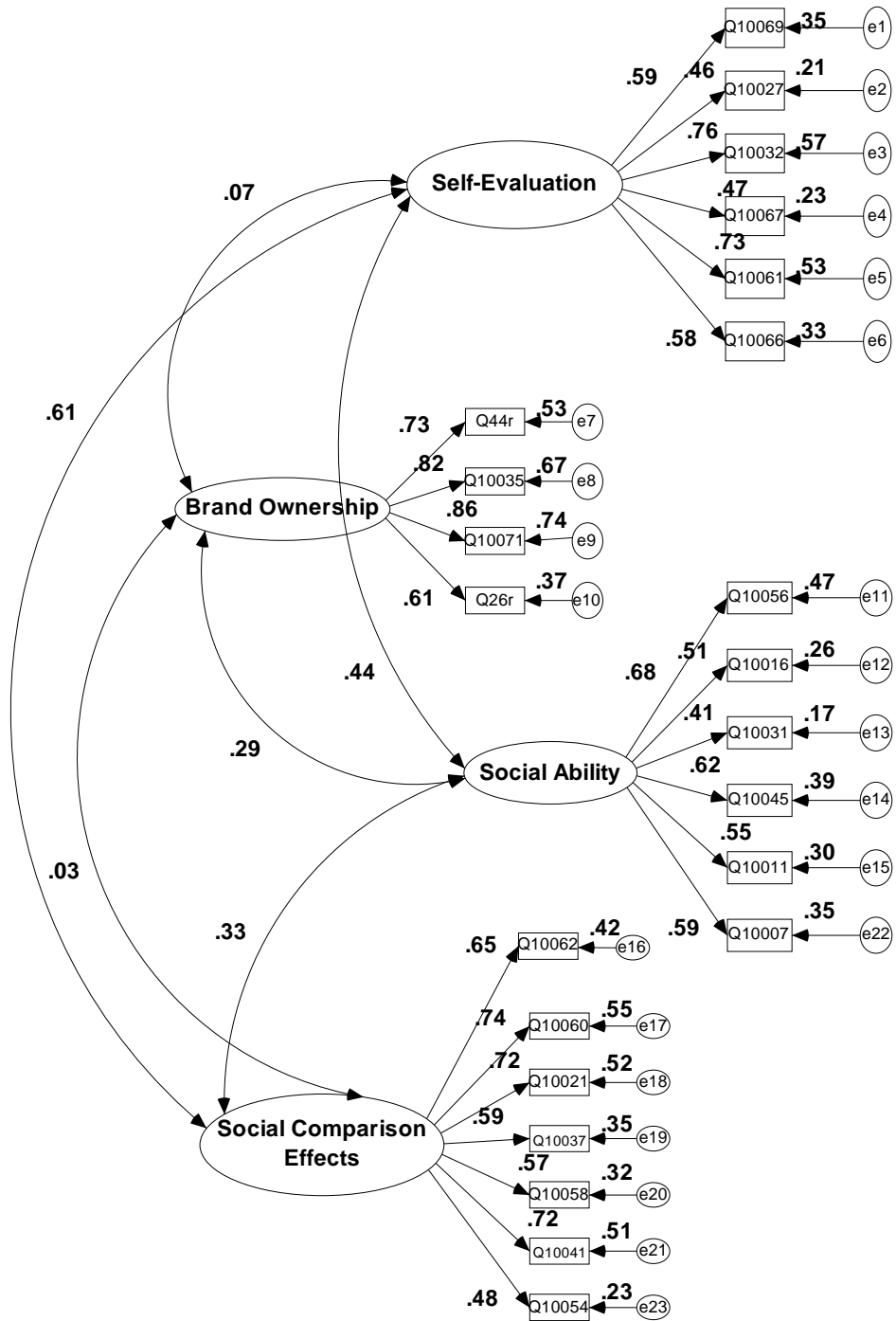
Figure 4-4 CFA of four factor model of adolescent self-esteem

The above model shows how (and at what strength) each of the variables (scale items) load on the relevant factors and also, how the factors co-vary. Although most of the loadings displayed were significant, the model produced fit measures marginally below the recommended values (as shown in the footnotes). Measurement fit: X2 (df) = 495.262(224), p<.001[24]; Comparative Fit Index (CFI)[25] = .846; Bentler-Bonnet Normed Fit Index (NFI) = .754; Bollen (IFI) Fit Index = .849; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)[26]: .072; HOELTER[27] = 124.

Despite the less-than desirable fit indices reported above, the importance of qualitative interpretation must not be forgotten. As seen in the EFA (section 4.5.1) it is necessary to consider not only statistical, but also theoretical and practical information prior to judging the adequacy of the model. As aptly stated by Byrne (2009) the fit indices "can in no way reflect the extent to which the model is plausible; *this judgement rests squarely on the shoulders of the researcher.*" (pg. 84). In addition, considering the extensive statistical and interpretative work completed thus far, it was decided that this model be further assessed using the parcelling technique (as used by Clarbour and Roger, 2004).

4.5.2.1 Parcelling

Parcelling in CFA typically improves model fit because the complexity of the model is reduced (as can be seen in figure 4-5). When using parcels or summated scales, composite indicators are created from the sum of all the measured items in a construct (Hair et al., 2006). Thus, in modelling self-esteem, four composite indicators (one for each factor/dimension) were created from the sum of scores of the items pertaining to each factor. In order to be suitable for parcelling, the items within the composite indicator must be both statistically and conceptually similar (Kim and Hagtvet, 2003). Thus the suitability of the parcelling technique was confirmed by the unidimensionality of the items within each of the four factors; as expressed by the alpha values seen in section 4.5.1.3 above[28]. Moreover, the number of items pertaining to each factor adheres to the parcelling criteria as "good practice dictates a minimum of three items per factor, preferably four" (Hair et al., 2006, pg 783). Figure 4-5 below, illustrates the parcelled model of self-esteem.

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[24] As is commonly agreed, the rejection of the model by the Chi-square statistic was expected due to the large sample (e.g. Blunch, 2008; Floyd and Widaman, 1995).

[25] CFI is the choice index and is generally agreed to be acceptable at values >.90 (Bentler, 1990)

[26] RMSEA is one of the most widely used measures of covariance (Hair et al., 2006). The acceptable values seem to lie between .06 and .10. However, according to MacCallum et al., (1996) values between .08 and .10 represent a mediocre fit, and values greater than .10 a poor fit.

[27] The HOELTER value (Hoelter, 1983) assesses the sampling adequacy and ideally exceeds a value of 200.

[28] Although alpha values above .70 is the usual cut-off value for unidimensionality, Hair et al., (2006) note that for exploratory work, values above .60 are sufficient.
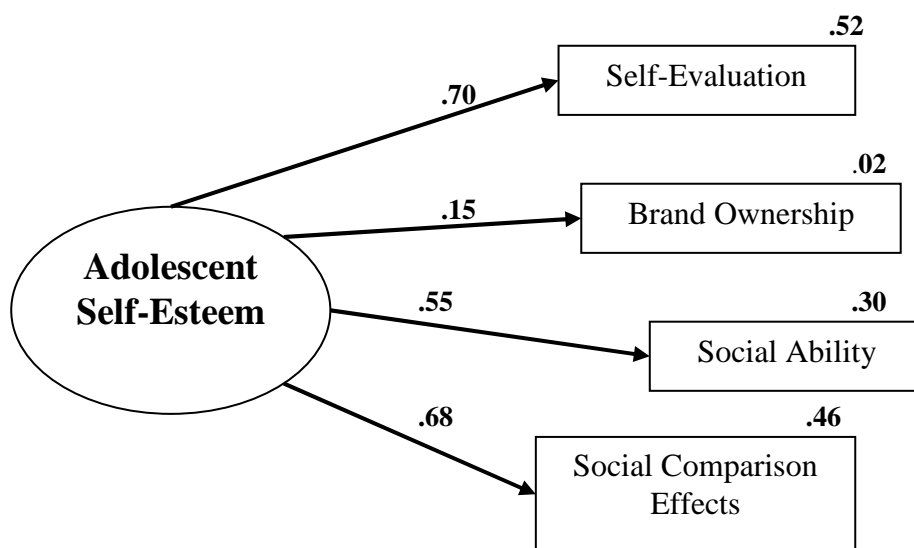
Figure 4-5 CFA of (parcelled) four factor model of adolescent self-esteem

The parcelled model, in its simplicity, shows the direct relation between the latent variable of global self-esteem and its measurable factors more accurately; self-evaluation, Brand Ownership, Social Ability and Social Comparison Effects. Although the regression values of the model are moderate, the goodness of fit indices of the parcelled model confirms the structure of the construct. Measurement fit: X2 (df) = 8.358 (2) p<.001; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .967; Bentler-Bonnet Normed Fit Index (NFI) = .958; Bollen (IFI) Fit Index = .969; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA): .09; HOELTER: 281.

Although the indices of the models were lower than desired, the model was deemed as adequate. This is due to the small sample size and the extensive interpretive work carried out in the previous stages of the scale development (including EFA) which strongly supported the four factor structure.

4.5.3 Concurrent validation

As was explained above, in the first round of data collection, the self-esteem scale was distributed together with a concurrent 12 item scale. Thus, the initial concurrent validation of the 23 item self-esteem scale was based on its relationship with the Brief Fear of Negative Evaluations Scale (BFNE; Leary, 1983). The correlation between the scales was based on the total sample of 425 respondents.

4.5.3.1 Brief fear of negative Evaluations Scale (BFNE; Leary, 1983)

The BFNE (Leary, 1983) is a reduced version of Watson and Friend's (1969) Fear of Negative Evaluations (FNE) scale and measures the "degree to which people experience apprehension at the prospect of being evaluated negatively" (Leary, 1983, pg. 371). The scale consists of 12 statements and asks respondents to mark on a 5-point Likert scale, how characteristic the statement is of them (1= 'not at all characteristic of me' to 5= 'extremely characteristic of me'). A high score indicates a high fear of negative evaluations. The BFNE was shown to be reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .90 and a test-retest reliability coefficient of .74 (Leary, 1983).

Based on the literature reviewed and previous work undertaken, it was felt that the wording of some of the statements in the BFNE required alteration. Not surprisingly, this scale was developed on an American college-student sample and thus the vocabulary used was not suited for use on British adolescents (with a wide range of literacy levels). In addition, the wording of the response scale was changed from "characteristic of me" to "like me" as this was deemed less complex. Finally, the wording of two of the response intervals were altered: "slightly" to "a little" and "moderately" to "kind of". It was felt that these changes made the scale more suitable for the target sample. See Appendix H for the original and revised scale.

The findings from the literature review, and indeed the focus groups, clearly showed the importance of social acceptance and positive evaluations amongst adolescents; indeed they are central to levels of self-esteem. For this reason, the degree to which an individual was concerned with 'other people' was thought to be a marker of self-esteem; a high concern indicated low self-esteem. For this reason, it was expected that a high fear of negative evaluations would be related to a low self-esteem score.

Total scores were calculated for the BFNE and the 23 item self-esteem scale. Due to the difference in their units of measurement, the scores for the two scales were converted into *Z* scores so as to compare standardized scores. The relationship between the scales was examined using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. There was a strong, negative correlation between the total self-esteem scores and BFNE; r= -.533, n = 372, *p*<.000. As expected, this suggests that a high fear of negative evaluations is associated with low levels of self-esteem. This suggests that the new scale is indeed measuring an element of self-esteem; this is because, "people who are highly concerned about being perceived and evaluated negatively would be more likely to behave in ways that avoid the

possibility of unfavourable evaluations" (Leary, 1983, pg. 372). Considering the negative relationship between the two measures, this means that those individuals with low self-esteem are more afraid of being negatively evaluated and, according to the sociometer hypothesis (Leary et al., 1995), this is a sign of low self-esteem (resulting from reduced social inclusion).

4.6 Administration of Test-retest Sample

Having established the 23 item self-esteem scale, further reliability and validity measures were conducted through a retest sample. The questionnaire was re-administered to a sample in one of the schools used in the development sample (where ID numbers had been matched to student names). In this (second) round of data collection, two additional validating scales were included with the 23 item self-esteem scale. The following section will first present the results of the test-retest for the self-esteem scale and subsequently, the concurrent measures will be described and analysed.

4.6.1 Test-retest results

Test-retest reliability is considered the most popular measure of a scale's stability and reliability and is commonly cited in scale manuals; values between .7 and .8 are considered to display a high reliability. The retest was administered eight months after the first scale. A total of 57 questionnaires were administered, 45 of which (22 females and 23 males) could be used for comparison; due to absent pupils and incomplete data. The reliability of the scale upon second administration remained stable; Cronbach's alpha was .847. A correlation between the total scores at T1 and T2 revealed a high test-retest reliability of $r = .776$ ($n = 45$, $p<.000$). Furthermore, a paired-samples t-test of the total scores showed no significant difference between the results at T1 and T2. These results suggest the reliability and consistency of the new self-esteem scale.

4.6.2 Further concurrent validation

Despite the relatively small sample size, this second round of data collection was used as an opportunity to further establish the validity of the new scale. Thus, this administration included Harter's (1988), five 'Global self-worth' items from the Self-perception profile for adolescents (SPPA) described in the previous chapter. In addition, a short version of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability scale (M-C1) (Strahan and Gerbasi, 1972) was distributed with the scales.

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4.6.2.1 Harter's (1998) Self-perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA).

The full description of Harter's (1988) SPPA was provided in the previous chapter. However, in order to assess whether the new scale related to global or general self-esteem, only the five items from the 'global self-worth' dimension were used. These items are thought to constitute "a global judgement of one's worth as a person" (Harter, 1988, pg. 3). The reliability of the global self-worth measure dimension is .85 (Harter, 1988). A positive correlation between these scales is thus thought to provide a measure of scale validity. Due to the complex nature of the SPPA's response scale (as discussed), a simplified version was used (Appendix H). The simplified response scale was derived from Wichstrom (1995) who simplified the scale format to include only one statement with a four-point Likert scale response format ('describes me very poorly' to 'describes me very well'). As has been mentioned, the altered response format has not been shown to be more prone to socially desirable responding (Wichstrom, 1995).

As with the previous concurrent measure (BFNE) the total scores for the global self-worth items and the self-esteem scale were converted to *Z* scores and correlated. A positive correlation of .501 (n = 55, p<.01) suggests that the self-esteem scale relates to self-worth. This suggests that the items in the new scale and the factors which they address, combine to tap in to global self-worth amongst adolescents. This relationship indicates the ability of the 23 scale items to asses overall self-worth by combining the most common – adolescent specific- domains of self-esteem; rather than viewing them as separate.

4.6.2.2 Short version of the Marlow-Crowne Social Desirability scale (MCSDS; MC-1)

The MC-1 (Strahan and Gerbasi, 1972) was derived from the original MCSDS (Crowne and Marlowe, 1960). The MCSDS is established as one of the most commonly used social desirability scales (Leite and Beretvas, 2005) and was specifically designed for assessing socially desirable responding in self-report measures. The scale assesses the tendency of individuals to present themselves favourably when answering questions; a tendency also referred to as 'impression management' (Paulhus, 1991). Individuals displaying high levels of social desirability are likely to have a higher need for approval, respond more to social reinforcement and thus tend to behave and respond in ways which are culturally acceptable. For this reason, by measuring social desirability amongst respondents and comparing their scores with those on other scales (such as self-esteem), it is possible to assess the extent to which scale items are prone to social desirability bias (SDB). A strong,

positive relationship between scores on a social desirability measure and that of another scale, might suggest the presence of a SDB on the latter scale.

Due to its length (33 items), there have been multiple short versions of the MCSDS developed (Fischer and Fick, 1993). Of these short versions, there appears to be a consensus that the MC-1 (Strahan and Gerbasi, 1972) is the most valid and reliable and is hence consistently recommended for use (DeVellis, 2003; Leite and Beretvas, 2005; Fischer and Fick, 1993; Strahan and Gerbasi, 1972). The MC-1 consists of 10 True or False items. Five refer to desirable but uncommon behaviours and five refer to undesirable but common behaviours; for example, 'I'm always willing to admit it when I make a mistake' and 'I like to gossip at times'. However, the wording of some of the questions was altered to suit the adolescent sample – see appendix H for the original and altered scales.

Scores are given for socially desirable answers and range from one to 10 with high scores representing higher social desirability. The reliability of the MC-1 was measured by Cronbach's alpha values between .6 and .7 by Strahan and Gerbasi (1972). However, given the True/False format and the disparate nature of the items in the scale, low alpha values are not surprising. The reliability of the measure has subsequently been affirmed by more recent Confirmatory Factor Analyses measures displaying consistently high levels of goodness of fit[29] (e.g. Fischer and Fick, 1993; Leite and Beretvas, 2005; Loo and Loewen, 2004).

The totals for the MC-1 were calculated and converted to Z scores. A correlation between Z scores for the self-esteem scale and the MC-1 failed to show a significant correlation $r = .042$ (n= 56, p= .761). Subsequently, the total MC-1 score was correlated against each of the individual scale items. The results showed two significant correlations. Item 16 'People would describe me as a quiet person' was mildly negatively related (r= -.327, n= 56, p<.05) and item 71 'I wear a lot of branded clothing' was mildly positively related (r = .311, n= 56, p< .05). The weak negative relationship with item 16 was not considered a concern given the direction and the strength of the relationship. Interestingly, the positive relationship between item 71 and MC-1 is to be expected according to the literature reviewed. Given the adolescent focus on branded clothing and the need to 'fit-in', it is not surprising that those who express a need for social desirability are likely to dress in ways that are considered socially desirable; namely in branded clothing.

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[29] CFI and AGFI values above .90

When the overall results of the MC-1 are considered, it seems that the self-esteem scale is not at a high risk of social desirability bias. Furthermore, considering the thorough steps taken to reduce SDB (indirect questioning, assuring anonymity of responses, questionnaires in envelopes) it seems reasonable that respondents answered honestly to questions asked.

4.7 Conclusions

The lengthy process and multiple stages in the development of this new self-esteem scale reflect the attention paid to the scale development process. Firstly, the differences between college or adult samples and the target adolescent sample were given special attention as they are all too often overlooked (Solomon and Peters, 2005). The design, data collection and analysis procedure were all adapted specifically for the teenage sample. Indeed, a major fault in much social science research was addressed; the use of college student samples and the generalisation of their results to other populations (Sears, 1986; Peterson, 2001). The present scale was developed on adolescents and is intended to be used by adolescents; for kids by kids approach; subjects as experts.

Furthermore, the combination of interpretive qualitative methods and stringent quantitative procedures in the item generation and reduction stages, have increased the applicability and validity of this scale. The final scale consists of items previously affirmed to be relevant to self-esteem but, due to the extensive qualitative work, also incorporates items which have been overlooked in past development procedures. For example, the role of brand ownership has previously been overlooked despite playing a very real and statistically stable role in adolescent self-esteem; indeed it is a psychologically central aspect of adolescent self-esteem in Britain. Conversely, the re-examination of the construct also showed the need for the removal of facets which were previously considered important but have since become obsolete; for example job competence.

The iterative item reduction process, in combination with the concurrent validation procedures have resulted in a scale consisting of items that can be considered the lowest common denominators of adolescent self-esteem. That is, rather than compartmentalising self-esteem to a set of separate domains, the detailed scale development process has identified those items which are most relevant and may be considered the common

denominators of self-esteem amongst British adolescents. For this reason, it seems that the new self-esteem scale can be considered as an appropriate measure for addressing the aims and hypotheses of this thesis. See Appendix I for full scale.

Having created this scale, the next chapter will outline how the scale was used in examining the impact of consumerism and branding on adolescents self-esteem. As will be seen, the final stage of data collection incorporated additional concurrent measures; once again checking the validity of the scale.

Chapter 5. Methodology: Data Collection for Comparative Study

5.1 Introduction

Having completed the new self-esteem scale, the next step was to implement it. The new self-esteem scale, in combination with seven concurrent measures, was used for the comparative study between high and low-income teenagers in Britain. The concurrent measures used served two main purposes; they provided validity assessments for the new self-esteem scale and they also enabled a more in-depth understanding of the construct and its relationship with other psychological variables. Therefore, this combination of psychological measures allowed the researcher to investigate the possible antecedents and consequences of consumerism and self-esteem levels. Indeed, Pervin and John (1990) note that often times when considering constructs, the nomological networks (in the form of correlations with other measures) are rarely considered and thus the relationship amongst constructs too often remain unclear. Therefore, the current scale-development methodology can be seen to be addressing another common flaw in scale development procedures.

Due to the large and diverse socioeconomic status of the sample of respondents, it was possible to directly compare the results of low and high-income adolescents; the results are presented in the following chapter. Once again, although the quantitative, psychometric measures provided ample data for numerous statistical analyses, the researcher used a large deal of qualitative interpretation in her analysis (as recommended by Stanton et al., 2002). Thus, the in-depth nature of this study was thought to provide empirical evidence for the links in the vicious cycle model (presented in chapter 2) and thus shed light on specific factors that contribute either positively or negatively to the well being of adolescents living in a consumer culture. Indeed, according to Goldberg et al., (2003), "given the centrality of the relationship between materialism and happiness, further considerations of the relation between materialism and general happiness/life satisfaction would seem warranted" (pg. 286). For this reason, close attention was given to the interplay between the self-esteem scale and seven other constructs.

This chapter will commence with a description and the rationale for the use of each of the concurrent measures. Subsequently, the respondent sample will be described in detail; a

description of each of the schools will be provided. Finally, the distribution and procedure of administration will be explained.

5.2 Concurrent/Validating measures

The seven measures selected for the validation and further exploration of the self-esteem scale included: Harter's (1988) 'global self-worth' dimension of the Self Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA); Leary's (1983) Brief Fear of Negative Evaluations (BFNE) scale and Strahan and Gerbasi's (1972) short version of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MC-1); these are all described in the previous chapter. In addition, Campbell et al's (1996) Self-Concept Clarity Scale (SCC); Leary et al.'s (2005) Need to Belong scale (NB); Bearden et al.'s (1989) Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence scale (CSII); and Goldberg et al.'s (2003) Youth Materialism Scale (YMS) were added to the questionnaires. All of the scales, including any alterations, are clearly depicted in Appendix H.

The following sections will describe and justify the use of each of the concurrent measures. The rationale for their inclusion in the study, provides the reasoning for the analyses conducted and the results presented in the following chapters. Furthermore, although the descriptions of the concurrent measures (in this chapter) include some expected relationships between the constructs, Chapter 6 will clearly summarise these in the form of hypotheses and propositions.

5.2.1 Harter's (1998) Self-perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA)

The first three scales – global self-worth of the SPPA, BFNE and MC-1 – were used in the scale development process and have been described in detail in the previous chapter. However, in this final round of data collection, six of the seven concurrent measures were split between participants, apart from the 'global self-worth' of the SPPA which was administered to every respondent (in addition to the self-esteem scale). This was due to the fact that its short length (six items) allowed the researcher to include it in the 'root' scale; thus it consisted of 23 self-esteem items and six SPPA items, 29 scale items in total. The global SPPA provided a measure of consistency to ensure that the new, 23 self-esteem items do indeed tap in to global self-worth.

5.2.2 Brief Fear of negative Evaluations Scale (BFNE; Leary, 1983)

As explained in the previous chapter, the BFNE was used as a validating measure of the self-esteem scale: low self-esteem was expected to be related to a high fear of negative evaluations. Furthermore, due to this relationship, scores of the BFNE scale were also hoped to provide evidence for link C in the vicious cycle model: a high fear of negative evaluations was thought to be related to a greater susceptibility to consumption influences. Similarly, a high fear of negative relations was expected to be found amongst individuals who were highly materialistic. This is because, as previously discussed, teenagers with a fear of negative peer evaluations often deal with their insecurity through the consumption of popular products and brands; thereby causing them to be intently focused on material and financial aspirations (as shown by Link E in the vicious cycle model). Furthermore, due to the stigma attached to poverty, it was also expected that low-income adolescents would have higher scores on the BFNE scale than high income teenagers.

5.2.3 Short version of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability scale (MCSDS; MC-1)

The social desirability scale was used in order to ensure that the self-esteem scores, from this larger respondent sample, were not influenced by, or the result of socially desirable responses from the teenagers. However, based on Henry's (2004) claims that low-income consumers are likely to focus on reaching the status quo, it is possible that the low-income adolescents will have higher scores on the MC-1 than high-income teenagers. Such a finding may support claims regarding the efforts that low-income consumers place on fitting into the dominant social order.

5.2.4 Campbell et al's (1996) Self-Concept Clarity (SCC)

The Self-Concept Clarity scale (SCC) (Campbell et al., 1996) assesses the "extent to which the contents of an individual's self-concept (e.g. perceived personal attributes) are clearly and confidently defined, internally consistent, and temporally stable" (pg. 141). The scale consists of a series of 12 statements regarding the stability of the self—for example, "I spend a lot of time wondering about what kind of person I really am." Respondents are asked to mark, on a five-point likert-type scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree), the degree to which they agree or disagree with the statement. The sum of scores yields an overall self-concept clarity score, with higher scores associated with a clearer self-concept. Campbell et al (1996) have reported a Cronbach's

α of .86 and a test-retest correlation of .79 over a four month interval, suggesting that the scale is reliable and the results replicable.

The SCC scale has been shown to correlate strongly with self-esteem; .62 (Campbell et al., 1996), high SCC is associated with high self-esteem. This relationship supports Calhoun and Morse's (2006) claims that SCC is in fact a prerequisite and hence an antecedent of self-esteem; Link B in the vicious cycle model illustrates this. Furthermore, the correlation coefficient of .62 also illustrates a distinct difference between SCC and self-esteem; they are related yet not the same (in contrast to Shavelson et al.'s, 1976 belief). For this reason, it was expected that a positive correlation between SCC and self-esteem scores would provide validation for the new scale. Moreover, based on the literature reviewed thus far, it was hoped that the SCC scale would highlight certain differences between high and low-income respondents. It was expected that low-income respondents would have a less-clear conception of their selves (Link A in vicious cycle model). Similarly, due to their focus on financial and material aspirations, materialistic individuals were expected to have lower levels of SCC; as illustrated by Link E in the vicious cycle model. The SCC scale has successfully revealed significant mean-level differences between groups of respondents from different cultures (Campbell et al., 1996) and thus it was deemed appropriate for the current study.

Finally, in terms of consumerism and identity formation, the SCC scale was considered to be a useful tool for assessing the extent to which a clear concept of self prevents or encourages individuals to engage in consumption. For example, as Isaksen and Roper (2008) found, individuals unclear in their self-concept were more susceptible to consumption influences. Furthermore, considering the identity-reinforcing properties of brands and especially branded clothing (e.g. Ross and Harradine, 2004), one might expect that those who have a lower self-concept clarity are more likely to place emphasis on brand consumption (Link E in vicious cycle).

5.2.5 Leary et al.'s, (2005) Need to Belong (NB) scale

The Need to Belong (NB) scale is based on the assumption that human beings are gregarious animals who have an innate need to belong (e.g. Baumeister and Leary, 1995). Furthermore, Leary et al's (2005) NB scale specifically considers the "desire for interpersonal acceptance and belonging that lies at the heart of the need to belong" (pg 3). Thus, the NB scale does not simply assess a similar construct such as extraversion; it

specifically assesses a *desire to be accepted.* This is partly because there exists no evidence to suggest that extrovert individuals in fact have a specific *desire* to be valued or accepted by others. Thus it seems that sociability is related to a need to belong, but it is by no means the same construct (Leary et al., 2005). Furthermore, "differences in belonging motivation underlie an array of behaviours that are focused on obtaining and maintaining interpersonal acceptance and also predict emotional reactions (such as social anxiety and hurt feelings) that reflect people's concerns with others' evaluations and acceptance of them" (Leary et al., 2005, Pg 4). For this reason it is clear that the desire for acceptance has important impacts on both emotional (for example self-esteem) and interpersonal behaviours in humans.

The NB scale consists of 10 statements – for example "I want other people to accept me"- and asks respondents to indicate, on a 5-point Likert scale, the extent to which they agree (strongly disagree to strongly agree). Scores range from 10 to 50 with high scores indicating a high need to belong and factor analysis has revealed a single factor termed 'the need for affiliation'; the reliability of the scale has been demonstrated with high Cronbach's alpha values (Leary et al., 2005). For example, on a sample of 307 respondents, the NB scale produced a reliability value of .81 and the consistency of the scale was displayed with a test-retest reliability of .87 over a 10 week period (Leary et al., 2005). Furthermore, the validity of the NB scale was thoroughly examined in a series of nine studies by Leary et al., (2005) who found that NB was positively correlated with the desire to be accepted (r=.61), a fear of rejection (r=.68) and sociability (.32); once again the low correlation with sociability highlights the distinction between the *desire* to be accepted and simple social encounters. Moreover, the motivation for affiliation was examined and significant correlates with the NB scale included emotional motivation (r= .39), social attention (r= .40) and social comparison (r= .37). Therefore, it would seem that the need to belong is based on a range of personal and social motivational factors.

The link between the need to belong and self-esteem was discussed in the review of the self-esteem literature. Indeed there is strong evidence which shows that a strong need to belong is related to low self-esteem and depression (e.g. Leary et al., 1995; Myers, 1992). The sociometer hypothesis purports that an individual's level of self-esteem is dependent on the level of social inclusion and by this logic, it seems reasonable to assume that those individuals with a high need to belong will have a lower level of social acceptance and thus a lower self-esteem than those with a lesser need to belong. Thus, NB and self-esteem scores should be negatively related and if they are, this would provide yet another

validity check for the new scale. Furthermore, considering the reportedly strong feelings of social exclusion amongst low-income consumers (e.g. Hill and Stephens, 1997; Ridge, 2002), it is expected that low-income respondents will have higher levels of NB. Such a finding would support the notion that the vicious cycle is indeed stronger amongst low-income adolescents.

In terms of relationships with consumerism, it is expected that those with high scores on the NB scales are also likely to display high levels of materialism and susceptibility to influence (as shown in Link C and E of the vicious cycle model). This is because, as Kelly (2001) explains, those individuals with a strong desire to be accepted, are likely to be highly concerned with what others think of them and for this reason they will focus on those aspects which are most likely to aid in the formation of connections with others (Pickett et al., 2004). Thus, considering the central role of consumption and brands in British society, it seems likely that those with a high need to belong will also be more susceptible to consumption influences, be more materialistic and have a strong orientation towards popular brands. After all, specifically in the adolescent world, these are the keys to social acceptance.

5.2.6 Bearden et al's, (1989) Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence scale (CSII)

Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (CSII) is defined as "the need to identify or enhance one's image with significant others through the acquisition and use of products and brands, the willingness to conform to the expectations of others regarding purchase decisions, and/or the tendency to learn about products and services by observing others" (Bearden et al.,1989, p. 474). The CSII measure was thought to be particularly relevant to this study as it is likely to provide some indication of the extent to which the adolescents are consumption orientated and how susceptible they are to consumption pressures from their peers – perhaps the most dominant consumption influence amongst them. The CSII scale consists of 12 statements – for example "It is important that others like the products and brands that I buy" - and asks respondents to indicate (on a seven-point likert scale) the extent to which they agree (strongly agree to strongly disagree). The sum of responses yields a CSII score with higher scores indicating greater susceptibility to influence.

Reliability analyses have produced high Cronbach's alpha values; for example Bearden et al (1989) showed a reliability (Cronbach's alpha) value of .88 on a sample of 220 adults and more recently, Isaksen and Roper (2008) found a reliability score of 0.83 amongst a sample of 206 adolescents. Moreover, Bearden et al (1989) found a test-retest reliability value of .79 amongst a sample of 35 respondents. These results suggest that the scale is consistent in its measurement of CSII. Furthermore, the validity of the scale was assessed with regards to its relationship with other measures. For example, Janis and Field (1959) found that individuals who experience feelings of inadequacy (as seen in low self-esteem) are more susceptible to influences and indeed, using the CSII, Rose et al., (1997) found this to be the case. In addition, Bearden et al. (1989) performed a series of validity studies and found that CSII correlated negatively with self-esteem (r= - .21). These results confirm that an individual's self-esteem levels are related to the importance they place on others' opinions of themselves and their possessions. For this reason, the relationship between scores on the CSII scale and self-esteem scale is thought to indicate the validity of the new self-esteem scale; individuals with low self-esteem scores will have a higher CSII score than those with high scores. Furthermore, apart from validating the new scale, such a result would also provide empirical evidence for link C in the vicious cycle model.

In terms of the CSII scale's relation to other measures, it has already been noted that individuals with low self-concept clarity (SCC) are likely to be more susceptible to influences; they are uncertain in themselves and thus look to others for inspiration in forming their identities. Furthermore, considering the close relationship between self-esteem, the need to belong (NB) and fear of negative evaluations (BFNE), it is thought that the latter two constructs may also be related to CSII. That is, individuals who have the desire to be accepted are likely to consume those items which will allow them to do so; hence they will buy those items suggested by or worn by peers. In addition, if one has a high fear of being negatively evaluated, one is also likely to consume items which are used by others and hence positively evaluated by them; the individual is strongly influenced by favourable interpersonal influences. Once again, a statistically significant relationship between these measures will strongly support the existence of Link C in the model.

Furthermore, considering the consumer culture and the proliferation of brands (specifically amongst adolescents), it is also likely that those who are highly susceptible to consumption influences, will have higher levels of materialism and specifically, a stronger orientation towards consuming popular brands (link D in the vicious cycle model). Indeed Rose et al (1997) have already showed that CSII scores were positively related to the

importance placed on the display aspect of clothing (e.g. brand logos) – as opposed to the functional dimension. Finally, based on the findings which suggest that low-income consumers are more materialistic, have lower self-esteem and lower self-concept clarity than high-income consumers, it is thought that CSII scores will be greater amongst the low-income adolescents. This has previously been shown by Isaksen and Roper (2008) but the current study seeks to confirm this finding on a much larger sample- thereby adding validity to the claim.

5.2.7 Goldberg et al's (2003) Youth Materialism Scale (YMS)

The final concurrent measure assessed the level of materialism amongst the respondents. Indeed the materialism construct is heavily featured in this work and thus it needed to be assessed. The chosen scale, Goldberg et al's (2003) Youth Materialism Scale (YMS), was deemed to be the most appropriate measure in terms of its complexity, length and suitability for the adolescent sample. Furthermore, the YMS is a recent measure, based on a child-centred perspective of scale development and has been successfully used, on an adolescent sample, in a recent study (e.g. Chaplin and Roedder-John (2007). The items in the YMS were derived from an item by item analysis of scale items on two dominant adult measures of materialism; Belk (1985) and Richins and Dawson (1992). Materialism is conceived as a "value that guides people's choices and conduct in a variety of situations, including, but not limited to, consumption arenas" (Richins and Dawson, 1992, pg. 307) and therefore the YMS seeks to measure the level of an individual's materialistic orientation so as to assess the importance (in terms of time, money, effort) placed on consumption. Furthermore, by examining materialism in relation to the other psychological measures described, it was thought possible to gain a deeper understanding of the antecedents and consequences of a materialistic orientation.

The YMS scale consists of 10 items – for example, "I'd rather spend time buying things, than doing almost anything else" – and asks respondents to mark, on a four-point, forced choice, Likert scale, the degree to which they agree or disagree (disagree a lot to agree a lot). Scale scores are summed to produce an overall materialism score with high scores indicating high materialism. Factor analyses have consistently shown the presence of a single factor and internal consistency and reliability were shown with a Cronbach's alpha value of .75 and a test-retest correlation of r= .85 after a two week period (Goldberg et al., 2003). Furthermore, the validity of the scale has been tested by a number of means. Goldberg et al, (2003) compared groups of adolescents who scored in the upper and lower

quartiles of materialism scores and found that those who scored in the upper quartile (high on materialism) shopped more, had more interest in new products, were more interested in advertisements, were more likely to buy products endorsed by celebrities, had more materialistic parents and placed more consumption pressures on their parents than those in the lower quartile. Indeed these findings are in-line with the construct described and suggest that the YMS successfully distinguishes between individuals who are highly materialistic and those who are less so.

In terms of self-esteem, there are a wealth of claims which suggest that there exists a negative relationship between materialism and self-esteem; as previously outlined, materialists are thought to have lower self-esteem (e.g. Kasser, 2002; Chang and Arkin, 2002). Furthermore, Chaplin and Roedder-John (2007) recently used the YMS and found empirical evidence of these claims; a significant negative correlation between self-esteem and materialism, r= -.37. Based on these results, the YMS will provide validation of the new self-esteem scale (providing it correlates negatively with the YMS) and will also provide empirical evidence for link E in the vicious cycle model; those who have a strong desire for material possessions are expected to have lower self-esteem than those who do not. Furthermore, based on the relationship between the need to belong (NB), fear of negative evaluations (BFNE) and self-esteem described above, it is expected that these constructs will have a positive relationship with materialism scores. However, it is expected that SCC scores will be negatively related to materialism; those who are unclear in their self-concept are most likely to clarify it with possessions. Therefore, the relation between YMS scores and self-esteem, SCC, NB and BFNE scores will not only aid in validating the new scale, but also provide evidence for link E. Furthermore, as the causal relationship between self-esteem and materialism is debatable (recall Kasser, 2002 versus Chaplin and Roedder-John, 2007), the additional measures of NB, SCC, and BFNE may aid in determining in which direction the relationship between materialism and psychological well-being is strongest.

In addition, further support for the vicious cycle model may result from measuring materialism levels. This is because, as stated previously, those who are highly susceptible to influence are likely to be more materialistic (link D in the model). This has indeed been found by other researchers (e.g. Richins, 1991) however the direction of the relationship has not yet been determined. Thus, through regression analyses, it is hoped that the YMS may shed some light on this issue. Finally, the explicit measurement of YMS will allow for the investigation of claims that low-income consumers are in fact more materialistic

than those from higher income backgrounds (e.g. Goldberg et al., 2003). For this reason, it is expected that low-income respondents will have higher levels of materialism than high-income respondents. Results in the predicted direction would once again provide empirical support for the self-esteem scale, the YMS and the vicious cycle model.

Due to the numerous scales employed and the many expected relationships between them, the expected findings will be clearly and explicitly summarised in the following chapter (in the form of hypotheses).

5.2.8 Alterations to concurrent measures

Despite the valid contribution these scales provide to the validation of both the self-esteem scale and the vicious cycle model, it was, as ever, necessary to consider how suitable these scales were for the adolescent sample in terms of content, literacy and length (MRS, 2006). For this reason, and for practical implications, the wording and/or response scales of some of the scales were altered to suit the current study. The original and altered versions of each of the scales are clearly displayed in Appendix H; a brief summary of the alterations are provided below.

5.2.8.1 Wording of scale items

In terms of the wording of scale items, all of the scales apart from Harter's SPPA were altered in some way. These changes were mostly minor and were needed to either simplify or clarify the scale items. For example, the BFNE was originally constructed on adults and thus the wording on some of the items was overly complex for the literacy levels of the adolescents. On some of the other scales however, the changes in wording were based on linguistic differences between US English and UK English. For example, one of the items in the CSII scale was changed from "If I have little experience with a product, I often ask my friends about the product." to "If there is something that I don't know a lot about, I usually ask my friends about it". All of the changes made to the scale items were based on the language and levels of literacy encountered in the previous focus groups; they were also assessed by an external judge to ensure that the meaning of the items were not altered by the changes in the wording of items.

5.2.8.2 Response format

The response formats of the scales were also altered to suit the study. Not only were the wordings and formats changed to suit the respondents, but changes also served to standardise, as far as possible, the response format across the scales. This was done for the ease of the respondents (to avoid drastic changes in response styles between scales) as well as the ease of the analyst (similar response scales facilitate simpler interpretation of results). As discussed in the previous chapter, the issue of scale response length was noted by Coelho and Esteves (2007) who supported the use of a minimum of five response options, but also failed to show any benefit of using more than five options. For this reason, and in order to be consistent with the other scales used, the CSII response scale was reduced from a seven-point to a five-point likert scale. Conversely, the response scale of the YMS was increased from a four-point to a five-point scale. It was felt that (in light of comments from the adolescents) a neutral response option was beneficial to the suitability and efficacy of the scale. In addition, the response range of the CSII scale was reversed; whereas the original version ranged from agree to disagree, it was altered to suit the more widely used format of disagree to agree. These scale changes were based on consultations with psychometricians who confirmed that the alterations were not likely to confound the results obtained by the measures.

In addition, the wording of the response scales were altered for most of the scales. For example the SCC, CSII and NB scales used the common response options of 'strongly agree' and 'strongly disagree'. However, in order to make the responses more relational to adolescents, these were replaced with 'agree a lot' and 'disagree a lot', respectively. This response format has been used in previous scale studies with children, for example the YMS scale already uses this format and Mayo (2005b) altered the response scales of the measures he employed. As outlined in chapter four, the response style for the BFNE scale was also altered from 'not at all characteristic of me' to 'not at all like me'; this is more in line with the language typically used by adolescents.

Perhaps the most drastic changes were made to Harter's (1998) SPPA items. These changes were based on Wichstrom's (1995) work. However, it is worthy to mention that the altered SPPA items were the only scale to use only 4 response options. Despite the previous mentions of scale sensitivity and the need for a neutral option, it was felt that the nature and wording of scale items, and the already successful employment of this measure (by Wichstrom, 1995) warranted maintaining the four-point response format.

5.2.9 Division of concurrent measures

The benefits of validity checks and the investigative depth facilitated by including the seven additional measures in the research design are unquestionable. Indeed, as stated by Leary et al, (2005) "Only by knowing how a particular construct relates to a wide array of other variables can we hone in on precisely what the construct in question entails" (pg 5). However, in terms of administering the scales, it is clearly not possible to present each participant the seven concurrent measures in addition to the 23 item self-esteem scale. Indeed such a large number of scale items is highly likely to result in respondent fatigue amongst any sample, but amongst young samples, this is clearly increased. For this reason, three separate versions of the self-esteem scale were created and divided equally amongst participating schools (as will be seen).

The 'root' scales, completed by all respondents, consisted of the 23 self-esteem scale items and the five global self-worth items from the SPPA; thus a total of 28 self-esteem items. The three versions were constructed as follows:

Version 1: The root scales, the YMS and the SCC scale; a total of 50 scale items.
Version 2: The root scales, the BFNE scale and the MC-1; a total of 50 scale items.
Version 3: The root scales, the CSII scale and the NB scale; a total of 50 scale items.

Considering the large sample size of this study, the division of the concurrent measures was thought to be the most effective way of distributing all the scales to the broad range of participants. Furthermore, the fact that the five self-worth items from the SPPA were included in *all* of the scales, meant that a constant construct validity check could be performed. Conversely, by dividing the remaining six scales between participants, comparisons between them were somewhat restricted. For example, the scores for the CSII scale could not be directly compared to the SCC scale scores because they will be completed by separate samples of respondents. However, despite the lack of methodological rigidity, it was thought that some indication of the relationships between several key constructs was more beneficial than interpreting scores from a limited set of only two measures.

5.3 Sample: Profiles of Participating Schools

As with the previous data collection rounds, the data for the final, comparative study was collected from schools. Nine schools were selected based on their social and economical

demographics and their willingness to participate. Although a number of the participating schools were involved in the previous scale development stages, the elapsed time between the stages (approximately one year), meant that the previous respondents (Year 10s) had progressed to Year 11 and thus the previous years' Year 9 students were now the participants. For this reason, the risk of practice/memory effects were eliminated; responses were not based on previous exposure to the scale.

The geodemographic characteristics of each school were particularly important in this part of the research. This is because the main aim at this stage, was to compare high and low-income respondents and thus an equal selection of impoverished and non-impoverished schools were targeted. For this reason, when selecting schools, the most recent OFSTED inspection report[30] of the school was consulted and data regarding the socioeconomic characteristics of the school's surrounding area was obtained via its ACORN classification (CACI, 2010), as provided by from www.upmystreet.com. However, the ACORN classification of the school's location did not always reflect the population of the school; this was for a number of reasons, as will be seen below.

Similarly, although the OFSTED criterion[31] was used as a guideline for indicating deprivation levels, it was not used as a concrete criterion. This is because, as will become clear, the percentage figure may not reflect the true proportion of pupils on free school meals. Indeed, as was explained in chapter two, the stigma associated with poverty may prevent parents and indeed children from claiming these free meals. Indeed, as is explicitly stated by Salford City Council, "For some children, the social stigma or even teasing attached to 'being on free dinners' puts them off. Often parents don't realise they're entitled -or are discouraged by the likely bureaucracy." (http://www.salford.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals.htm). For this reason, where possible, the gatekeepers of the schools were consulted to assess their opinions of the 'true' socioeconomic status of the majority of the students. Thus, as in the previous stages, a mix of quantitative figures and in-depth qualitative investigations were used to assess the schools' – and therefore its pupils'- levels of deprivation, which in turn allowed the researcher to classify them as either high or low-income for the purpose of this research. Below, is a brief description of the sample of the nine schools. These are divided into those considered to be high and low-income.

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[30] These are reports based on inspections of the school carried out by employees of OFSTED. They contain information pertaining to the location, size and characteristics of the school, as well as student behaviour and achievement.

[31] A deprived school is classed as one in which over 35% of pupils are eligible of free school meals (OFSTED, 2003).

5.3.1 High-income schools

5.3.1.1 Sale Grammar School, Cheshire, M33 3NH

Sale Grammar School is located in Sale, Cheshire and is a large selective, co-educational school with 1250 pupils ranging from 11 to 18 years old. According to the most recent OFSTED inspection report (2006a), "It is a stable school with a lower than average percentage of students entitled to free school meals". Indeed the gatekeeper confirmed that only 1.7% of the students are in receipt of free school meals which clearly illustrates the affluence of the majority of the students. Furthermore, "There are fewer students than average from minority ethnic backgrounds or with English as an additional language."(OFSTED, 2006a).

The population of the surrounding area falls into category two of the ACORN classification scheme; 'Urban Prosperity'. "These are well-educated and mostly prosperous people living in our major towns and cities. They include both older wealthy people living in the most exclusive parts of London and other cities, and highly educated younger professionals moving up the corporate ladder." (CACI, 2010, pg.29). Specifically, the population is classed as type 14; "Older professionals in suburban houses and apartments". The average family income in this area is high and a very high number of inhabitants are educated to a degree level (UpMyStreet, 2010a). Therefore, based on these figures as well as discussions with the gatekeeper and the researcher's perceptions of the school, the vast majority of the pupils at this school are likely to come from affluent families; it was classed as a high-income school.

5.3.1.2 Comberton Village College, Cambridge, CB23 7DU

Comberton Village College is located in Comberton village on the outskirts of Cambridge. It is a comprehensive, co-educational school with 1363 pupils ranging from 11to 16 years old. According to the most recent OFSTED inspection report (2007a) "The college serves a relatively prosperous rural catchment area to the west of Cambridge, the vast majority of students are from White British backgrounds and very few speak English as an additional language." According to the gatekeeper, only 5.4% of the students are in receipt of free school meals.

Comberton village falls into category one of the ACORN classification scheme; 'Wealthy Achievers". This category is described as "some of the most successful and affluent people in the UK. They live in wealthy, high-status rural, semi-rural and suburban areas of

the country... Some neighbourhoods contain large numbers of well-off families with school-age children, particularly the more suburban locations." (CACI, 2010, pg.13). This type of area is classed as type 3, "Villages with wealthy commuters". The average family income is very high and a high number of inhabitants are educated to a degree level (UpMyStreet, 2010b). The researcher's visit to the school and conversations with pupils and the gatekeeper confirmed that this school could securely be classed as high-income.

5.3.1.3 Wilmslow High School, Cheshire, SK9 1LZ

Wilmslow High School is located in Cheshire and is a comprehensive, co-educational school with 1895 pupils ranging from 11 to 18 years old. According to the most recent OFSTED inspection report (2007b) "This large school is popular and over-subscribed. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well below national averages. Students are mostly White British and less than 10% are from Black and minority ethnic groups." The gatekeeper informed the researcher that only 4.25% of the pupils were in receipt of free school meals.

The population of the area surrounding the school fall into category three of the ACORN classification scheme; 'Comfortably off'. "This category contains much of middle-of-the-road Britain. Most people are comfortably off. They may not be wealthy, but they have few major financial worries." (CACI, 2010, pg. 45). The area is classed as type 36, "Older people, flats". The average family income in this area is medium and a medium number of inhabitants are educated to a degree level (UpMyStreet, 2010c).

Despite the reported average affluence in this area, the fact that the immediate catchment area consists predominantly of pensioners suggests that pupils come from a wider catchment area. Indeed discussions with the students and the gatekeeper confirmed that a majority of students live in surrounding areas which are similar to those described in Sale Grammar School (Urban Prosperity). This is not surprising as these schools are in close proximity of one another. Therefore, despite the conflicting descriptions of the catchment area and the school, it was decided that Wilmslow High School be classified as a high-income school.

5.3.1.4 Kings international College, Surrey Heath, Greater London, GU15 2PQ

Kings International College serves Surrey Heath, an area bordering Greater London. It is a comprehensive, co-educational school with 681 pupils ranging from 11to 18 years old.

According to the most recent OFSTED inspection report (2008a) "Roughly three-quarters of the students are of White British heritage, with the remaining students drawn from a diverse range of minority ethnic groups. Free school meal eligibility is below the national average but is higher than the local authority's average." According to the gatekeeper, approximately 10% of the students are in receipt of free school meals.

As with Comberton Village College, the surrounding population of this school fall in to category one of the ACORN classification scheme; 'Wealthy Achievers". However, the area is classed as type 11; "well-off managers, detached houses". In addition, the average family income in this area is high and a medium number of inhabitants are educated to a degree level (UpMyStreet, 2010d).

The affluence of the immediate catchment of the area initially suggests that pupils in Kings College are all from very affluent households. However, the OFSTED inspection report, free school meal figures and discussions with the gatekeeper, made it clear that a considerable number of the students are in fact drawn from less affluent catchment areas. Although this was considered in the analysis, it was decided that this school could be classed as high-income; in relation to the low-income schools (as will be seen), a dominant proportion of the students come from high-income families.

5.3.2 Low-income schools

5.3.2.1 Reddish Vale Technology College, Stockport, Greater Manchester, SK5 7HD

Reddish Vale Technology College is located in Reddish, Stockport, Greater Manchester. It is a comprehensive, co-educational school with 1317 pupils ranging from 11to 6 years old. According to the most recent OFSTED inspection report (2007c), the school is "a larger than average mixed comprehensive school serving an area of relative disadvantage. The majority of the college population are of White British heritage and few students are at the early stages of learning English. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is higher than the national average" Indeed, according to the gatekeeper, 25% of the students are in receipt of free school meals.

As with Wilmslow High School, the surrounding population fall in to category three of the ACORN classification scheme; 'Comfortably Off'. However, the area is classed as type 30; "established home-owning workers". The average family income in this area is medium and a low number of inhabitants are educated to a degree level; "family incomes

are average, and the main income is often supplemented by female part-time working"(Upmystreet, 2010e).

The ACORN classification suggests that this school may in fact serve a population with average income levels. However, upon visiting the school and discussions with the gatekeeper, it became apparent that the majority of the students came from surrounding areas with much higher levels of deprivation than that of the immediate surrounding areas. Indeed this is reflected in the OFSTED report and the free school meal figure. For this reason, it was deemed appropriate to classify this school as low-income.

5.3.2.2 Grange school , Oldham, Greater Manchester, OL9 6DY

Grange School is located in Oldham, Greater Manchester. It is a comprehensive, co-educational school with 778 pupils ranging from 11 to 16 years old. According to the most recent OFSTED inspection report (2006b), the school "serves an area of significant social disadvantage reflected in the percentage of students eligible for free school meals, which is four times the national average. Almost all the students are from minority ethnic groups and the proportion whose first language is not English is high." According to the gatekeeper, a large proportion, 60.6% of the students are in receipt of free school meals.

The surrounding population of Grange School fall under category five of the ACORN classification scheme; "Hard Pressed; "This category contains the poorest areas of the UK. Unemployment is well above the national average. Levels of qualifications are low and those in work are likely to be employed in unskilled occupations...These are the people who are finding life the hardest and experiencing the most difficult social conditions." (CACI, 2010, pg 75). Furthermore, the area is classed as type 53; "old people, many high-rise flats".

This school, by OFSTED and ACORN reports, personal inspection and consultation with the gatekeeper, undoubtedly serves a majority of students from low-income families. The high levels of ethnic minorities may bear implications for both data collection and comparison however, this will be further considered in chapter 8.

5.3.2.3 Grace Academy, Coventry , West Midlands, CV2 2RH

Grace Academy, formerly Woodway Park School and Community College, is located in Coventry, West Midlands. It opened as an academy in September 2008 and is a co-

educational academy with 650 pupils ranging from 11 to 18 years old. According to a recent OFSTED monitoring inspection report (2009), it "serves the dynamic community of North East Coventry. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is more than double the national average" (Cook, 2009). Indeed, according to the gatekeeper, 26% of students are in receipt of free school meals.

The surrounding population of Grace Academy falls under category three of the ACORN classification scheme; 'Comfortably Off"; this is the same category as Wilmslow High School and Reddish Vale Technology College. However the area is classed as type 28; "Working Families with Mortgages". The average family income in this area is medium and a low number of inhabitants are educated to a degree level (UpMyStreet, 2010f).

The classification of Grace Academy was less straight-forward than the other schools due to the discrepancy between the OFSTED and ACORN reports. This was discussed with the gatekeeper who explained that the school was located on the boarders of poverty stricken and an affluent area.   Therefore, although the surrounding area contains 'Comfortably Off' families, this pertains only to the physical location of the school. Indeed the gatekeeper emphasised the fact that the majority of the students were from the more poverty stricken areas near the school. For these reasons, and the high proportion of students eligible for free school meals, it was decided that Grace Academy could safely be classed as a low-income school.

Furthermore, the fact that the school has recently become an academy, suggest that it was highly deprived and thus under serving pupils. This is because academies are typically formed from schools with high levels of deprivation which can no longer run from solely state funding. As described by the United Learning Trust, "Academies are independent schools within the State Sector, held in charitable trusts, with independent governance and responsibility for their own teachers. They are co-educational secondary schools, often with a sixth form, serving inner city communities and also some rural areas… We have 17 ULT academies in areas with some of the worst deprivation index scores in the country." (www.ult.org.uk/academies.htm).   Over the course of this research, three of the low-income schools participating were converted to academies. Once more, the implications of this will be discussed in Chapter 8.

5.3.2.4 Merchants' Academy, Withywood, Bristol, BS13 9AJ

Merchants' Academy, formerly Withywood Community School, is located in the suburbs of Bristol. It opened as an academy in September 2008 and is a co-educational academy with 1150 students ranging from 11 to 18 years old. There is currently no OFSTED report for this Academy however, from consultations with the gatekeeper, the school is predominantly attended by white-British children from deprived backgrounds; over 30% of the students are in receipt of free school meals.

The surrounding areas of the school reflect the socioeconomic status of the students; similarly to Grange School, they are in category five "Hard Pressed". However the area is classed as type 45; "low income, older people, smaller semis". The average family income in this area is low and a very low number of inhabitants are educated to a degree level, "Working people will be in routine jobs in shops, on the factory floor or in other manual occupations. This results in low incomes." (UpMyStreet, 2010g).

The fact that the surrounding areas are predominantly inhabited by older people was discussed with the gatekeeper who clarified that the further reaching surrounding areas had similar levels of deprivation but with younger residents. Thus this school was classed as low-income.

5.3.2.5 Cedar Mount High, Gorton, Greater Manchester, M18 7DT

Cedar Mount High School is located in Gorton, Greater Manchester. It is a co-educational comprehensive school with 806 students ranging from 11 to 16 years old. According to the most recent OFSTED inspection report (2008b), it is a "smaller than average secondary school serving an urban area with very high levels of social and economic challenge. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is well above the national average. Over half the students are from a wide variety of minority ethnic backgrounds". The exact figure for the percentage of pupils on free school-meals was not available at this school, however, as can be seen below, it falls under the 'low-income' category.

Similarly to Merchants' Academy, the surrounding areas of Cedar Mount falls under category five; "Hard Pressed". However the area is classed as type 50; "single, elderly people in council flats". The average family income in this area is low and a very low number of inhabitants are educated to a degree level, "For those of an economically active

age, unemployment is relatively high and people tend to work in routine jobs in manufacturing and retail. The average household income levels for these areas are amongst the lowest in the whole country." (UpMyStreet, 2010h).

This school, its pupils and its surrounding areas are clearly deprived. Furthermore, descriptions given by the gatekeeper, highlighted the severity of deprivation amongst the average pupils at the school. The school can safely be said to serve a majority of low-income students.

5.3.3 Conclusion

The classification of the schools was an important factor in the research design. Due to access issues when working with schools, and data protection acts, it was not possible, nor feasible to classify individual students according to their family incomes. For this reason, the deprivation levels of the school, the surrounding areas and the information provided by inspection reports and gatekeepers were used to determine the income levels of the average student at the school. This however, implies that some of the respondents may have been falsely classified; for example it is possible that a pupil in a high-income school, is in fact from a low-income family or vice versa. Although these issues are important, it is also important to note that the large sample size of this study is likely to account for some of these sampling issues. Therefore, the data are likely to paint a rough, but realistic picture of the differences between high and low-income consumers. Indeed, the high-income schools all had very low free school meal measures and were classified in the top 3 ACORN categories; only Wilmslow High pertained to category 3. Similarly, amongst the low-income schools, three of five fell under the lowest ACORN category (five) and the remaining two (in category three), had catchments areas beyond their immediate surrounding area. The implications of this sample selection and classification differences, will be further discussed in chapter eight.

In order to obtain a truly representative sample of all income levels and inner city and suburban schools in the north and south of the UK, the researcher attempted to recruit schools from a wide range of areas in the UK. Indeed, the schools selected included ones from the north and south of England, some inner city and some suburban. However, as is clear from their descriptions the majority of the schools are located in the North West of England; as stated this was due to access and practicality issues. Indeed, when working with schools, it is often difficult to make contact and gain access to a large number of

them (as thoroughly discussed by Isaksen and Roper, 2010a). For example, it is possible that the researcher's proximity (and affiliation with a known university) to the schools in the North West, was a facilitating factor. However, despite this northern majority, it was felt that the large samples from 'southern schools' (as will be seen in the next chapter), balanced their representation within the sample.

5.4 Procedure of Questionnaire Administration

When access had been arranged and agreed with each school, the questionnaires were sent by post to the gatekeepers of the participating schools. As with the previous questionnaires, the final questionnaires were distributed to the students in class. The questionnaires were distributed in envelopes (for anonymity) and all of the teachers were again given a brief containing instructions for the students (Appendix E); students were reminded of their anonymity and were asked to complete all questions honestly, in their own time.

As there were three versions of the questionnaire, each school was sent an equal number of each version. These were randomly ordered and allocated to the students to maximise the likelihood of equal numbers of responses. The fact that a number of the schools were participating for the second, or even third round of data collection, was attributed to the relationship developed with the gatekeeper (and hence school). As outlined in Isaksen and Roper (2010a), forming such relationships is extremely important when researching with schools. The numbers and proportion of questionnaires sent to each school is depicted in table 7-1 in chapter seven.

Chapter 6. Hypotheses and Propositions

Based on the literature reviewed, the new scale developed and the seven concurrent measures used, a number of hypotheses and propositions were formulated. The previous chapter provided the reasons behind some of the expected relationships between the scales and as a result, concrete and testable hypotheses for those relationships will be presented here. In addition, a number of hypotheses pertaining to the vicious cycle model and the differences between income groups will also be presented. Due to the two stages of this thesis- scale development and the investigations of the impacts of branding – for ease of reading, the chapter will be divided into subsections. Firstly, hypotheses relating to the validity and reliability of new self-esteem scale will be outlined and subsequently, those based on the vicious cycle model will be presented and explained. Finally, the expected differences between high and low income teenagers will be clearly outlined and hypotheses presented. Despite the separation of these sections, it is important to note that there is a degree of overlap between the hypotheses. For example, a hypothesis assessing the new self-esteem scale's validity may also provide evidence for one of the links in the vicious cycle model. Furthermore, because the supporting evidence (and reasoning) for the hypotheses and propositions have already been presented throughout the thesis, the justifications for the hypotheses and propositions will be outlined briefly. Given the number of hypotheses (26), this simple format is hoped to present the hypotheses in a clear and concise manner.

6.1 Self-Esteem Scale Development

The acceptance and/or rejection of the following seven hypotheses will provide support for the validity and reliability of the new self-esteem scale and hence whether it is a suitable and applicable measure. According to Robinson et al. (1991), construct validity and convergent validity are essential criteria for scale selection and thus these were the first to be examined.

6.1.1 Construct validity

If the new scale does indeed tap in to the domain of general self-worth, it follows that it should correlate with a measure of global or overall self-worth. For this reason, it was expected that:

H1a: There will be a strong, positive relationship between Harter's (1988) SPPA 'Global Self-Worth' dimension and the newly developed self-esteem scale (SE).

Support for this hypothesis will be based on a positive correlation and simple regression between the two measures. The strength of the relationship is also important; it must be strong enough to illustrate construct validity, however, as was seen with the validation of the NB scale (when correlated with sociability), there must be sufficient variance between the scales to demonstrate that they are not measuring the *exact* same construct.

6.1.2 Concurrent validity

The relationship between the six remaining concurrent measures (BFNE, MC-1, SCC, NB, CSII and YMS) and the self-esteem scale, formed the basis for the remaining six validating hypotheses. If the scales are related in the ways predicted (as outlined in the previous chapter), the results will demonstrate the validity of the new scale.

Firstly, the relationship between self-concept and self-esteem will be assessed. Several studies have found a close relationship between SCC and self-esteem (e.g. Campbell et al.,1996; Fennell, 1999); it is unlikely that an individual who is not clear in his/her concept of self will be able to truly evaluate themselves in a positive manner. Thus, it was expected that:

H1b: There will be a positive relationship between self-esteem (SE) and Self-Concept Clarity (SCC).[32]

Furthermore, there exists ample evidence, including the themes from the focus groups, suggesting that self-esteem is negatively related to a fear of negative evaluations; individuals with high self-esteem are less likely to fear the evaluations of others (e.g. Lorr and Wunderlich, 1986; Leary, 1983). For this reason, it was expected that:

H1c: There will be a negative relationship between self-esteem (SE) and a Fear of Negative Evaluations (BFNE).

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[32] Note: Hypothesis H3a below contributes further support for this claim.

Similarly, based on Leary et al.'s (1995) sociometer hypothesis, self-esteem has been argued to be related to a need to belong (Leary et al., 2005; DeWall et al., 2009). A low self-esteem is thought to be indicative of a reduction in social inclusion, thereby increasing the individual's desire and need to belong (in order to encourage behaviours likely to facilitate inclusion). For this reason it was expected that:

> **H1d**: There will be a negative relationship between self-esteem (SE) and
> the Need to Belong (NB).

The confirmation of this hypothesis will also add to the support for Leary et al.'s (1995) sociometer theory of the function of self-esteem. Furthermore, Harter (1990) explains that amongst adolescents, comparisons with others serve as a barometer of skills and attributes. Indeed, social processes such as 'social comparison' (Festinger, 1954) and 'reflected appraisals' (Rosenberg and Pearlin, 1978) have been identified as central facets in the development of self-esteem. These elements of self-esteem assist in the interpretation of findings which show self-esteem to be negatively related to susceptibility to interpersonal consumption influences (e.g. Bearden et al., 1989). That is, if a low self-esteem is associated with a fear of negative evaluations, it follows that an individual will behave in ways which are hoped to reduce that fear. Therefore, in the context of the consumer society, it is highly likely that the consumption of socially accepted goods/clothes will reduce fear as it facilitates social acceptance. For this reason, it was expected that:

> **H1e**: There will be a negative relationship between self-esteem (SE) and
> Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (CSII).

Furthermore, the negative relationship between self-esteem and materialistic tendencies has been presented by many authors (e.g. Chaplin and Roedder-John, 2007; Kasser, 2002; Deci and Ryan, 1985). Thus, for the purpose of scale validation, a negative relationship is expected between the two variables; low self-esteem is expected to be related to high materialism:

> **H1f**: There will be a negative relationship between self-esteem (SE) and
> Materialism (YMS).

Finally, when assessing personal constructs such as self-esteem, it is vital to ensure that responses are not skewed by socially desirable responses. The issue of social desirability is

rife in scale development and is all too often over-looked (Murphy and Davidshofer, 2005), however the importance of this bias is greatly increased when working with children and adolescents (Greig et al., 2007). For this reason, the MC-1 was used to assess whether the precautions taken during the scale development process, were in fact sufficient in creating a self-esteem scale which was not prone to social desirability bias. For this reason it was expected that:

> **H1g**: There will be no relationship between self-esteem (SE) scores and social desirability (MC-1).

Support for this hypothesis will provide strength to the claim that the new scale (SE) shows improvements over the frequently used, Rosenberg's (1965) measure of self-esteem (RSES). This is because previous studies have shown Rosenberg's (1965) RSES to be prone to social desirability bias. Furthermore, if statistical support is found for *all seven* of the above hypotheses, the combined results provide strong, convincing evidence of the author's claims of measurement improvement.

6.2 Hypotheses and Propositions Based on the Vicious Cycle Model

6.2.1 Proposition 1

> **P1**: There exists a Vicious cycle whereby the antecedents and consequences of adolescents' consumerism are linked in such a way that a self-perpetuating cycle is formed.

The individual links within the vicious cycle model are based on findings which demonstrate interplay between several psychological constructs, particularly self-esteem and materialism. For ease of interpretation, the vicious cycle model is displayed below. In terms of adolescents, the argument for the core cycle (links B to E) is as follows: A reduced sense of self and identity are likely to contribute to lowered self-esteem, increased insecurity and reduced psychological well-being *(link B)*. This in turn, may add to one's degree of susceptibility to external and interpersonal consumption pressures *(link C)* thus contributing to their desire to consume (most often specific, expensive, branded items) *(link D)*. In turn, this heightened focus on consumption is likely to detract from one's identity and sense of self and thus further contribute to a low self-esteem and reduced

psychological well-being *(link E)*. As a result of these negative contributors, it is likely that self-esteem levels will be reduced further, which then increases the likelihood of re-entering this vicious cycle, thereby allowing the negative psychological impacts of the consumer culture to be continually reinforced. These links will be empirically examined on the total sample of adolescents (high and low-income) and the relevant hypotheses are described and explained below[33].
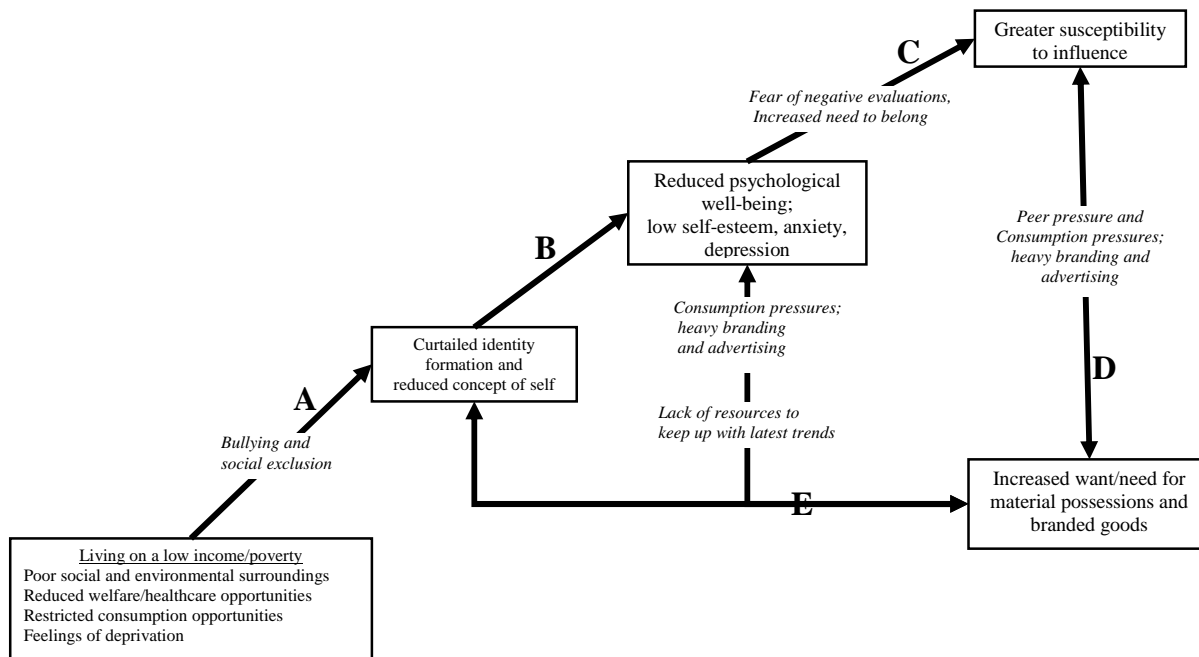
Figure 6-1 The vicious cycle model

6.2.2 Link B: Restricted identity contributes to reduced self-esteem and reduced psychological well-being

As described in Hypothesis H1b, there is a predicted positive relationship between self-concept clarity and self-esteem; in order to positively evaluate oneself, it is necessary to have a clear concept of who one is (Fennell, 1999). Indeed Calhoun and Morse (2006) claim that SCC is in fact a prerequisite of self-esteem. Furthermore, due to the drastic physical, psychological and social changes experienced during adolescence, this relationship (between SCC and SE) is likely to be particularly strong amongst them. As shown by Chaplin and Roedder-John, (2007) adolescents are unclear and unsure of their concept of self and hence experience a reduction in self-esteem. For these reasons, it was expected that:

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[33] Note: Link A will be examined below.

H3a: A high/low level of Self-Concept Clarity (SCC) will contribute to a high/low level of Self-Esteem (SE).

Support for this hypothesis will not only support Link B in the model, but it will also lend support to Calhoun and Morse's (2006) whilst providing additional evidence for the validity of the new self-esteem scale.

6.2.3 Link C: Low self-esteem and reduced psychological well-being contributes to greater susceptibility to influence

The predicted negative relationship between self-esteem and susceptibility to influence (described in Hypothesis H1e), if supported, will provide some support for link C in the model. Rose et al., (1997) found that those with low self-esteem were more susceptible to influence and McGuire (1968) found that individuals with high self-esteem are less influenced by others than those with low self-esteem. More specifically however, Chang and Arkin (2002) suggest that a consumer's susceptibility to influence may stem from self-doubt and it is for this reason that the vicious cycle model purports that low self-esteem is a contributing factor to a heightened susceptibility to influence (amongst other factors). For this reason, it is expected that:

H4a: A low level of Self-esteem (SE) will contribute to a high level of Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (CSII).

Furthermore, the (predicted) relationship between self-esteem and the need to belong – as seen in hypothesis H1d- implies that an individual's need to belong influences his/her susceptibility to influence. That is, if consumption has become a form of social glue (as proposed by De Chenecey, 2005), an individual may be inclined to manage their need to belong by consuming what others consume. For this reason it is expected that:

H4b: A high Need to Belong (NB) level will contribute to a high level of Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (CSII).

As the literature suggests, individuals who have a fear of being negatively evaluated are likely to behave and react in ways which will minimise that threat. For this reason, given the importance adolescents place on social acceptance, they may also be more motivated to consume goods which are positively evaluated by others. Moreover, socially acceptable

products are identified through others' use of them and thus it is likely that individuals with a high fear of negative evaluations (e.g. adolescents), may be more susceptible to interpersonal consumer influences. Therefore it was expected that:

H4c: A high level of Fear of Negative Evaluations (BFNE) will contribute to a high level of Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (CSII).

The reasons for the positive relationship between self-concept clarity and self-esteem (as seen in Link B and hypothesis H3a) suggest that an individual's SCC may also influence how susceptible they are to influence (as with H4a). It is possible that a low SCC contributes to a high susceptibility to influence because individuals with an unclear/uncertain self-concept have been shown to be more influenced by others than those who are clear in their conception of their selves (Janis and Field, 1959). Furthermore, given the central role that material possessions play in adolescent identity formation (Ross and Harradine, 2004), it is likely that consumption influences are particularly pertinent amongst them. For this reason:

H4d: A low level of Self-Concept Clarity (SCC) will contribute to a high level of Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (CSII).

6.2.4 Link D: Greater susceptibility to influence contributes to increased need and desire for material goods and brands

Chang and Arkin (2002) suggest that materialistic individuals are more susceptible to influence as a result of their (typically) high levels of self-doubt. However the causal direction of this relationship has not been established (Achenreiner, 1997) and thus it is possible that an adolescent's susceptibility to consumption influence – considering their highly consumer orientated nature- is also a contributing factor to the development (or increase) of materialistic tendencies. In this respect, it is possible that this relationship is bidirectional; materialism contributes to susceptibility to consumption influences and susceptibility to consumption influences contributes to one's levels of materialism. Considering the adolescent sample (and the strong consumption pressures they face), it seems likely that a propensity to consumption influence will contribute to a heightened desire for material acquisitions; specifically branded goods and clothing. For this reason, it was expected that:

H5a: A high level of Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (CSII) will contribute to a high level of Materialism (YMS).

At this stage, it is important to re-emphasise that the YMS measures the extent to which an individual has a *materialistic value orientation* and thus uses material possessions as a means of defining success and pursuing happiness (Richins and Dawson, 1992); it does not assess the types of products consumed in these pursuits. Therefore, in order to investigate the validity of link D more accurately, the influence of CSII on 'brand ownership' scores (BO factor; from the self-esteem scale) will be assessed. The sum of the responses to the four brand ownership questions indicate the amount of, and importance given to, the acquisition of branded possessions and clothing (specifically). Due to the central role of brands amongst adolescents- e.g. coping with insecurities and facilitating social inclusion- it is likely that an insecure adolescent may be more prone to interpersonal consumption influences (link C), which in turn contributes to a greater importance placed (specifically) on branded goods; i.e. they will have a higher Brand Ownership score. For this reason it was expected that:

H5b: A high level of Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (CSII) will contribute to a high level of Brand Ownership (BO).

This hypothesis explores whether the degree of susceptibility to consumer influence impacts on the level of adolescents' brand orientation (as opposed to simply materialism). Although this link may be relevant to adult consumers, due to the brand-oriented nature of adolescents, it is thought to be particularly pertinent to teenage consumers.

6.2.5 Link E: Increased desire for material possessions and brands contributes to reduced self-esteem, self-concept and psychological well-being.

The psychological well-being of children in the consumer culture is a hot topic and is the focus of this link. The claim that a materialistic orientation detracts from intrapsychic development and interferes with self-actualisation (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Kasser and Ryan, 1993), will thus be examined in hypotheses H6a and H6b. Furthermore, Link E is perhaps the most important link in the model as it refers to the central investigative focus of this thesis; the link between materialism and reduced psychological well-being.

The measurement of self-esteem as an assessment of psychological well-being was supported by Covington (1992) who found that a high level of self-esteem results in greater socio-emotional well-being. For this reason, although H1f examines whether there is a link between materialism and self-esteem, H6a aims to further investigate the direction of influence between materialism and low self-esteem, as this remains to be clarified. Regarding the cumulative evidence thus far it is thought that a high level of materialism contributes more strongly to reduced self-esteem than a low self-esteem contributes to heightened materialism. For this reason it is expected that:

H6a: A high level of Materialism (YMS) will contribute to a low level of self-esteem (SE).

In addition, in order to add further clarity to materialism's relation to self-development and identity, scores for self-concept clarity will also be investigated. Given that self-concept clarity is thought to be an antecedent of self-esteem and identity development (hence psychological well-being), it was expected that:

H6b: A high level of Materialism (YMS) will contribute to a low level of Self-Concept Clarity (SCC).

Investigations based on the above hypotheses are hoped to shed light on the specific nature of the negative relationship between self-esteem, psychological well-being and materialism. However, due to the focus on branding in this thesis, the impact of brand ownership on well-being will also be examined. The brand ownership (BO) variable will be used to assess whether high brand consumption and high importance placed on brands, contributes to a reduced psychological well-being amongst adolescents. It was expected that:

H6c: A high level of Brand Ownership (BO) will contribute to a low level of self-esteem (SE).

H6d: A high level of Brand Ownership (BO) will contribute to a low level of Self-Concept Clarity (SCC).

If confirmed, the above hypotheses will provide support for suggestions that a consumption/brand orientation may contribute to a reduction in psychological well-being amongst adolescents.

The 11 hypotheses presented in section 6.2 pertain to the core vicious cycle model (links B to E) as first proposed by Isaksen and Roper (2008). If each of the 11 hypotheses are supported by the data, their combination will add strength to Proposition 1: There exists a vicious cycle whereby the antecedents and consequences of adolescents' consumerism are linked in such a way that a self-perpetuating cycle is formed.

6.3 Group Differences between Income Levels

6.3.1 Proposition 2

The negative impacts of consumerism have been argued to be magnified amongst low-income adolescents for several reasons. As LaPoint and Habrick-Dixon (2003) state, "poor children...are also very likely to be affected by commercialism influences, and these influences may be further exacerbated by poverty..." (pg. 234). Indeed substantial research has made a number of claims which suggest that low-income adolescents face a number of initial disadvantages with regards to the psychological constructs in the consumption cycle. For example, children from low-income families have reduced levels of self-esteem and self-concept (Ridge, 2002), feel a greater need to belong (Kohn, 1977), have a greater fear of negative evaluations (Henry, 2004), a higher susceptibility to consumption influence (Isaksen and Roper, 2008), display stronger materialistic tendencies (Kasser et al., 1995) and place greater importance on branded possessions (Mayo 2005b) than high-income teenagers. Furthermore, because they are less able to afford the goods they feel are necessary to satisfy these wants and needs, their sense of relative deprivation is heightened and hence further reduces self-worth which again increases their desire to consume (to reduce the feelings of deprivation). Moreover, the dominance of the consumer culture provides them with constant reminders of their exclusion from 'normal' society. Given these disadvantages, it is possible that low-income adolescents are more likely to enter, and experience stronger negative consequences of the consumption cycle than high-income adolescents. For this reason it is proposed that:

> **P2**: The Vicious Cycle, and hence its negative impacts, is magnified
> amongst low-income adolescents.

This proposition will be tested by directly comparing the high and low-income adolescents on the seven psychological measures used in this study. Thus, the following hypotheses were formulated to assess whether income levels have an impact on the specific psychological traits which are involved in the vicious cycle and hence, whether any differences found provide support for P2.

6.3.2 The comparisons of psychological constructs between high and low-income groups

The first hypothesis will examine Link A of the vicious cycle model; does growing up on a low-income result in a less clear self-concept? The reportedly high level of social exclusion experienced by low-income teenagers suggests that their identity formation processes may be disrupted and hence curtailed. This is because, as has been explained, the identity of an individual is strengthened and solidified in the teenage years through social interactions and lived experiences. It follows that, if one feels socially excluded and inferior in these formative years, one is likely to form a less stable concept of self. For this reason, it was expected that:

> **H2a**: Low income adolescents will have reduced self-concept clarity (SCC)
> in comparison to high-income adolescents.

Furthermore, if self-concept clarity indeed contributes to self-esteem levels (Link B, hypothesis H3a), it follows that a lower concept of self (as a result of poverty) may contribute to a lower self-esteem. For this reasons it was expected that:

> **H7a**: Low-income adolescents will have a lower level of self-esteem than
> high income adolescents.

In addition, a restricted ability to consume, coupled with a reduced self-esteem, has been argued to breed materialistic tendencies; those who have the least, want the most (Mayo, 2005b). Furthermore, the heightened insecurity and fear of negative evaluations experienced by low-income consumers, has been argued to results in conspicuous consumption as individuals attempt to gain personal validation (Henry, 2004). Indeed, this consequence of poverty has been illustrated both qualitatively (Isaksen and Roper, 2010b)

and quantitatively (e.g. Kasser et al., 1995 and Schor, 2004). For this reason, it was expected that:

> **H7b**:Low-income adolescents will be more materialistic than high-income adolescents.

Support for this hypothesis will contribute to the validity of Proposition 2, regarding the greater magnitude of the vicious cycle amongst low-income adolescents. That is, if levels of materialism are higher amongst low-income adolescents, links D and E are likely to be stronger amongst them. This is because the greater psychological insecurity and need to conform (amongst low-income adolescents) is likely to encourage the development of materialistic tendencies (Link D), which in turn contributes to reduce levels of self-concept and self-esteem (Link E).

Moreover, the need to conform is also expected to be higher amongst low-income than high-income teenagers. Both Kohn (1977) and Henry (2004) argue that individuals of lower socioeconomic status are more likely to focus on conformity as a means of preserving identity and avoiding negative evaluations, than those of higher status. For these reasons, it is likely that low-income adolescents will be more eager to display social desirability and have a greater fear of negative evaluations than high-income adolescents. Therefore:

> **H7c**: Low-income adolescents will have a greater fear of negative evaluations than high-income adolescents.

> **H7d**: Low-income adolescents will respond in a more socially desirable manner than high-income adolescents.

If low-income teenagers have a greater fear of negative evaluations and are more focused on conformity than high-income adolescents, it follows that they are also more likely to have a greater need to belong and be more susceptible to interpersonal consumption influences (Link C). If low-income adolescents are keener to consume in order to present themselves as 'normal' citizens, they are also more likely to be susceptible to influences; they aim to consume socially accepted goods in order to 'fit in'. Moreover, the findings which suggest that low-income adolescents typically have greater feelings of insecurity and uncertainty, suggests that they are more likely to feel a need to belong and thus turn to

others for opinions regarding consumption decisions (Link C, as was found by Isaksen and Roper (2008)). For these reasons, it was expected that:

> **H7e**: Low-income adolescents will be more susceptible to interpersonal consumer influences than high-income adolescents.

> **H7f**: Low-income adolescents will have a greater need to belong than high-income adolescents.

If, as Belk (1988) suggests, we are what we possess, the importance of possessions in identity cannot be understated. Thus, considering the reportedly fragile identities of low-income teenagers, it is indeed possible that their consumption restrictions contribute to heightened feelings of insecurity as a result of their reduced opportunities to acquire the possessions to support their sense of identity. As a result, they are likely to designate greater importance to material rewards and hence may be more susceptible to consumption influences than high-income teenagers. If this is indeed the case, it follows that the strength of Link D will be magnified. Furthermore, due to the dominance of status-signalling brands amongst low-income adolescents (e.g. Mayo, 2005b), it is likely that their increased susceptibility to consumption influence will heighten the desire for branded goods in particular. For this reason, it was expected that:

> **H7g**: Low-income adolescents will place more emphasis on, and own more branded clothing than high-income adolescents.

Support for this hypothesis will lend statistical support to the observations made in the focus groups suggesting that low-income adolescents place greater importance on consumption and particularly branded goods (section 4.3.2.11). It seems that for low-income adolescents, the need and want for status symbols (such as expensive branded clothing) is continually reinforced while the resources to obtain them remain scarce.

The two propositions and 26 hypotheses presented in this chapter will be assessed and the results will be used to fulfil the aims of this thesis. Whereas H1a to H1g will determine the validity of the self-esteem scale, P1 and H2a to H6d will test the 'core' of the vicious cycle, and P2, H2a and H7a to H7g will assess whether there are significant differences between high and low-income adolescents in terms of the effects of the consumer culture.

Chapter 7. Results and Analyses

All the data were entered and analysed in SPSS (Version 16.00). For simplicity and readability, this chapter will be divided into six main parts. 1) First, the response rates and descriptive statistics of the sample will be presented. Subsequently, the appropriateness of the newly developed self-esteem scale will be confirmed through exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modelling (SEM). 2) Then, assessments of the relationship between the SE scale and the six concurrent measures determine the construct validity and concurrent validity of the new scale; does it behave as expected? Once the scale has been confirmed, 3) the links in the Vicious cycle model will be statistically examined in order to determine whether it is in fact a feasible model for the psychological antecedents and consequences of adolescent consumerism. 4) The strength of the model will then be compared between high and low-income teenagers to assess whether low-income teenagers do in fact experience more negative effects from the consumption culture. 5) The differences in scale scores between those who report a heavy focus on brands and those who do not, will be examined. Therefore, the final two stages of the analysis procedure aim to assess the effects that income and consumption involvement (respectively) have on psychological well being. 6) The chapter will be concluded with a brief summary of the key findings.

7.1 Descriptive Statistics

A total of 1170 questionnaires were sent out between the nine schools and a total of 889 usable questionnaires were returned; a response rate of 76%. The lack of responses was due to a combination of incomplete questionnaires, student absences and the overestimation of pupil numbers by the gate keeper. Every school received an equal proportion of the three different versions of the scale; Table 7-1 below displays the distribution of responses between high and low-income respondents, gender and the version of the scale completed. As can be seen, the distribution of responses was near equal between the groups. The relevant figures for each school are presented vertically; for example in Reddish Vale Technology College (school 1), there were a total of 103 respondents (12% of the total sample), of these, 54% were male and 46% female. Furthermore, 24% of respondents in school 1 completed version 1 of the scale, 37% completed version 2 and 39% completed version 3.

Table 7-1 Descriptive statistics of respondents

School	Low Income					High Income				Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Total
N	103	115	63	89	51	143	227	20	78	889
(% of total)	(12)	(13)	(7)	(10)	(6)	(16)	(26)	(2)	(8)	(100)
% Male: Female	54: 46	46: 54	39: 61	50: 50	67: 33	52: 48	47: 53	66: 34	32: 68	49: 51
%Version 1	24	37	19	20	39	43	31	30	38	32
%Version 2	37	34	43	33	18	20	35	35	31	32
%Version 3	39	29	38	47	43	37	34	35	31	36
Total	N= 421 (47%)					N= 468 (53%)				
Average Age										14.8 (SD=.39)

1= Reddish Vale Technology College; 2= Grange school; 3= Grace Academy;
4= Merchants' Academy; 5= Cedar Mount High; 6= Sale Grammar School;
7= Comberton Village College; 8= Wilmslow High School; 9= King's College
Version1 = Self-Esteem, YMS and SCC scales
Version2 = Self-Esteem, BFNE and MC-1 scales
Version3 = Self-Esteem, CSII and NB scales

7.2 Confirmation of the Self-Esteem Scale

As this was the first, large-scale distribution of the new self-esteem scale, its stability was confirmed prior to using it for analysis. Subsequent to cleaning and screening the data, the scale was once again subjected to exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. Subsequently the reliability and validity of the scale was assessed with the concurrent measures. The results are presented below; they confirm the suitability of the scale for measuring adolescent self-esteem.

7.2.1 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

The 23 items of the SE scale were subjected to a principal component analysis (PCA) with four factors specified. Indeed, the development sample identified 'Self-Evaluation', 'Brand Ownership' 'Social Ability' and 'Social Comparison Effects' as the dominant factors of self-esteem.

The preliminary analysis of the 23 items revealed that two of the scale questions were highly correlated; item 5- '*When my friends are wearing a brand that I don't have, it makes me feel bad*' (Social comparison effects) and 26- '*When people describe me they would probably say I have a lot of friends*' (Social ability), r = .993, p=.000. Item 5 had proven to be problematic due to its loading on the 'social comparison effects' factor. That is, the question involved brands and thus also related closely to the items loading on the

brand ownership factor. Furthermore, the fact that item 26 loaded on the 'social ability' factor but correlated so highly with an item on the 'social comparison effect' factor, suggested that the item was not explicit to one factor. For these reasons, both of the items were removed and further analyses were completed on the remaining 21 scale items. The suitability of the data for factor analysis was again confirmed; correlation coefficients were largely above .3, Bartlett's test reached statistical significance and the KMO value was .886 (exceeding the recommended .6). Cases were excluded pairwise and the PCA was performed on 845 cases.

The resulting four-factor solution accounted for a total of 54.6% of the variance in self-esteem scores; an improvement on the 50% in the development sample with 23 items. A Direct Oblimin rotation found the factor solution had remained unchanged for this sample[34], indicating the stability of the factor structure of the SE scale. Table 7-2 shows the pattern matrix of the rotated solution and Table 7-3 details the reliabilities and percentage of variance explained by each of the four factors and the total scale.

These tables suggest that the four factors of the self-esteem scale are able to account for a large amount of the variance in scores. The stable factor structure and the percentage of the variance accounted for by each factor, indicates the importance of self-evaluation, brand ownership, social ability and the effects of social comparison when assessing self-esteem levels. Furthermore, the high Cronbach's alpha values for both the independent factors and the total scale, highlight its reliability. The only alpha value below .7 was found on the social ability factor. However, considering the wide variety of questions in this factor, this was not surprising the items loading on this factor do not all measure the same precise ability – and hence the correlations between them are likely to be lower. For example, when looking at items 8 and 19 (in Table 7-2), one can argue that it is possible to be a quiet person yet make friends easily.

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[34] As compared to the development sample.

Table 7-2 Pattern matrix for the 21-Item self-esteem scale

Item	Component			
	Self-Evaluation	Brand Ownership	Social Ability	Social Comparison Effects
11. I am proud of my abilities/ skills	.760			
27. I believe that I can do anything if I try	.743			
28. I feel good about myself	.716			
15. There are some things that I am good at	.702			
3. I am happy with the person I am	.624			
23. I am happy with the way I look, I don't want to change anything about myself	.596			
1. When I go clothes shopping I only buy good brands*		.852		
24. I usually have the latest designer labels (names/brands)*		.825		
12. I wear a lot of branded (named) clothes*		.822		
17. I feel better about myself when I am wearing clothes with a label (name/brand)*		.770		
21. People would probably describe me as a sociable and outgoing person			.746	
8. People would describe me as a quiet person*			.692	
10. I am not a shy person			.588	
19. I make friends easily			.565	
9. I fit in with the people around me			.396	
29. If someone takes the mick out of me I think about it for a long time afterwards*				.702
4. I often feel bad about things and feel depressed a lot*				.690
16.When I look at other people I feel as though I'm not good enough*				.642
2.When I'm with a group of people I often worry about the right things to talk about*				.611
7. I often feel like I'm the odd one out in a group*				.585
22. I often feel like I do everything wrong*				.486

* Negatively marked (reverse scored) items.

Table 7-3Mean score, variance explained and reliability values of the individual factors and total self-esteem scale

	Mean Score (SD)	% Variance explained	Reliability: Cronbach's Alpha
Self-Evaluation	401.75 (116.70)	28.4	.829
Brand Ownership	205.2 (98.63)	11.5	.844
Social Ability	310.95 (94.07)	8.1	.678
Social Comparison Effects	393.78 (119.89)	6.6	.760
TOTAL Scale	1311 (254.89)	54.6	.771

7.2.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Due to the removal of the two scale items and the intended use of the scale in multivariate

analyses, CFA was repeated so as to reaffirm the applicability of the four factor model on

this larger sample (N=846). As with the development sample, two SEM models were drawn; one which included all 21 scale items and covariances between the factors, and a second model where summated scales (parcelling) were used. Figures 7-1 and 7-2 illustrate the models and their measurement fit indices.
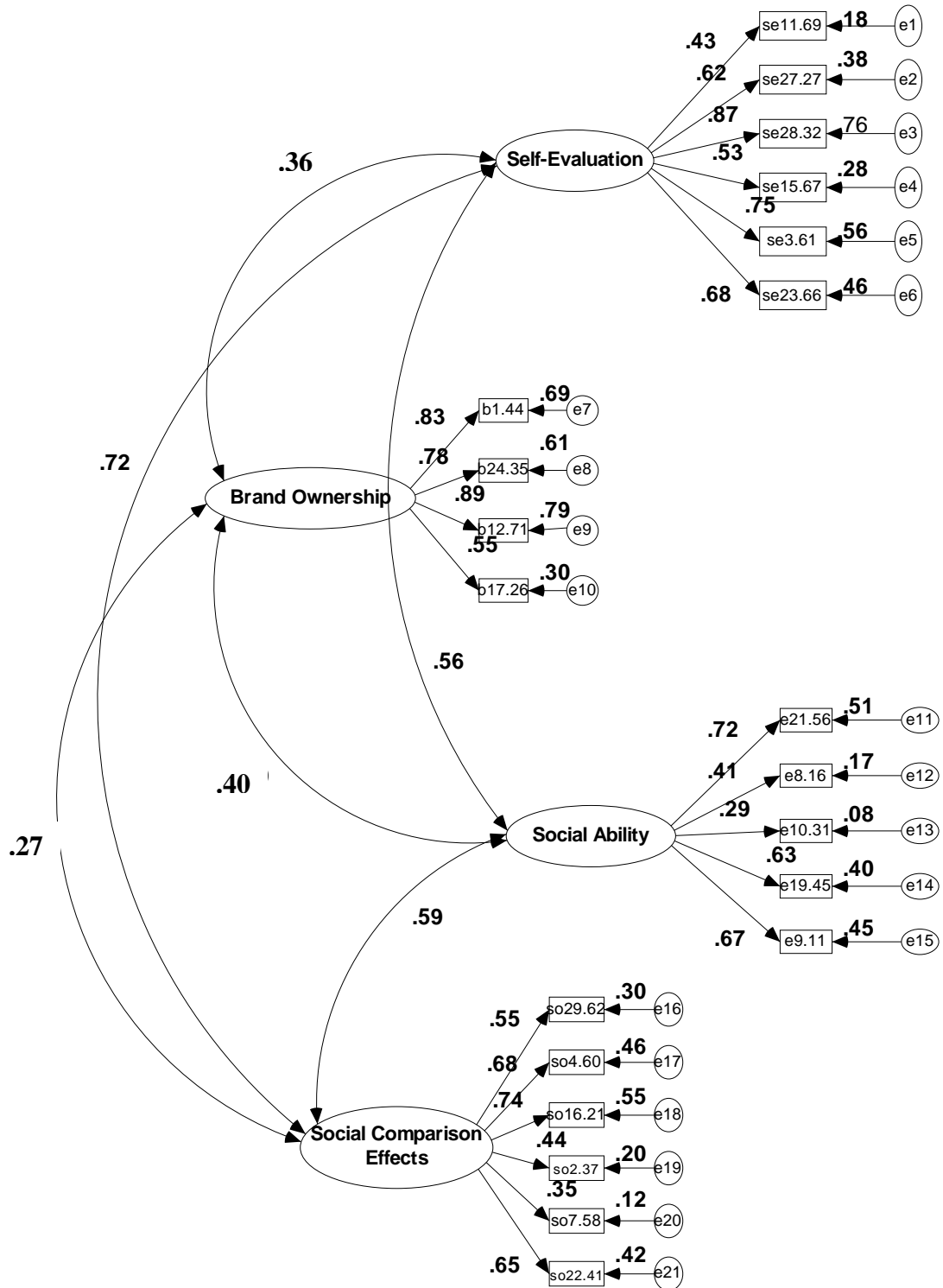
Figure 7-1CFA of four factor model of adolescent self-esteem

When considering the coefficients in the model, it seems that the four factor model was strengthened with the larger sample size; the loadings of the items on the factors and the

covariances between them are stronger. The fit indices reaffirmed the four factor model of self-esteem. Measurement fit: X2 (DF) = 661.6 (183), p<.001; CFI=.919; NFI= .893; IFI= .920; RMSEA= .056; CMIN/DF = 3.615; AGFI= .911; HOELTER=276.

The Hoelter index exceeds 200 and thus confirms the sampling adequacy of this SEM. Recall that for the first SEM on the development sample (N=393)- seen in figure 4-4 in chapter four - the Hoelter index failed to reach the accepted criteria (H=124). For this reason it can be assumed that, as predicted, the small sample size contributed to the lack of fit in the previous SEM. Indeed this affirms the author's use of qualitative interpretation in the scale-development process and as stated by Sobel and Bohrnstedt (1985), "scientific progress could be impeded if fit coefficients (even appropriate ones) are used as the primary criterion for judging the adequacy of a model" (pg. 158).

The simplified, model using summated scales is shown below. It further illustrates the significant relationships between adolescent self-esteem and the four factors within a larger sample (N= 846; Hoelter = 330).
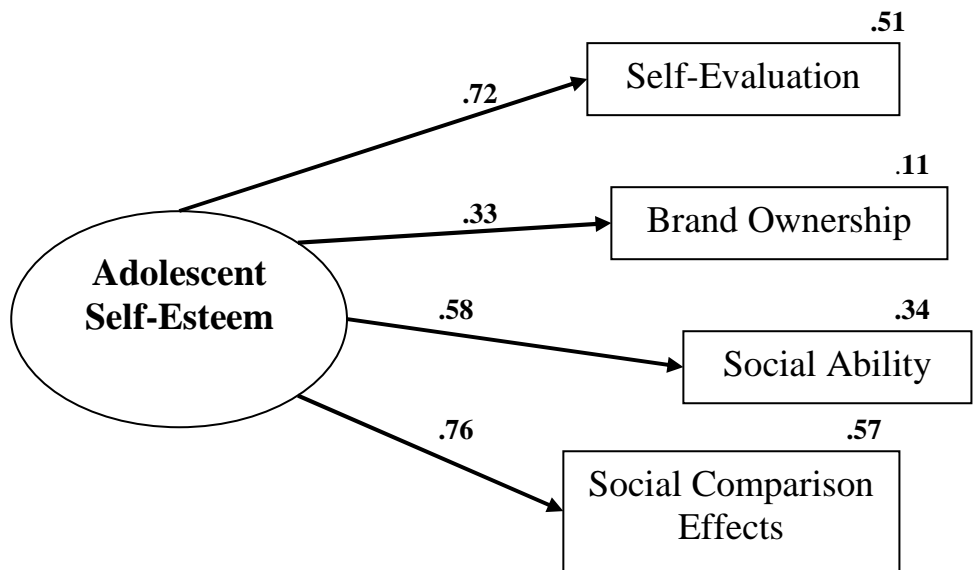
Figure 7-2 CFA of (parcelled) four factor model of adolescent self-esteem

Once again, the four factor structure of adolescent self-esteem is reaffirmed. Measurement fit: X2 (df) = 15.4 (2) p<.001; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .975; Bentler-Bonnet Normed Fit Index (NFI) = .975; Bollen (IFI) Fit Index = .978; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA): .09; HOELTER: 330.

The measurement fits for these SEM models are considered an integral finding of this thesis. This is because the justification for the development of a new self-esteem scale is largely based on the need for an 'up-to-date' measure which includes factors such as Brand Ownership in assessing self-esteem. Therefore, the fact that the models (both parcelled and non-parcelled) significantly illustrated the relationships between brand ownership and other factors of self-esteem, validates the creation of the new scale. This will be further discussed in the following chapter.

7.2.3 Construct validity: relationship with concurrent measures

As outlined in the previous chapter, the construct validity of the SE scale was assessed using Harter's (1988) global self-worth dimension (for convergent validity) and the remaining six concurrent measures; Youth Materialism Scale (YMS), Self-Concept Clarity scale (SCC), Brief Fear of Negative Evaluations scale (BFNE), the Marlow-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MC-1), Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence scale (CSII) and the Need to Belong scale (NB). All 889 participants completed the self-esteem scale and Harter's global measure and depending on whether Version one, two or three of the questionnaire was completed they also completed either the YMS and SCC, the BFNE and the MC-1, or the CSII and the NB, respectively. For this reason, the relationship between the validating measures and the self-esteem scale were tested on smaller selections (thirds) of the total sample. The following sections will first detail the descriptive statistics of all the scales and continue to present the findings addressing the relationship between them. These test hypotheses H1a through H1g.

7.2.3.1 Scales used for construct validity

Prior to analysis, normality assessments were conducted on each of the eight measures used. The distributions of the scale scores all produced bell-shaped curves in histograms and straight lines in the normal probability plots. Further normality statistics, including Skewness and Kurtosis values for each of the individual scales, can be seen in Table 7-4.

Table 7-4 Descriptive statistics for measures used

Scale	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Reliability α
Self-esteem N= 847	1311.64	254.89	-.121	-.166	.771
Harter N=864	14.87	3.15	-.557	.159	.822
YMS N=278	29.63	7.24	.036	-.394	.792
SCC N=251	36.27	8.38	.145	-.352	.822
BFNE N=263	34.29	8.42	.162	.195	.828
MC-1 N=226	4.55	2.02	.144	-.307	.560
CSII N=293	30.23	9.48	.282	-.504	.883
NB N=284	32.6	6.75	-.228	.323	.760

The values in Table 7-4 suggest that the seven scales used for validating the self-esteem scale are appropriate for the sample. The notably low Cronbach's alpha score for the social desirability scale (MC-1) was expected. As explained previously, the True/False format and the disparate nature of the items in the scale mean that responses are less likely to correlate and hence produce a low reliability statistic.

7.2.3.2 Concurrent validity: self-esteem's relationship with concurrent measures.

Having confirmed the normality of the individual scales and ensuring no violations of the assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity, bivariate correlations were employed to examine the relationships between the scales. The correlation coefficients are displayed in Table 7-5 below. The letters S, M or L depict a small medium or large correlation strength according to Cohen's (1988) guidelines.

Table 7-5 Correlation coefficients of relations between self-esteem and concurrent measures

	HARTER (N=830)	YMS (N=266)	SCC (N=240)	BFNE (N=253)	MC-1 (N=219)	CSII (N=280)	NB (N=273)
SES	.694** L	-.161** S	.551** L	-.554** L	.102	-.187** S	-.283 ** S/M
% shared variance (r^2*100)	48.16	2.59	30.36	30.69		3.5	8

**Significant at the .01 level

7.2.3.2.1 Relation to Harter's global dimension

The correlations between the self-esteem scale and each of the concurrent measures, were consistent with the expectations and hence provide evidence of construct validity and support hypotheses H1a to H1g. The large, positive correlation with Harter's global self-worth dimension, confirms the ability of the new scale to tap in to global self-esteem (H1a). Although there is no cut-off value that defines construct validity (DeVellis, 2003), the size of the correlation is large enough to suggest a relationship, but modest enough to discriminate the two measures; they are not measuring the *exact* same construct. In fact, as Campbell and Fiske (1959) assert, "Tests can be invalidated by too high correlations with other tests from which they were intended to differ" (pg. 81). Based on this finding, it would seem that the new self-esteem scale has successfully measured an element of global self-worth whilst contributing new facets to the construct; for example, the brand dimension.

7.2.3.2.2 Relation to self-concept clarity

The positive correlation between self-esteem and SCC scores confirms H1b. The positive correlation suggests that individuals who have a clear concept of self are likely to have a higher self-esteem. This result is akin to Campbell et al's (1996) study which found a correlation of .67 between SCC and self-esteem. Furthermore, in contrast to the results obtained by Isaksen (2006) - which showed a *negative* correlation between SCC and Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) (Rosenberg, 1965) - the predicted (and intuitive) positive correlation using the new SE, suggests that it is a more valid measure of British adolescent self-esteem.

7.2.3.2.3 Relation to fear of negative evaluations

The large negative correlation between self-esteem and BFNE suggests that a fear of negative evaluation is indeed associated with low levels of self-esteem. This relationship was as predicted and confirms hypothesis H1c. It appears that individuals with low self-esteem have a low evaluation of themselves and are also likely to fear the evaluation of others.

7.2.3.2.4 Relation to need to belong

The moderate negative correlation between self-esteem and NB scores supports the relationship between social acceptance and self-esteem amongst adolescents. A low self-

esteem is related to a strong need to belong; and vice versa- hypothesis H1d is supported. As suggested by Baumeister and Leary (1995) a person who does not feel socially accepted is likely to have a heightened need to belong and 'fit in' and will most likely have lowered levels of self-esteem.

7.2.3.2.5 Relation to consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence

The link between self-esteem and consumers' susceptibility to influence is widely established and further supported by the negative correlation between the self-esteem and CSII scale. Although small, this correlation was significant and hence provides support for hypothesis H1e and previous studies which have found the same relationship (e.g. Bearden et al., 1989; Janis and Field, 1959). Furthermore, as will be discussed in the following chapter, this negative relationship bears implications for the role of consumption in self-esteem maintenance.

7.2.3.2.6 Relation to materialism

Self-esteem's relationship with materialistic tendencies was confirmed with a moderate negative correlation. The negative relationship shows that a low level of self-esteem is related to a high level of materialism, and vice versa. This confirms hypothesis H1f and supports previous studies which have shown the same relationship (e.g. Chang and Arkin, 2002). Indeed the existence of this negative relationship lends support for the validity of the new SE scale; it behaves as expected.

7.2.3.2.7 Relation to social desirability

The lack of a significant relationship between the MC-1 and self-esteem suggests that the new scale is resistant to social desirability bias. Hypothesis H1g was supported. As stated previously, social desirability bias has proven to be a problem in other measures of adolescent self-esteem (e.g. Rosenberg's 1965, RSES). For this reason, the lack of a relationship between the SE and MC-1 scale suggests an important improvement to the way in which adolescent self-esteem is measured (over the RSES). Thus it seems that the various techniques used- e.g. indirect questioning and the visual analogue scale- helped to create a measure which cannot easily be 'cheated' by the respondents.

7.2.3.2.8 <u>Impacts of income level on relations between scales</u>

In order to establish whether the high and low-income samples interpreted the scale in the same way (and hence whether it measured the same construct amongst both groups) the correlations between SE and the concurrent measures were repeated on a split sample, between the high and low-income respondents. Subsequently, the strengths of the correlations were compared and the comparison revealed no significant differences in the direction or size of the correlations. This stability suggests that the new scale is able to measure self-esteem on both of these samples, despite any differences that exist between them; for example understanding of self-esteem or literacy levels.

7.2.3.2.9 <u>Additional assessments of validity</u>

The relationship between the self-esteem scores and concurrent measures were further assessed by one-way, between groups Multivariate Analyses of Variance (MANOVAS) between the high and low self-esteem participants. This was because out of the seven measures, only the Harter scale was completed by the total sample and the remaining six measures were divided between three versions of the questionnaire. Thus, the sample was split according to whether respondents scored above or below the *mean self-esteem score of 1311*. Figure 7-3 illustrates the mean scores for each of the seven validating measures between high and low self-esteem scorers. Table 7-6 displays the mean scores and significance value of the MANOVAS; the Bonferonni adjusted significance level was .025. As can be seen, there is a significant difference in Harter's global measure, SCC, BFNE, NB and CSII between those who have high and low self-esteem. The YMS and MC-1 however, failed to reach the adjusted significance level.
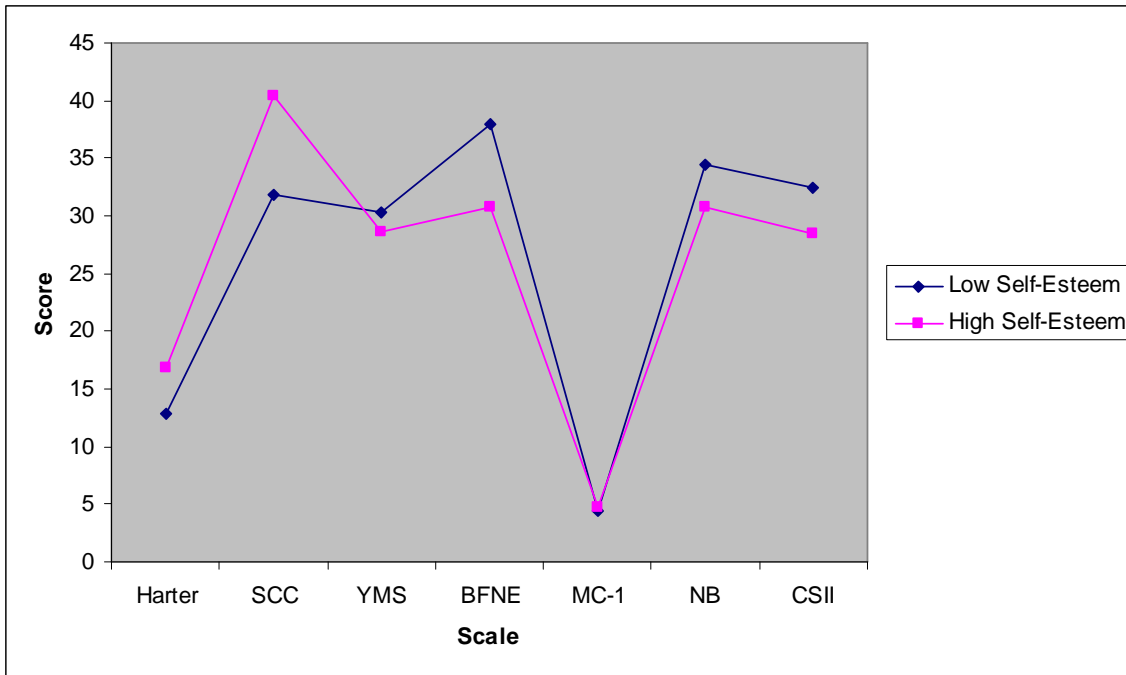
Figure 7-3 Mean scores on concurrent measures for high and low self-esteem.

Table 7-6 Mean scores (and standard deviations) and sig. values for concurrent measures between high and low self-esteem

	Harter	**SCC**	**YMS**	**BFNE**	**MC-1**	**NB**	**CSII**
Low Self-Esteem	12.83 (3.06)	31.9 (6.91)	30.36 (7.04)	37.97 (7.44)	4.40 (1.92)	34.48 (6.59)	32.38 (10.01)
High Self-Esteem	16.79 (2.23)	40.34 (7.68)	28.57 (6.90)	30.69 (7.55)	4.69 (2.08)	30.74 (6.42)	28.47 (8.54)
Sig. (p)	.000	.000	.047	.000	.303	.000	.001
Partial ETA squared	.359	.250	.016	.191	.005	.077	.043

The support for hypotheses H1a through H1f all suggest that the new self-esteem scale displays construct validity and is thus suitable for measuring self-esteem. Furthermore, the size of the partial ETA squared values in Table 1-6 adhere to the expected relationships between the measures. Indeed it is clear that self-esteem is most closely related to the constructs measuring aspects of 'the self'. For example, self-esteem accounts for 35.9%, 25% and 19.1% of Harter, self-concept clarity and fear of negative evaluation scores, respectively.

7.2.4 Conclusions on the new self-esteem measure

The exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis and concurrent validation measures, suggest that the development of the new self-esteem scale was successful. The stable factor solution and the strong goodness of fit values confirm the existence of the

four factors of self-esteem; Self-evaluation, Brand Ownership, Social ability and Social comparison effects. Furthermore, the scale's validity was confirmed through its predicted relations with other scales. Importantly, the .694 correlation with the Harter scale showed that the global construct of self-esteem is commonly measured by the two scales but that there are considerable differences between the two measures.

The added value of the new scale was also demonstrated in the results. Firstly, the predicted positive correlation with self-concept clarity suggest that the scale is more valid than the Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem scale. Secondly, the fact that the relationships between the self-esteem scale and the concurrent variables did not differ between high and low-income respondents, suggests that the scale is measuring the same construct (to the same affect) amongst all the participants. With this reliability and validity confirmed, further analyses were conducted.

7.3 Testing the Vicious Cycle Model

In order to assess the validity of the 'Vicious Cycle Model', the strengths and directions of the relationships between the concurrent measures were empirically tested. This allowed for the confirmation or rejection of the five individual links in the model (A to E). Thus the following sections will first present the results of the statistical analyses carried out; they will be presented under the suitable sub-headings.

7.3.1 Link A: Low income contributes to restricted identity formation.

Poverty is often related to a reduced sense of identity and hence curtailed identity formation (e.g. Ridge, 2002; Elliott and Leonard, 2004). Therefore, link A was tested by comparing the mean SCC scores of high and low-income adolescents. Mean scores suggested that- as predicted- low-income teenagers had a lower SCC than high-income teenagers; 35.39 and 36.91 respectively. However, a t-test failed to show a significant difference in the mean scores and thus H2a was not supported. This was indeed a surprising result and will be further discussed in the following sections.

7.3.2 Link B: Restricted identity contributes to reduced self-esteem and reduced psychological well-being

This link represents the close relationship between an individual's sense of self, their identity, and their level of self-esteem; a damaged or disrupted identity is thought to

contribute to a lowered sense of self-esteem and psychological well-being. The relationship between self-concept clarity (SCC) and self-esteem was supported in H1b; a positive relationship between self-esteem and SCC was confirmed. However, a standard simple regression was used to shed light on the direction of the relationship between these two variables. SCC was used as the independent variable and self-esteem as the dependent variable. The result showed that SCC scores significantly account for 30.2% of the variance in self-esteem scores: $R^2 = 0.302$; $F(1, 238) = 102.90$, $p < 0.000$. This confirms link B in the model and supports hypothesis H3a. It seems that a clear concept of self is a contributing factor to the development of self-esteem (e.g. Campbell et al., 1996).

7.3.3 Link C: Low self-esteem and reduced psychological well-being contributes to greater susceptibility to influence

Hypothesis H1e supported the negative relationship between self-esteem and susceptibility to interpersonal consumption influence. Furthermore, a simple regression showed that self-esteem accounts for 4.5% of the variance in CSII scores ($R^2 = .045$; $F(1,278) = 13.04$, $p < .001$). Although a moderate result, this finding supports previous work which suggests that low self-esteem contributes to an increased susceptibility to influence (e.g. Bearden et al., 1989; Rose et al, 1997 and Janis and Field, 1959). Hypothesis H4a was confirmed, providing support for link C of the vicious cycle model.

A high need to belong is associated with low self-esteem (as shown in hypothesis H1d) and therefore a simple regression was performed between NB and CSII scores. NB scores accounted for 17% of CSII scores ($R^2 = .171$; $F(1,281) = 58.127$, $p < .001$); Hypothesis H4b was confirmed, providing further support for link C.

The relationship between BFNE and CSII was also examined to test link C. This is because a high fear of negative evaluations is related to low self-esteem (as shown in H1c) and as suggested by Chang and Arkin (2002), insecurity and self-doubt can increase one's susceptibility to consumption influences. Indeed, if one considers that a high fear of negative evaluations signals personal insecurity, it follows that individuals who highly fear negative evaluations are likely to rely on interpersonal influences in order to make the 'right' product choices - so as to avoid negative evaluation. However, because the BFNE and CSII scales were distributed on different versions of the questionnaire, they were not completed by the same respondents and thus these two measures could not be directly compared. For this reason a new, 'hypothetical' data set was produced. This data set

ordered responses in such a way that all of the eight scales[35] were (theoretically) completed by the participants. However, as there were three versions of the questionnaire (divided between the total sample – see table 7-1), the hypothetical data set referred to only a third of the total sample size. For example, the participants who completed version one, also, hypothetically, completed versions two and three (rather than having separate respondents for each of these).[36]

The analyses performed on the hypothetical data set showed a positive relationship between BFNE and CSII scores; a high BFNE score was related to a high CSII score. Furthermore, a simple regression showed that BFNE scores accounted for 2.1% of variance in CSII (r= .144) R^2= .021; F(1,261)=5.50, p<.05. Due to the fact that these results were based on the hypothetical data set, it cannot be said that hypothesis H4c was statistically confirmed.

The relationship between SCC and CSII was also tested on the hypothetical data set. However, a bivariate correlation failed to show any significant relationship between the two variables. The data did not confirm H4d. This result contrasts with previous findings by Isaksen and Roper (2008), who found that self-concept clarity was significantly, inversely related to consumer susceptibility (using the same scales on a British adolescent sample). These contrasting results will be further discussed in the following chapter.

The combination of the above findings provide support for the existence of Link C; a low self-esteem (and related constructs such as the need to belong) is likely to contribute to an adolescent's susceptibility to interpersonal influence. Furthermore, the influence measured by the CSII is specific to interpersonal *consumption* influence and hence it can be argued that reduced psychological well-being is a contributing factor to an adolescent's propensity to identify with others through consumption.

7.3.4 Link D: Greater susceptibility to influence contributes to increased need and desire for material goods and brands

Due to the fact that the CSII and YMS scales were distributed on different versions of the questionnaire, the link between susceptibility to influence and materialism could only be

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[35] Materialism, SCC, BFNE, MCSDS, CSII, NB, Harter's global dimension and the new self-esteem scale.
[36] Although this use of the hypothetical data set is not commonplace, the researcher used it so as not to 'waste' the data; it was felt that although tenuous, this data set could provide some indication of the relationships between the constructs.

tested on the hypothetical data set (as previously described). A bivariate correlation between CSII and YMS failed to show the predicted positive relationship between the two constructs; there was no relationship between them, hypothesis H5a was not confirmed.

However, when the relationship between consumer susceptibility and brand ownership (BO) was analysed, it was found that CSII and BO[37] were significantly related; r= -.354. It is important to note here that due to the reversed scoring of the four BO items, a *high score* on the factor represents a *low brand ownership* and vice versa. Therefore the negative correlation shows that a high susceptibility to influence is related to high levels of brand ownership. Furthermore, a simple regression showed that CSII scores account for 12.6% of the variance in brand ownership scores (R^2= .126; $F(1,285) = 40.95$, $p<.001$). Hypothesis H5b was supported. This suggests that amongst British adolescents the extent of susceptibility to interpersonal consumption influences, contributes to the importance placed on owning and acquiring branded goods in particular.

In the interest of further examination of the relationship between brand ownership and susceptibility to influence, a post-hoc statistical test was carried out. The sample was subjected to a mean split between high and low Brand Ownership scores(at 205.2) and the mean CSII scores of the two groups were compared. A t-test showed that there was a significant difference in CSII scores between the high and low brand ownership groups: $t(285)= 5.77$, $p<.001$; N=287. Those respondents who reported a high level of brand ownership also had a significantly higher susceptibility to influence than those who reported less brand ownership.

Despite the lack of a significant relationship between CSII and materialism levels (on the hypothetical data set), the confirmation of hypothesis H5b, provides statistical support for the existence of link D. Furthermore, the fact that interpersonal consumption influences contribute to the likelihood of adolescents possessing (or indeed wanting to possess) branded goods/clothing, illustrates the central role that brands play in British adolescents' consumption behaviour. Possible reasons for the lack of a significant relationship between CSII and YMS scores will be explored in the following chapter.

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[37] The average scores of the brand ownership factor were calculated: Mean= 205.20; Standard Deviation= 98.63; N= 873. The questions in this factor directly assess the respondent's ownership of branded clothing and the level of importance assigned to branded clothing. The four scale items were:
1. When I go clothes shopping I only buy good brands.
12. I wear a lot of Branded Clothes
17. I feel better about myself when I am wearing clothes with a label
 24. I usually have the latest designer labels

7.3.5 Link E: Increased desire for material possessions and brands contributes to reductions in self-esteem, self-concept and psychological well-being.

The confirmed correlation between self-esteem and materialism (H1f) suggested that the more materialistic one is, the less clear and secure one is in one's identity. Furthermore, a simple regression showed that materialism scores accounted for 2.5% of Self-esteem variance (R^2= .025; F(1,264), p<.05) and 7.9% of SCC variance (R^2= .079; F(1,249)= 21.36, p<0.001); confirming hypotheses H6a and H6b respectively. Although moderate, these findings suggest that, a materialistic orientation contributes negatively to an individual's self-esteem and self-concept (psychological well-being). These findings lend support to Kasser and Kanner's (1993) proposition that materialism is related to reduced psychological well-being. However, subsequent analyses did not provide statistical support for hypotheses H6c and H6d; no relationships were found between brand ownership levels (BO) and measures of the self (SE and SCC).

Due to the intuitive link between brand ownership and materialism, the author was surprised by the lack of support for H6c and H6d. For this reason, in an attempt to shed some light on these findings, a number of post-hoc analyses were carried out. The sample was split between high and low Brand Ownership and the YMS and SE scores between the two groups were compared. The t-tests (with Bonferonni adjustments)[38] revealed that those respondents who reported high Brand Ownership were also significantly more materialistic and had lower self-esteem than those who reported low brand ownership (see Table 7-7 below). In contrast to the correlations between BO and SE and SCC, these post-hoc t-tests are in-line with the predicted findings; those who report high brand ownership have significantly lower self-esteem than those who report low brand ownership. As will be further discussed in the following chapter, the result of the t-test does not imply that a high focus on brands *contributes* to a reduction in self-esteem. However, there exist a number of alternative possible interpretations of this result which were thought to be of interest in light of the extant research.

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[38] .025 significance level

Table 7-7 Materialism and self-esteem scores for high and low brand ownership.

	Materialism (YMS)	Self-Esteem
High Brand Ownership	31.67 (SD=7.07)	1287.8 (SD=235.5)
Low Brand Ownership	27.62 (SD=6.88)	1335.94 (SD=273)
t	4.80	-2.74
p	.000	.006

7.3.6 Vicious cycle conclusions

Although not all of the hypotheses pertaining to Proposition 1 were supported, the results provide statistical evidence for the existence of links B to E of the vicious cycle model; a reduced self-concept contributes to reduced self-esteem, reduced self-esteem and a high need to belong contribute to increased susceptibility to interpersonal consumption influence, susceptibility to consumption influence contributes to an increase want and need for branded goods and a materialistic value orientation contributes to reduced psychological well-being. It was surprising that the link between brand ownership and reduced psychological well-being was not confirmed despite the fact that levels of materialism contributed significantly to a reduction in psychological well-being (reduced self-esteem and self-concept). For this reason, based on the current findings, Proposition 1 can only be partially supported. There are indeed links between the antecedents and consequences of adolescent consumption however, whether they operate in a directly cyclical and self-perpetuating manner, cannot be confirmed. This is because a greater need/want for brands was not seen to contribute to reduced psychological well-being and although materialism contributes to reduced self-concept and self-esteem, it was not shown to be impacted by consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence. However, had a significant relationship between CSII and YMS scores been found, there would have been stronger support for the continuous flow of influence within the vicious cycle.

Perhaps one of the most key findings from the above analyses, was the link between materialism and reduced psychological well-being (Link E). This is because they provide further statistical support which shows that a materialistic value orientation contributes to low psychological well being. Thus, having established this link - and links B to D - on the total adolescent sample (high and low income), the next step was to compare the high and low-income respondents. H2a predicted that low-income adolescents would have reduced self-concept clarity however there was no statistically significant difference between the

two income groups. As stated, this was a surprising result and will be further discussed in the following chapter. However, the following section will present a series of analyses and results which further examine Proposition 2; whether low–income adolescents do in fact experience *more* negative consequences from the consumer culture than high-income adolescents. That is, does consumerism exacerbate the already negative consequences of living on a low income?

7.4 Is the Cycle More Vicious for Low-Income Adolescents?

7.4.1 Comparison of high and low-income adolescents: Scale scores

The first step in assessing whether a low income exacerbates the vicious cycle, and hence whether low-income adolescents have a more negative experience in the consumption culture, was to determine whether there were significant differences between scale scores for high and low-income adolescents. The data for each of the scales are presented in Table 7-8 and figure 7-4 shows a graphical presentation of the mean scores; these have been converted to mean z-scores for ease of interpretation.

Table 7-8 Mean scale scores (and standard deviations) for high and low-income respondents

	Harter's Global	Self-esteem (SES)	Materialism (YMS)	SCC	BFNE	MC-1	CSII	NB
High-Income	14.92 (3.1)	1314.8 (249.12)	28.50 (6.76)	36.91 (8.84)	35.40 (8.03)	4.52 (2.06)	29.16 (9.62)	32.92 (6.95)
Low-Income	14.81 (3.11)	1306.8 (261.24)	31.23 (7.18)	35.39 (7.62)	33.15 (8.02)	4.59 (2.0)	31.32 (9.27)	32.27 (6.58)
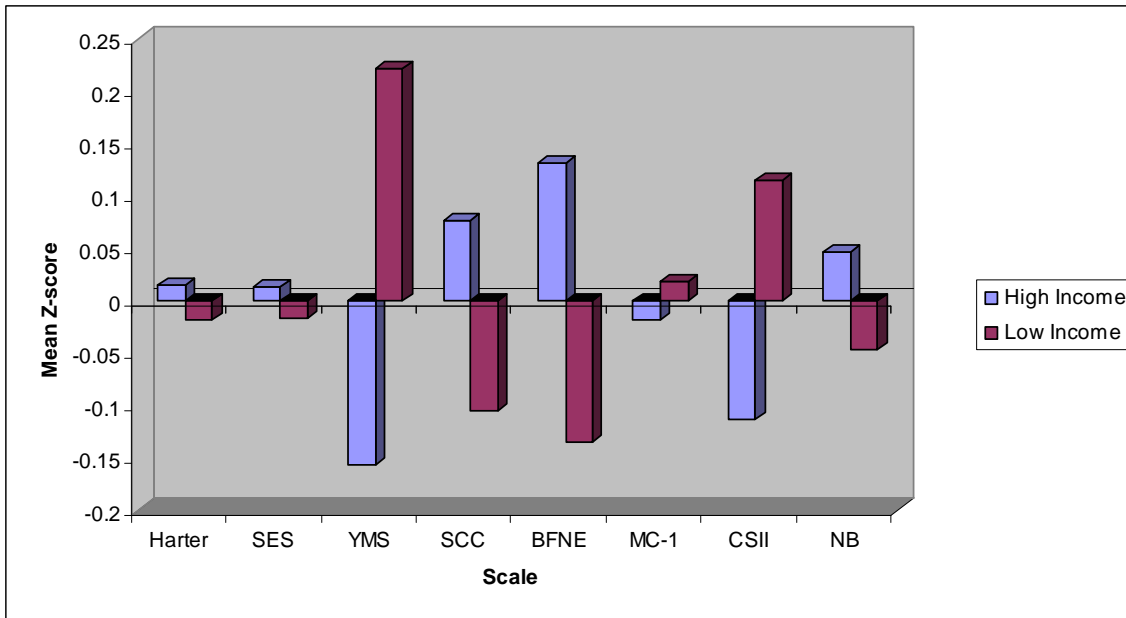
Figure 7-4 Mean z-score (scale scores) for high and low-income respondents

The comparison of mean scores suggest that high-income respondents displayed higher scores for self-esteem (Harter and SES), self-concept clarity (SCC), fear of negative evaluations (BFNE) and need to belong (NB) than low-income respondents. They also displayed a lower score for materialism (YMS), social desirability (MC-1) and consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (CSII). Aside from the mean scores for BFNE and NB, the score differences between the groups were in the predicted direction.   To empirically test these differences however, four one-way, between group MANOVAs were conducted.

7.4.1.1 Self-esteem and Harter's global dimension

Preliminary testing confirmed that the data did not violate assumptions of normality, linearity, univariate and multivariate outliers, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices and multicollinearity. There were no statistically significant differences between high and low-income respondents on the Harter and SES test scores: $F_{(2, 827)} = .126$, p=.881, Wilks' Lambda = 1.00. Hypothesis H7a was not supported.

The lack of a significant difference in self-esteem scores was surprising considering the vast amount of supporting literature for this (e.g. Hill and Stephens, 1997; Mayo, 2005a; Ridge, 2002) (Link A and B). However, when the RSES (Rosenberg, 1965) was used by Isaksen (2006) on a British adolescent sample, the direction of the results suggested that low-income respondents had *a higher* self-esteem than high-income respondents. The fact that the scores using the new measure (although not significant) were in the predicted

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direction may be suggestive of the increased efficacy of the SE scale; this speculation will be further discussed in the following chapter.

7.4.1.2 Materialism (YMS) and self-concept clarity (SCC)

There was a statistically significant difference between high and low-income respondents on the combined dependent variables YMS and SCC: $F(2, 248) = 5.34$, $p = .005$, Wilks' Lambda $= .96$. However, when considered separately, using a Bonferonni adjusted alpha level of .025, the only significant difference was found in materialism scores: $F(1,249) = 10.383$, $p=.001$, partial eta squared $=.04$. H7b was supported and H2a was not. Low income respondents were significantly more materialistic than high income respondents. A small-medium[39], 4% of the variance in materialism scores was accounted for by income level. Although small, the difference in mean materialism scores was as predicted. Indeed, both Dittmar and Pepper (1994) and Kasser et al. (1995), found that low-income respondents display a higher level of materialism than their high-income counterparts. As will be further discussed in the following chapter, this finding, in combination with the confirmed link between materialism and reduced psychological well-being (Link E), bears interesting implications for the different experiences of consumerism amongst high and low income adolescents.

In light of the wealth of extant evidence suggesting that low-income children typically experience reduced psychological well-being (e.g. Ridge, 2002), the lack of a significant difference in SCC scores was surprising. Furthermore, it was expected that, as a result of heightened materialism (and the confirmation of Link E), low-income adolescents would show a lower level of SCC (based on the established relationship between materialism and SCC; hypothesis H6b). Thus, in order to shed light on this unexpected result, a post-hoc analysis was carried out whereby the total sample was split between high and low-income respondents and the strength of the relationship between self-concept clarity and materialism was compared between the two groups.

The YMS and SCC scale scores were converted to Z scores and the observed value of Z (Z_{obs}) (as outlined by Pallant, 2007) was calculated. The calculations produced a Z_{obs} value of -1.962, indicating that the correlation coefficients between YMS and SCC scores were statistically significantly different between high and low-income respondents. The low-income respondents displayed a significantly stronger negative correlation between the

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[39] According to Cohen's (1988) guidelines on effect size: 1%=small; 6%=medium; 13.8%= large

SCC and YMS than their high-income counterparts; -.408, p<.001, N=106 and -.180, p<.05, N=145 respectively.   This suggests that materialism is more strongly related to reduced self-concept amongst low-income, than amongst high-income adolescents. This was an interesting finding which suggests that link E of the vicious cycle may be stronger amongst low-income adolescents. However, the lack of a significant difference in SCC scores between the income groups means that this remains a speculation, which requires further testing before concrete claims can be made.

7.4.1.3 Fear of negative evaluations (BFNE) and social desirability bias (MC-1)

There was a statistically significant difference between high and low-income respondents on the combined dependent variables BFNE and MC-1: $F(2, 221) = 3.17$, $p = .044$, Wilks' Lambda = .972. However, when considered separately, with a Bonferonni adjustment, the groups differed only on the BFNE scores: $F(1,222) = 6.294$, $p= .013$, partial eta squared = .028. In contrast to the expected direction, high-income respondents displayed significantly higher levels of fear of negative evaluations than low-income adolescents. Income accounted for a small[40], 2.8% of the variance in BFNE scores. Low-income adolescents were expected to display a greater fear of negative evaluations than high-income adolescents due to their (reportedly) reduced psychological well-being. Furthermore, based on Kohn's (1977) arguments, it was expected that low-income adolescents were more likely to focus on conformity and thus they would have a greater social desirability score. However, the lack of statistical support for these expected results means that H7c and H7d were rejected. The possible reasons for these unexpected results will be further discussed in the next chapter.

7.4.1.4 Consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (CSII) and the need to belong (NB)

There was a statistically significant difference between high and low-income respondents on the combined dependent variables CSII and NB: $F(2, 280) = 3.58$, $p = .029$, Wilks' Lambda = .975, Partial eta = .025. However, when considered in isolation, none of the scales significantly differed between the income groups. **CSII**: $F(1,281)= 3.824$, $p = .052$; **NB**: $F(1,281)= .691$, $p=.407$. Thus hypotheses H7e and H7f were not supported. As with the previous analyses, the hypotheses were based on evidence from extant literature (eg. Isaksen and Roper, 2008) and thus the lack of significant differences in mean scale scores

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[40] Ibid.

was unexpected. Possible suggestions for these results will be further discussed in the following chapter.

7.4.2 Comparison of high and low-income adolescents: Brand ownership

It has been established that low-income adolescents are more materialistic than high-income adolescents. However, does it then follow that they are more actively involved in the consumer society and place greater importance on branded goods? This was indeed suggested in the focus groups, but in order to investigate it empirically, scores for the Brand Ownership factor were computed and a t-test revealed that low-income respondents reported a significantly greater level of brand ownership (M=178.89 , SD=89.4) than their high-income counterparts (M=228.61, SD=100.62)[41]: t(870.99)= 7.73, p=.000. Hypothesis H7g was confirmed.

As was previously explained, the sum of the brand ownership (BO) questions in the SE scale were considered as a measure of the importance placed on owning branded goods/clothing; BO levels are representative of an individual's brand orientation. Thus, the confirmation of hypothesis H7g, concurs with previous consumer reports which show that low-income children have a greater preference for clothing with a popular brand than high-income children; 75% and 61% respectively, according to Mayo (2005b). Furthermore, in terms of the vicious cycle model, the heightened brand focus in combination with heightened materialism amongst low-income adolescents, support the notion that they may be more active/eager members of the consumption society than high income adolescents.

7.4.3 Conclusions on the strength of the vicious cycle

The eight hypotheses in this section (7.4) were used to asses/test Proposition 2; is the vicious cycle and hence its negative impacts, magnified amongst low-income adolescents? As outlined in the previous chapter, it was expected that low-income adolescents display lower self-esteem, lower self-concept clarity, greater levels of materialism, higher fear of negative evaluations, greater susceptibility to influence, higher need to belong and report higher brand ownership than high-income adolescents. If supported, these findings would suggest that low-income adolescents were more prone to entering the consumption cycle and hence (due to the confirmed links of the vicious cycle) may be more likely to

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[41] The scores on the items have been reversed, thus *a high score* represents a *low ownership*.

experience negative psychological consequences as a result. However due to the lack of statistically significant mean scale score differences on the majority of the psychological constructs tested, it cannot be said that P2 is supported by this evidence. This will be further discussed in the following chapter.

7.5 Comparing the Vicious Cycle for Low and High Brand Ownership

Considering that the group differences in scale scores - although not significant - were in the predicted direction and that several previous studies have presented significant group differences on a number of these constructs (e.g. Henry, 2004, Schor, 2004 and Isaksen and Roper, 2008), the lack of support for the hypotheses was surprising. For this reason, it was decided that a number of post-hoc analyses be carried out using a different criteria; namely brand-ownership.

Considering that one of the largest discrepancies between the high and low-income groups was found on the Brand Ownership factor (BO), the researcher thought it of interest to split the sample based on this criteria. A mean split based on BO scores, was thought to shed some light on the differences between those who place a high importance on acquiring and possessing branded clothing and those who do not. Indeed it may be the case that a focus on brands (specifically), rather than income levels, is a key factor in reducing psychological well-being amongst adolescents living in the consumer culture. For this reason the following post-hoc analyses were carried out.

The total sample was subjected to a mean-split between high and low Brand Ownership scores and the four MANOVAs carried out on the high and low-income groups (in the previous section) were repeated on the high and low BO groups. The descriptive statistics and results of the group comparisons are displayed in table 7-9 below. For ease of interpretation, the results are displayed according to the actual ownership groups (i.e. the reverse scoring of the brand ownership items has been accounted for).

Table 7-9 Mean scale scores (and standard deviations) for high and low brand ownership

	N (%)	SE*	Harter*	SCC	YMS*	BFNE	MCSDS	CSII*	NB
High Brand Ownership	High Income 192 (43%) Low Income = 254 (57%)	1287.8 (235.5)	15.27 (3.00)	36.76 (7.54)	31.67 (7.07)	34.64 (7.95)	4.34 (1.88)	33.35 (8.74)	32.54 (5.48)
Low Brand Ownership	High Income = 270 (63%) Low Income = 157 (37%)	1335.94 (273)	14.51 (3.26)	35.91 (9.13)	27.62 (6.88)	34.66 (8.88)	4.76 (2.13)	27.43 (9.3)	32.49 (7.78)

*Significant with the adjusted alpha level of .025

Firstly, to assess the justification of the mean BO split, the proportion of high and low income respondents, within the high and low brand ownership groups was compared. A Chi square test for independence (with Yates Continuity Correction) confirmed that there was a significant association between income level and brand ownership. There was a higher proportion of low-income respondents (57%) in the high Brand Ownership group than in the low Brand Ownership group (37%); X^2 (1, n=873) = 34.86, p<.001 (see Table 1-9).

Significant differences between the groups were found on the SE, Harter, YMS and CSII scales. Those who reported a high brand ownership had a lower SES score {$F(1,828)$= 7.09, p=.008, partial eta = .008}, a higher materialism score {$F(1,245)$= 22.38, p= .000, partial eta= .084}and a higher Harter score {$F(1,828)$= 12.39, p= .000, partial eta= .015}. These were all in the direction as expected except for the Harter Scale which was in the reverse direction of what was expected. This result will be further explored in the following chapter.

7.6 General Conclusions

The analyses performed and the results obtained, achieved two notable goals; the confirmation of the newly developed self-esteem scale and statistical evidence which furthers our understanding of the nature of the relationships between the psychological traits involved in adolescent consumption behaviour. The new results revealed that the self-esteem scale required further item elimination, hence highlighting the need for scale

testing and validation (as outlined by Churchill, 1979 and DeVellis, 2003). Moreover, the stability of the four factor model of self-esteem (Self-Evaluation, Brand Ownership, Social Ability and Self-Evaluation), suggests that they are indeed essential components of adolescent self-esteem. Furthermore, the added value of the new SE scale was displayed in comparison to the RSES which failed to produce intuitive and expected results.

The newly constructed scale, in conjunction with the other measures (YMS, SCC, BFNE, MCSDS, CSII and NB), provided evidence for links B to E in the vicious cycle model. However, due to the fact that the cyclical nature of the links was not supported (CSII contributed to BO but not YMS, and YMS contributed to reduced psychological well-being, but BO did not), Proposition 1 was not statistically confirmed. However, as supported by the extant literature, Link E (hypotheses H6a through H6d) appears to be an important aspect in understanding the relationship between consumerism and psychological well-being. A reduction in well-being (partially contributed to by materialistic values) may be a contributing factor to an increased susceptibility to consumption influence (Link C), which in turn increases the likelihood of placing a high importance on acquiring branded goods (Link D).

The lack of support for a number of the predicted income-group differences failed to support Proposition 2. However, low-income adolescents' greater materialism and brand ownership, in addition to the post-hoc tests carried out, are suggestive of possible differences between the implications of a consumption orientation for high and low-income teenagers. The following chapter will provide the reader with further explanations and interpretations of the findings – in relation to extant research. Furthermore, based on some of the unexpected results and the post-hoc analyses carried out, a number of the author's own speculations and the need for a number of future investigations will be outlined.

Chapter 8. Discussions, Implications, Limitations and Contributions

8.1 Introduction

This thesis has produced a number of findings, both hypothesised and unexpected, which can help to shed light on several issues surrounding scale development, research with children and teenagers, the role of consumption amongst adolescents and importantly, the potentially exacerbated negative consequences of the consumer culture on low-income adolescents. Having presented all the findings, this chapter serves to discuss these results in the context of today's society. Due to the large number of hypotheses and findings presented (referring to self-esteem scale development and adolescent consumption), this chapter will assume a similar format to that of the (previous) results chapter. The discussion will commence with the scale development part of this work; this will include the benefits of the scale development process assumed and the contribution and benefits that the new self-esteem scale has made. Subsequently, the vicious cycle model will be discussed; is it a feasible model? Can it be reliably used for assessing and examining the psychological impacts of adolescent consumption? If so, how useful was it for the comparison of high and low-income teenagers and was there indeed a difference between them - do the poor really suffer more? The discussion will then proceed to examine how the vicious cycle model and the findings of this thesis can be practically applied to 'real life' situations (for example policies and intervention programs) in order to prevent and protect teenagers from the possible negative affects of the consumption culture. Furthermore, due to the detailed level of analysis in this work, a number of the factors which contribute to adolescents' consumption orientations were revealed. This is in turn, helps to highlight *specific* areas which require attention when investigating the impacts of consumption society on adolescents (for example self-esteem and brand ownership). Subsequently, some of the existing strategies and suggestions for stemming consumerism amongst adolescents will be reviewed in terms of the empirical findings from this study. For example, are current suggestions really the most applicable, from a child-centred approach?

The final part of this chapter will discuss future research within the field of adolescent consumer behaviour, with references to the limitations of this research. Considering the special nature of the teenage sample and the issues encountered during the scale-development process, suggestions regarding appropriate methodologies will also be

reviewed. Thus, this chapter will serve to summarise and conclude the thesis, but also provide the bases for the next stages of research in this very important subject area; consequences of adolescent consumerism. For ease of interpretation, a table of the relevant hypotheses will be presented in each section discussing them. The final part of this chapter - and indeed thesis - will provide an explicit description of its contributions to knowledge and thus, considering the volume of work presented, it is hoped that the reader will be left with a clear understanding of the purpose and value of this thesis.

8.2 Scale Development; the New Self-Esteem Scale

8.2.1 Benefits of the scale development process

The process of developing the new self-esteem scale was by no means a quick and easy task. Considerable time and effort was invested in the process; from the initial background research on self-esteem and scale development theory, through to the careful construction of planning and running the focus groups and subsequently, the qualitative analysis and item generation process which were then confirmed through quantitative tests and reduction of the scale items.

The multi-stage, approach used to develop the scale- where qualitative data is used to formulate a quantitative scale- contributes considerable rigidity to the realm of self-esteem scale development. The qualitative part of the scale development process was particularly pertinent to the construct of self-esteem. This is because, as Wells and Marwell (1976) correctly argued, self-esteem is a slippery and complicated concept and investigations of its intricacies amongst individuals, has historically been plagued by the approach of 'everyone knows what self-esteem is'. Therefore, the qualitative work enabled the clear definition of the concept which, as DeVellis (2003) noted, is a crucial starting point of the scale development process.

Furthermore, the fact that this study used British adolescents in creating a scale for British adolescents was extremely beneficial. Previous child and adolescent self-esteem scales have most often been designed and analysed on respondents who are not the target recipients of the scale; for example, adults, college students, or simply the 'expert' opinions of the researchers themselves. This is clearly a flawed method of assessing psychological constructs because depending on the life stage and context of the target sample, their conception, understanding and bases of self-esteem are likely to vary. For

this reason, the large scale and in-depth nature of qualitative data collected with adolescents, although extremely time consuming, was deemed as an essential part of the data collection process. The subjects in this study (British Adolescents) were truly perceived, and treated like the experts.

Furthermore, the focus groups and elicitation techniques used within them, not only allowed the adolescents to define the concept themselves, but it also allowed the researcher to formulate a scale which was suited to adolescents in every way. For example, the four specific dimensions included in the measure, the language used in the scale items and the response format used, were all designed to suit the sample. As a result of this, the likelihood of obtaining the most accurate measure of adolescent self-esteem was greatly increased. This is because, as argued throughout this thesis, it is necessary to investigate a construct as personal as self-esteem, through the eyes of the beholder; namely the eyes of the adolescents themselves. Furthermore, within child research in general, there is a distinct lack of these personal opinions; it has most often been the opinions of parents or significant others. Therefore, conducting focus groups with the adolescents themselves, clearly reflects the ontological assumptions held by the researcher; namely that children are active beings, they are by no means "incompetent, unreliable and incomplete…mere objects to be studied" (Barker and Weller, 2003, pg. 208). Considering the extensive consideration and efforts placed in designing the methodology of the scale development process, it is perhaps not surprising that the empirical testing of the final scale illustrated its reliability and validity in measuring self-esteem.

8.2.2 Statistics: reliability and concurrent validity of the new scale

8.2.2.1 Reliability and stability

The reliability and internal consistency of the self-esteem scale were clearly displayed by the Cronbach's alpha value for the complete scale (.777), as well as the four individual factors within it (from .678 to .844)[42]. These results show that the individual factors reliably assess the four dimensions of self-esteem but also that the combination of these dimensions assess a single underlying construct to which they all relate; namely adolescent self-esteem. Furthermore, the high test-retest correlation value (r= .776) displayed the stability of the measure across time. Moreover, this temporal stability also

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[42] The social ability factor produced a value of .678. This is below .700 but the items in the factor were still considered to reliably measure social ability. This is because, as Pallant (2003) explains, scales with few items (less than 5) typically produce low Cronbach's alpha values .

suggests that the scale measures *trait* self-esteem as opposed to *state* self-esteem. As clearly outlined by Denissen et al., (2008) "*state SE* (self-esteem) refers to temporary fluctuations within a person (e.g. across days), *trait SE* to stable individual differences…" (pg. 183, parentheses added). Therefore, the results obtained, can be confidently attributed to individual differences in self-esteem levels, rather than superficial differences caused by changes in mood or simple situational circumstances. This means that the levels of self-esteem assessed by the new scale are the 'core' levels of self-esteem amongst the adolescents and therefore, the scale is particularly suitable for comparing group differences; the results will not be circumstantial.

In addition, the stability of the scale's factor structure was displayed through the consistency of Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analyses across samples. This showed that the key dimensions of adolescent self-esteem -Self-evaluation, Brand Ownership, Social Ability and Social Comparison Effects were consistently measured by the items in the scale. Furthermore, the multidimensional nature of self-esteem was confirmed by the structural equation models because they also accounted for the variance between the factors; the models presented in the previous results chapter clearly depict the significant connections between adolescent self-esteem and the four factors. These results confirm that the final 21 item scale measures the same construct across time and samples.

8.2.2.2 Construct and concurrent Validity

Construct validity lies "at the very heart of the scientific process…" of scale development (Churchill, 1979, pg. 70) and for this reason, considerable efforts were devoted to relating the scores from the new scale, to constructs which were related - but not identical- to the construct of self-esteem. This method of assessing scale validity makes use of extant theory as well as specific empirical analyses (as supported by Peter, 1981). Thus, the seven hypotheses (as shown below) developed for testing the validity of the scale were based on previous theories and empirical findings. In addition, the BFNE and NB scales (H1c and H1d) also served to examine whether the new scale adhered to Leary et al.'s (1995) Sociometer hypothesis of self-esteem.

Table 8-1 Summary of hypotheses H1a - H1g

H1a: There will be a strong, positive relationship between Harter's (1988) Global Self-Worth dimension and the newly developed self-esteem scale (SE)	**Supported**
H1b: There will be a positive relationship between self-esteem (SE) and Self-Concept Clarity (SCC).	**Supported**
H1c: There will be a negative relationship between self-esteem (SE) and a Fear of Negative Evaluations (BFNE).	**Supported**
H1d: There will be a negative relationship between self-esteem (SE) and the Need to Belong (NB)	**Supported**
H1e: There will be a negative relationship between self-esteem (SE) and Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (CSII).	**Supported**
H1f: There will be a negative relationship between self-esteem and Materialism (YMS).	**Supported**
H1g: There will be no relationship between self-esteem and social desirability (MC-1).	**Supported**

As expected, all of the hypotheses were statistically supported and the self-esteem scale behaved as predicted. Indeed it is unlikely that a different construct would have resulted in this identical pattern of expected relationships; a positive relation with a global self-worth and self-concept clarity, a negative relationship with need to belong, fear of negative evaluations, consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence and materialism. The fact that the nature and strength of the relationships between these scales did not differ between the income groups (low and high), suggests that the scale assesses the same construct across a range of socio-psychologically distinct respondents. Therefore, the scale was deemed suitable for assessing income group differences in self-esteem. Furthermore, the strength of the correlation with Harter's global self-worth dimension (.694) showed that the new scale taps in to elements of general self-worth but that the two scales do not measure the same construct; sufficient variance was unaccounted for. Therefore, the new dimensions of the scale, for example brand ownership and social comparison effects, are likely to account for the variance not accounted for by global self-esteem.

Finally, the significant differences found between the low and high self-esteem groups (as determined by the mean SE score split), provided further support for the validity of the scale as it demonstrated its sensitivity to differences in self-esteem levels. Furthermore, the sensitivity of the scale supports the use of the Visual Analogue Scale as a response scale because it is more sensitive than for example a likert scale.

8.2.2.3 Social desirability

The pervasive question facing the measurement of personal and intimate psychological constructs such as self-esteem is whether respondents perceive there to be socially acceptable answers to the items in the scale (Mick, 1996). Indeed this was the justification behind the complex response format of Harter's (1988) SPPA, it was designed to measure true, as opposed to defensive, self-esteem (as discussed by Coopersmith, 1967). The consideration given, and the measures taken to avoid social desirability bias throughout the scale development process[43], seem to have been successful; self-esteem scores were not related to social desirability (H1g). This illustrates another benefit of this scale; having low self-esteem is not something image-conscious teenagers will readily admit to and thus a scale which is able to assess core levels of self-esteem (which Rosenberg's RSES has battled with) contributes to the study of it.

8.2.2.4 Sociometer hypothesis

Support for Leary et al.'s (1995) sociometer hypothesis for self-esteem was provided by the predicted negative relationships between self-esteem and BFNE and NB scores (H1c and H1d). These variables relate to an individual's (innate) need and desire for social acceptance and thus the fact that they are negatively related to self-esteem supports the claim that self-esteem may be an indicator of social acceptance. As proposed by Leary et al (1995), low self-esteem signals reduced acceptance and thus the need and desire to belong is increased. Amongst teenagers for example, a heightened fear of negative evaluations and a greater desire to belong (as a result of low self-esteem) may increase the teenager's focus and orientation towards material possessions and popular brands because they facilitate social acceptance. Indeed this was evident in the results; low self-esteem was related to high susceptibility to consumption influence and the respondents who reported high brand-ownership had significantly lower self-esteem levels than those who reported below-average brand ownership. Furthermore, in testing link C of the vicious cycle model, a simple regression showed that a high need to belong is a contributing factor to levels of susceptibility to consumption influence. Thus, just as strength and intuition may have increased chances of acceptance amongst cavemen, the findings within this thesis suggest that the consumption of fashionable and popular items is used as a means of dealing with one's need to belong amongst today's adolescents. However, although material possessions may be thought to assist in achieving social inclusion, there is statistical evidence to suggest that a materialistic orientation can detract from intrapsychic

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[43] For example the wording of scale items and the response format adopted.

development and hence self-esteem levels (e.g. the confirmation of H6a and H6b). For this reason, it appears that the some of the strategies employed by teenagers to gain social acceptance (and hence self-esteem) are in fact contributing to a reduction in their psychological well-being. Despite the details of the sociometer hypothesis (these will be discussed later), the fact that the new scale convincingly concurs with an extant (and supported) theory of self-esteem, added further validity to the new scale.

8.2.3 Improvements and benefits of the new self-esteem (SE) scale

The new scale (both reliable and valid) showed a number of marked improvements over existing measures of self-esteem (as reviewed in chapter three). Perhaps the most obvious (as discussed above), is the fact that the scale was designed, in context, with British adolescents, as opposed to twenty years ago on adult or college student samples in America. Indeed, the social structure of American colleges in the 1960s was vastly different to that of today's British schools. Furthermore, the general disregard for the issue of social desirability was not repeated in this scale (as shown in the development procedure). As a result of the thorough and cautionary scale development approach assumed in this study, the results suggest that the new scale has not only succeeded in appropriately measuring adolescent self-esteem, but that it also shows a number of improvements over a number of existing (and indeed popular) measures. These improvements are outlined below.

8.2.3.1 Dimensionality issues

8.2.3.1.1 A stable, multidimensional measure of self-esteem

The development of the scale revealed the four most stable - and presumably most important - dimensions of self-esteem amongst high and low-income British adolescents. In addition, the stability of the EFA, CFA and SEM results (on several samples) confirmed this structure. These findings suggest that the new SE scale is indeed a more stable measure than Coopersmith's (1967) SEI which has shown great inconsistency in its factor structure (Ahmed et al, 1985). Furthermore, some studies have struggled to statistically separate the dimensions of Harter's (1988) SPPA. For example, Eiser et al., (1995) failed to identify the distinct differences between the importance placed on 'physical appearance' and 'romantic appeal'. Indeed the lack of distinction between these elements is considered in the new scale as the SE has combined these elements into sub-factor of physical appearance, which is addressed in the 'self-evaluation' dimension. This change is

suggestive of a shift in the importance placed on these factors; for example it may be that romantic appeal was previously more important amongst American adolescents due to a greater social value placed on being in a relationship. The highly individualistic society of today's Britain does not seem to place as much emphasis on romantic relationships and hence did not need to be a focal point in the assessment of self-esteem.

Similarly, the SPPA's 'scholastic competence' and 'athletic competence' did not emerge as specific dimensions of self-esteem and were thus collapsed under a more general theme of 'ability and skill' and were addressed in the self-evaluation dimensions. Conversely, whereas the SPPA seems to have ascribed too much importance to some dimensions, it seems that Rosenberg's (1965) RSES, does not ascribe enough. For example the RSES does not include any element of physical appearance in its scale items. Thus, considering that physical appearance is amongst the most important elements of adolescent self-esteem (Hoare et al., 1993), it seems that the RSES may no longer be an adequate measure of self-esteem for today's adolescents.

These dimensional differences between the new and old self-esteem scales illustrate the fluidity of the bases of self-esteem and thus the importance of determining the psychologically central aspects of the construct (be it due to culture, trends, or age). Therefore, it is felt that the development of the new self-esteem scale has successfully addressed the "lack of dimension specification" which has plagued discussions of self-esteem for some time (Wells and Marwell, 1976, pg. 176). Based on the results of this thesis, it would seem that self-esteem is conceived as a multidimensional construct with four separate factors: self-evaluation, social ability, effects of social comparison and brand ownership.

8.2.3.1.2 Feasibility of a global measure

The debate surrounding the dimensionality of self-esteem was presented in chapter 3; it questions whether self-esteem is a single/global, overarching trait or whether it consists of several specific dimensions which contribute to a higher-level esteem. In light of the literature (e.g. Shavelson et al.'s, 1976 hierarchical facet model) and the results of this thesis, it seems that self-esteem is based on a number of specific dimensions. The validation of the scale and the fact that its four factor structure was repeatedly confirmed, adds support for this claim. Furthermore, the importance of psychological centrality, only serves to confirm this; it seems unlikely that it is possible to measure global self-esteem

without considering the pertinent and specific dimensions relevant to the population being studied. Thus, if one considers that Rosenberg's (1965) RSES claims to assess unidimensional self-esteem, in contrast to the consistently stable, four factor structure displayed with the new SE scale, it can be argued that this thesis has indeed presented a measure which demonstrates improvements over existing self-esteem scales.

Furthermore, considering that materialism and an excessive importance placed on possessions and brands detract from self-esteem (e.g. Kasser et al., 1995 and support for Link E), the counterintuitive direction of Harter's (1988) global self-worth scores of the high and low brand ownership were indeed surprising. Individuals who reported high brand ownership scored significantly higher on the global self-worth dimension than those who reported low brand ownership. The new SE scale however, produced significant differences in the predicted direction; those reporting high brand ownership had significantly lower self-esteem than those reporting low brand ownership. Given the unidimensional nature of Harter's (1988) global self-worth measure, in contrast to the multidimensional nature of the new SE scale, it is possible that the opposing results suggest that a unidimensional/global measures fails to encapsulate the various important elements which contribute to self-esteem levels. If this is indeed the case, the predicted results found, using the SE scale, are suggestive of marked improvements over Harter's (1988) global self-worth measure.

Furthermore, the above findings lend support to theories by Shavelson et al (1976) and Fleming and Courtney (1984), which suggest that self-esteem is not a unidimensional construct but rather, it is a combination of a number of specific dimensions (for example the four factors in the SE scale). Furthermore, considering the differences in the importance of dimensions across times and samples, it seems that Rosenberg (1979) was correct, self-esteem is not "a *collection* but an *organization* of parts and pieces, and components are hierarchically organized and interrelated in complex ways" (pg. 73).

8.2.3.1.3 New dimensions

The fact that the four dimensions accounted for over 50% of the variance in scale scores, further supports their role in the assessment of self-esteem. However, more interestingly perhaps, is the large percentage of the variance attributable to each of the factors: self-evaluation (28.4%), brand ownership (11.5%), social ability (8.1%) and effects of social comparison (6.6%) (see table 7-3). Although self-evaluation accounted for the majority of

score variance, Brand Ownership (BO) is clearly an important contributor to the level of self-esteem amongst British adolescents and should thus be included in its measurement. Once again, the contributions of the factors were confirmed in the consistency of the CFA and SEM models. Therefore, with regards to the motivation for developing this scale, this result suggests that existing scales (none of which account for brand ownership) are in fact overlooking a key dimension of adolescent self-esteem. Furthermore, this confirms one of the major themes of the focus groups; Clothing and Brand (section 4.3.2.11 in chapter four) which clearly represented the importance ascribed to brands. The commodification of self-esteem in the consumer culture is discussed in depth by Isaksen and Roper (2010b).

This new addition of brand ownership as an element of self-esteem, once again highlights the outdated nature of the popular scales such as Harter's (1998) SPPA and Rosenberg's (1965) RSES. Given the socially oriented nature of self-esteem, it will undoubtedly change in accordance with social and cultural trends; depending on social and environmental contexts, the psychologically central aspects are likely to change. Indeed, this is why "tests need to be revised to keep them contemporary and current" (Murphy and Davidshofer, 2005, pg. 226). The bases of self-esteem in 1965 have clearly evolved to include material possessions in the consumption culture. Furthermore, the variance accounted for by the 'effects of social comparison' factor (6.6%), is likely to be a reflection of the increased focus amongst adolescents on social status. It seems that when the fulfilments of basic needs such as shelter and food have been fulfilled, individuals place greater importance on previously less-important factors. Indeed, as Mechanic (1991) argued, the increase in materialism and individuality seems to have reduced the importance placed on personal responsibilities and collective social goals in self-esteem development; thus these aspects no longer seem to be a focal point of social comparisons amongst adolescents. Furthermore, whereas social comparisons may previously have focused on group status derived from skills and power, amongst adolescents this status is now based on more superficial aspects such as brand ownership, popularity and whether or not the adolescent is classed as 'cool' amongst his/her peers.

8.2.3.1.4 Old dimensions

As well as adding new and necessary dimensions to the measurement of self-esteem, the new scale also eliminated certain dimensions which no longer seemed to be relevant to adolescent self-esteem. The contrasts between the 'old' and 'new' scales were clearly outlined in table 4-1 in chapter four. For example, with regards to Harter's (1988) eight

dimensions of self-esteem, a number of the dimensions were collapsed (as outlined above) but others were completely removed, such as 'job competence'. This is because, at no point during the conduction of the fieldwork, was there any mention of job competence in relation to self-esteem[44]. This adheres to Wichstrom's (1995) (relatively recent) findings which also failed to identify this dimension amongst a Norwegian youth sample. This change can be explained by the raised standards of average living conditions and thus a reduced necessity to place teenagers in the workforce; they now receive their pocket money from their parents, often without having to work for it. Furthermore, Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1984) argued that the reduced demands placed on today's adolescents has resulted in a subsiding importance placed on work achievements as a means of gaining self-worth. If teenagers are not required to work, and it is no longer the 'norm', they are thus unlikely to judge themselves on their 'job competence' and thus it is no longer relevant to self-esteem.

8.2.3.1.5 Constant dimensions

Despite the considerable changes and the elimination of the relevant dimensions in the new self-esteem measure, certain 'staple' dimensions remained. Thus, rather than re-conceptualising the construct, the scale development process has simply adjusted the conception of self-esteem to suit the current social and environmental context of British adolescents. For example, as was described above, dimensions such as physical appearance and abilities/skills have shifted in their importance (hence their psychological centrality), however they still remain as staple elements of self-esteem.

Furthermore, although the brand ownership dimension was added, this can be interpreted as a growing emphasis on James's (1890) notion of the 'material me'. The 'material me' referred to the tangible aspects of an individual and later, the importance of the tangible aspects evolved (possibly with increased production capabilities) to include material possessions. Indeed Belk's (1988) recognition of the 'extended self' highlighted the growth of material possessions in defining (and hence evaluating) the self. Therefore, the inclusion of the brand ownership dimension in the new self-esteem scale, simply follows this trend of increasing importance placed on material possessions; it is now more specific and includes branded possessions. Indeed this reiterates and supports the previously noted shift in human needs; basic physiological and security needs have been fulfilled and thus the focus has shifted to belongingness which is increasingly (due to the consumer culture

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[44] Indeed the external judge also commented on this.

and adolescent life stage), achieved with material possession. Thus, in terms of Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, this displays the shift from the need to fulfil physiological needs, to the need for branded clothing for social inclusion amongst adolescents; it seems that the primary levels of the hierarchy of needs are now redundant. Again, the importance of considering the psychological centrality of the facets of self-esteem cannot be over-emphasised; the 'by kids for kids' approach to scale development was indeed crucial to the successful updating of the self-esteem scale.

8.2.3.2 The sociometer hypothesis; further support

The dimensionality of the new self-esteem scale also provides convincing evidence for Leary et al.'s (1995) sociometer hypothesis of self-esteem. This is because the socially oriented dimensions -when combined- accounted for a large proportion of the scale variance; social ability (8.1%) and the effects of social comparison (6.6%) account for 14.7% of the scale variance; roughly a third. The substantial contribution (and hence importance) of these factors in determining self-esteem, highlights the close connection between self-esteem and social inclusion and acceptance. Therefore, combined with the significant negative relationships between self-esteem and NB and BFNE scores (as outlined above), it seems that self-esteem is closely related to social inclusion. This finding adds to the supporting evidence provided by Leary et al., (1998), DeWall et al., (2009) and Denissen et al., (2008) amongst others. Furthermore, the fact that this was found on a British adolescent sample, gives cross-cultural and temporal validity to the sociometer hypothesis. This finding suggests that social inclusion may be a constant dimension of self-esteem - across various cultures and ages - and thus may lend support to Leary et al's (1995) claim that it is (universally) the key factor which determines levels of self-esteem. Indeed this adheres to the central focus on 'others' that was evident in the focus groups. Furthermore, the fact that the ability to socialise and communicate was considered to be one of the main markers of good self-esteem (amongst the adolescents), directly mirrors the sociometer hypothesis; an inability to communicate with others will lead to reduced acceptance and hence self-esteem will be low.

According to the sociometer hypothesis, any actions, behaviours, thoughts or feelings which increase the chances of inclusion and acceptance, will play a role in determining levels of self-esteem. As Srivastava and Beer (2005) suggest, it is signs of social inclusion which affects levels of self-esteem, not the other way around. Moreover, social inclusion has such a powerful influence on self-esteem, that even when individuals steadfastly claim

not to be affected by markers of it (for example, other peoples' approval), their levels of self-esteem suggest otherwise (Leary et al., 2003). Similar observations were made regarding brand ownership; in the focus groups, the adolescents often denied claims that brands were important for self-worth, however, as the quantitative results have shown, they clearly are. Indeed the extreme need for social acceptance provides the logic behind the inclusion of the brand ownership factor in the new self-esteem scale; teenagers, despite their denial, are using brands to signal social acceptance and hence it has become an element of self-esteem.

8.2.3.3 Conclusions

In conclusion, the successful development of this self-esteem measure has been thoroughly tested and its reliability and validity has been confirmed. Furthermore, it has shown strengths over existing (and indeed popular) self-esteem measures; thereby justifying the need for its development. The success of the new scale is likely to be a direct result of the time and effort given to its creation and analysis; the consultation of the true experts (the adolescents) had the desired effect. Moreover, the relationship between the self-esteem scale and the concurrent measures, as well as its newly determined factor structure, provided interesting additional findings. Furthermore, the central role of social acceptance in the scale, provided evidence for, what the author believes to be, a strongly supported, realistic and sensible theory of the purpose of self-esteem; namely the sociometer hypothesis.

The methodology used and the theories incorporated in the scale development procedure are consistent with the post-positivist theoretical perspective assumed by the researcher. That is, the positivist assumptions are evident by the mere fact that self-esteem is being investigated using scales and quantitative data in doing so; it displays the belief of the researcher that (self-esteem) theory is subject to modification as new evidence is obtained. In addition, the fact that historical forces (i.e. sociometer hypothesis) were used to explain the results, reflects a positivist standing. Furthermore, the continuous emphasis placed on the importance of social and psychological context (e.g. the notion of psychological centrality and the qualitative interpretation of quantitative data), characterises the more contemporary quantitative enquiry assumed by post-positivists (in comparison to the stricter, logical positivistic enquiry). Moreover, the post-positivistic assumptions that accounts of the world are inevitably value and theory-laden were displayed in the

researcher's continuous attempts to approach objectivity (e.g. the verification of focus group themes and the distance between the theory and qualitative analysis).

8.3 Vicious Cycle Model

The successful development of the new self-esteem measure, allowed for the empirical testing of the vicious cycle model. Indeed, although Isaksen and Roper (2008) developed and provided some support for this model, the empirical evidence was based on a small data set and a number of the links were speculative. Therefore, by employing the newly developed self-esteem scale, in combination with the seven concurrent measures, it was possible to test the model in a more stringent manner. For this reason, the testing of the developed hypotheses, provided more reliable evidence for the model of adolescent consumer behaviour; the vicious cycle.

For ease of interpretation, Figure 8-1 presents the Vicious cycle model again. To recap, the argument is as follows: In light of previous evidence, the consequences of growing up on a low-income/ in poverty[45] include curtailed identity formation and hence an insecure concept of self *(link A)*. A reduced sense of self and identity are likely to contribute to lowered self-esteem, increased insecurity and reduced psychological well-being *(link B)*. This in turn, may add to one's degree of susceptibility to external and interpersonal consumption pressures *(link C)* thus contributing to a desire to consume (most often specific, expensive, branded items) *(link D)*. In turn, this heightened focus on consumption is likely to detract from one's identity and sense of self and thus further contribute to a low self-esteem and reduced psychological well-being *(link E);* thereby further contributing to susceptibility to influence.

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[45] Which includes poor housing, education, welfare and healthcare opportunities and less resources for consumption.
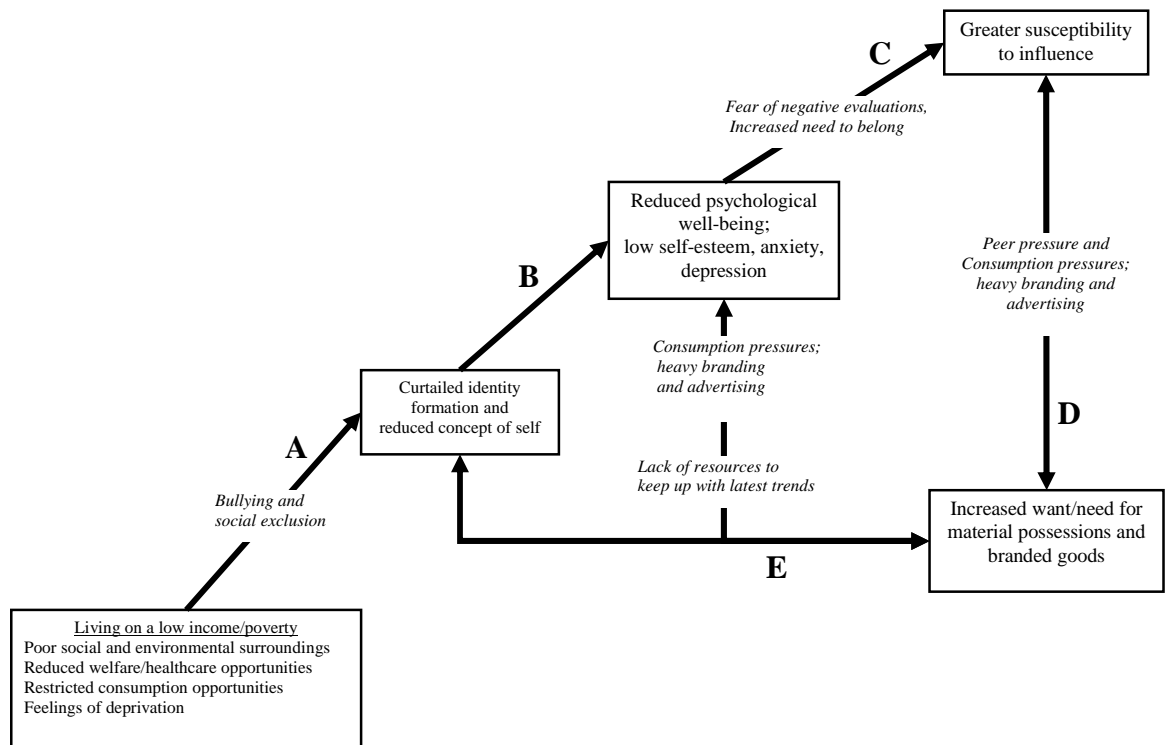
Figure 8-1 The Vicious Cycle model

The predicted psychological impacts of the core consumption cycle (from B to E) were thought to apply to all adolescents, regardless of income level. However, due to the reported links between poverty and reduced self-esteem and psychological well-being (*Link A),* the cycle was expected to have a greater magnitude amongst low-income adolescents (Proposition 2). This was also because the restricted consumption opportunities amongst low-income teenagers are likely to highlight (to themselves and others) their lower social and economic status which is likely to perpetuate their feelings of social exclusion and thus further contribute to a reduction in their self-worth *(link E.).* For this reason, particularly for low-income adolescents, it was thought that a need and want for status symbols in the form of material goods and brands, is continually reinforced while the resources to obtain them remain scarce.

8.3.1 The core cycle

The hypotheses formed and the implications of the evidence supporting them, are presented for links B to E below.

8.3.1.1 Link B

H3a: A high/low level of Self-Concept Clarity (SCC) will contribute to a high/low level of Self-Esteem (SE).   **Supported**

The strength and direction of the relationship revealed that SCC accounted for 30% of the variance in self-esteem scores. This result not only confirms the link between these two constructs (link B), but also shows that self-concept clarity contributes considerably to self-esteem. Indeed, Calhoun and Morse (2006) argue that self-concept clarity is in fact a pre-requisite of self-esteem; in order to evaluate oneself, one must first have a clear conception of one's identity (Fennell, 1999 and Campbell et al., 1996). Thus, contrary to Shavelson et al's (1967) beliefs, self-concept and self-esteem are indeed distinct constructs which, although related, are not interchangeable. This is because self-*concept* refers to an individual's knowledge of the self and self-*esteem* refers to their evaluation and judgement of the self; the extent to which they value themselves. By this logic therefore, any factors which may interfere with the formation of a clear self-concept, are likely to contribute to a reduction in self-esteem. Furthermore, this relationship between SCC and self-esteem goes some way in explaining why adolescents typically display lower levels of self-esteem than adults (Chaplin and Roedder-John, 2007). That is, the identity crises experienced by teenagers (Clarke, 2003), interfere with the formation of a clear understanding/conception of the self, thereby reducing the chances of positive self-evaluations. Furthermore, this finding highlights the importance of explicitly defining the concept of self-esteem before measuring it; the results for this model testing would most likely have been flawed if SCC was considered as synonymous to self-esteem. They are two clearly distinct yet related constructs.

8.3.1.2 Link C

Table 8-2 Summary of hypotheses H4a - H4d

H4a: A low level of Self-esteem (SE) will contribute to a high level of Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (CSII).	**Supported**
H4b: A high Need to Belong (NB) will contribute toa high level of Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (CSII).	**Supported**
H4c: A high level of Fear of Negative Evaluations (BFNE) will contribute to a high level of Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (CSII).	**Partially Supported on the hypothetical data set**
H4d: A low level of Self-Concept Clarity (SCC) will contribute to a high level of Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (CSII).	**Not Supported**

The existence of Link C was supported. Of the four hypotheses set out to test this link (reduced psychological well-being contributes to an increased susceptibility to consumption influence), two were statistically supported. Due to the fact that H4c and H4d were tested on the hypothetical data set, they cannot be used as direct evidence for the existence of link C. However, as will be discussed, the results obtained shed some light on the potential relationships between these variables and, in combination with the extant literature, they will be used to interpret the intricacies of link C. For example, the strength of the individual relationships between the independent variables (SE, NB, FNBE and SCC) and CSII, helps to shed some light on the possible reasons for the relationship between reduced psychological well-being and an increased consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence.

Darley (1999) explains the relationship between self-esteem and susceptibility to consumption influence in terms of shopping motivation. That is, he argues that individuals with low self-esteem have an *extrinsic* motivation to shop and thus are more prone to be susceptible to external influences than those with higher self-esteem; who have a more *intrinsic* motivation for shopping. This explanation is in-line with the sociometer hypothesis of self-esteem: low self-esteem signals social exclusion which results in behaviours directed to gaining acceptance. Therefore, an individual with low self-esteem will have extrinsic shopping motivations in order to gain acceptance from others (as opposed to intrinsic motivations which satisfy a more internal desire). Furthermore, this explanation of the relationship can also be interpreted from the amounts of variance in CSII scores accounted for by SE and NB; 4.5% and 17% respectively. The fact that the need to belong (NB) was more strongly related to CSII scores than self-esteem, may indicate that the desire for social acceptance is indeed the central contributor to an adolescent's level of susceptibility to consumption influence. Furthermore, as proposed by Kelly (2001), those with a strong desire to be accepted are specifically concerned with others' opinions of them and are thus more likely to pay attention to information which will lead to connections with others (Pickett et al.,2004); "anything that promises to gain acceptance for the adolescent receives considerable attention…." (Drake and Ford, 1979, pg. 283). Indeed, it has been shown that teenagers with low self-esteem tend to use clothing to conform, fit in and belong (Humphrey et al., 1971) and in extreme circumstances, for social survival (Piacentini and Mailer, 2004).

Furthermore, if one regards the hypothetical data for the relationship between the BFNE and CSII as indicative evidence, it is suggestive of the fact that adolescents' susceptibility

to consumption influence, can be enhanced by a fear of negative evaluations. Indeed, as suggested by Piacentini and Mailer (2004), a confirmed relationship between BFNE and CSII might imply that efforts to avoid negative peer evaluations, contribute to a desire of consuming socially accepted products. As explained however, the nature of the hypothetical data set used to test H4c, means that these findings cannot be used to verify this relationship and thus further investigations are needed.

Similarly, the finding that there was no relationship between self-concept clarity and consumer susceptibility must be subjected to further tests on a non-hypothetical sample before conclusions can be drawn. It may well be that there is indeed no relationship between these constructs, however Isaksen and Roper (2008) have previously found that a low self-concept clarity does in fact contribute to a high susceptibility to interpersonal consumption influence (using the same measures on a British adolescent sample). Furthermore, such a relationship is intuitive because if individuals are unclear in their concept of self, they are likely to attempt to consume in line with an 'ideal self' which is likely to be inspired by others.

Conversely however, it is possible that the tenuous support for H4c (BFNE) and the lack of support for H4d (SCC), illustrates the level at which these variables contribute to one's level of susceptibility to consumption influences; it may be that fear of negative evaluations is a more motivating factor (to consume in accordance to other's suggestions) than a reduced self-concept clarity. However, before any such speculations can be supported, further study is needed using a complete data set which can compare these variables' influence on CSII.

Despite the tenuous evidence for H4c and H4d, H1e, H4a and H4b have supported the existence of link C; reduced psychological well-being contributes to one's susceptibility to consumption influences. Whether this is due to the specific need to belong (as triggered by the sociometer), is yet to be confirmed. Furthermore, considering that adolescence is typically associated with low self-esteem, a high need to belong and a high fear of negative evaluation, these findings lend support to the author's suggestion that the developmental stage of teenagers, contributes to their avid interest in the consumer culture (e.g. Isaksen and Roper, 2008; Isaksen and Roper 2010b). However, it is important to note that although these results highlight a number of variables which contribute to CSII, there are certainly a number of other variables which contribute to it. Therefore, further studies

may serve to highlight a number of additional influencing factors which can shed light on the reasons for an increased in susceptibility to consumption influences.

8.3.1.3 Link D

Table 8-3 Summary of hypotheses H5a and H5b

H5a: A high level of Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (CSII) will contribute to a high level of Materialism (YMS).	**Not Supported**
H5b: A high level of Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (CSII) will contribute to a high level of Brand Ownership (BO).	**Supported**

This link was based on the premise that a need to identify or enhance one's image with others through acquisition of similar products and brands (as suggested by the definition of CSII; Bearden et al., 1989), contributes to an increased need/want for material possessions and branded goods. Support for this claim was gained by the confirmation of H5b; an adolescent's susceptibility to interpersonal influence contributes to the importance s/he places on owning and acquiring branded goods - in particular. Furthermore, the post-hoc analysis showing that those reporting high brand ownership had significantly higher levels of CSSI, added support to this finding. Considering the dominance of brands (particularly amongst adolescents), the relationship between CSII and BO was intuitive; if their peers are brand focused, it follows that adolescents' consumption influences will also pertain to brands. Furthermore, this result adheres to Rose et al.'s (1997) work which showed that those with high scores on the CSII scale, were typically more focused on the display aspect of clothing, as opposed to the functional aspects.

This finding can also be interpreted as highlighting an implication of a high susceptibility to consumption influences amongst adolescents; namely cost. Given that teenagers are highly susceptible to peer and media influence (e.g. Mandrik et al., 2005), it follows that if the resulting desire for goods is focused on brands, which are typically costly, parents and indeed the adolescents themselves, are faced with expensive consumption aspirations. Indeed this need/want to consume expensive brands has been shown to place great pressure on both teenagers and their parents (e.g. Isaksen and Roper, 2010b). Thus, if we wish to decrease this pressure, a reduction in adolescents' brand orientation may be of help. Furthermore, if one considers links C and D of the vicious cycle model, this may be aided by increasing levels of self-esteem and reducing the need to belong which may then contribute less to susceptibility to interpersonal influence and hence may stem the desire for branded goods amongst adolescents. However, this is a speculative suggestion which

requires further testing examination before it can be securely employed as a means of curbing brand orientation amongst British teenagers.

In examining the relationship between CSII and materialism (YMS), the lack of a significant relationship was surprising. However, the fact that this was relationship was assessed on the hypothetical data set, may have contributed to the lack of significant findings. This was thought to be because, if the CSII scale measures one's propensity to identify with others through consumption, it seems logical that this will be related to a general materialistic orientation. Furthermore, Goldberg et al., (2003) found that adolescents who scored highly on the YMS were also more susceptible to purchase influence and Richins (1991) found a positive relationship between susceptibility to influence and materialism. The relationship between materialism and CSII is explained by Chang and Arkin (2002), on the basis of the high levels of self-doubt and insecurity amongst materialistic individuals (as seen in Link E). They argue that high self-doubt increases an individual's desire to convey a positive, socially accepted image and thus (due to the dominant role of material possessions) the individual is more likely to be influenced by others' consumption choices; they will have a higher CSII. Whereas the supported relationships between low self-esteem, need to belong and susceptibility to consumption influence (Link C) lend support to Chang and Arkin (2002), the direct relationship between materialism and susceptibility to consumption influence (as outline in Link D) requires further investigation.

Conversely, it is also possible that the discrepancy between the results (based on materialism and brand ownership scores) are a result of the nature of Link D in the model. Link D refers to a specific 'want/need for material goods and brands' and thus the YMS may not have been the most appropriate measure for assessing this. Materialism (as measured by the YMS) refers to a general tendency to believe that material possessions and their acquisition are a means of defining success and pursuing happiness (Richins and Dawson, 1992). Therefore it may be the case that, because the YMS measures a belief (that possessions define success) rather than actual consumption behaviours, its scores are not influenced by/related to a susceptibility to consumption influence. Again, further investigations using the CSII and YMS measures are needed.

8.3.1.4 Link E

Table 8-4 Summary of hypotheses H6a - H6d

H6a: A high level of Materialism (YMS) will contribute to a low level of Self-Esteem (SE).	**Supported**
H6b: A high level of Materialism (YMS) will contribute to a low level of Self-Concept Clarity (SCC).	**Supported**
H6c: A high level of Brand Ownership (BO) will contribute to a low level of Self-Esteem (SE).	**Not Supported** (however those reporting high BO had significantly lower SE)
H6d: A high level of Brand Ownership (BO) will contribute to a low level of Self-Concept Clarity (SCC).	**Not Supported** (however those reporting high BO had significantly lower SCC)

The negative relationship between self-esteem and materialism is arguably one of the most widely discussed negative consequences of consumerism. When assessing the validity of the new self-esteem scale, there was clear negative relationship between these two constructs. However, the direction of the relationship remains to be confirmed. Does, as Kasser and Ryan (1993) suggest, materialism contribute to reduced self-esteem, or does, as Chaplin and Roedder-John (2007) argue, reduced self-esteem contribute to the developments of materialistic tendencies? Considering the literature reviewed, and the findings obtained, it seems likely that this relationship is bi-directional; materialism reduces self-esteem and reduced self-esteem increases levels of materialism. Indeed as Kasser and Ryan (1993) state, "Individuals dispositionally high on broad factors such as neuroticism, or those with low security and sense of well-being, may be more prone to view money as a means of self-enhancement. A cycle may then be initiated that maintains, or possibly deepens, the original sense of contingent worth" (pg 420).

The confirmation of H6a and H6b (Link E), support the proposition that a materialistic orientation contributes to reduced psychological well-being. The reasons for this result are explained by Kasser and Ryan (1993); a focus on acquiring material possessions detracts from intrapsychic development and hence results in reduced psychological well-being. Furthermore, according to Richins and Dawson (1992), materialists are caught in an endless cycle of acquiring goods in hopes of compensating for feelings of insecurity and searching for happiness. Indeed, according to Chang and Arkin (2002), those who define success with material possessions are more likely to experience low self-esteem, lower satisfaction and greater discomfort in social settings.

Furthermore, the fact that materialism accounts for 2.5% of the variance in self-esteem scores but an even greater proportion (7.9%) of self-concept clarity scores, can be

interpreted as support for Kasser and Ryan's (1993) explanation for materialism's influence on reduced psychological well-being. Indeed, if we assume that self-concept clarity is a pre-requisite for self-esteem (as Calhoun and Morse, 2006 do), the fact that materialism contributes more negatively to SCC (than SE), suggests that a materialistic orientation interferes with the development of self-esteem. By contributing negatively to an important element of self-esteem development (SCC), it may indeed be that materialism detract from intrapsychic development. By this logic, if materialism results in an external orientation to identity development, the focus is diverted from an understanding of the self (self-concept) and thus distorts the individual from being able to evaluate themselves positively (as was described in link B). In this sense, it is possible to argue that the consumer culture has resulted in individuals (especially adolescents) having a stronger external focus on rewards (through acquisition) as opposed to more internal focuses such as personal goal achievements (sports and academic). As a result, the development of clear self-concepts have been overshadowed, which contributes to a reduced self-esteem. The urge to consume seems to be superseding personal development.

Conversely, it is also possible that a reduction in self-esteem contributes to a materialistic orientation (as argued by Chaplin and Roedder-John, 2007). This is because, as Richins and Dawson (1992) note, materialists consume in order to compensate for feelings of insecurity and a search for happiness. This insecurity amongst materialists has been illustrated in a number of studies including Kasser and Kasser (2001), who showed that materialistic individuals have a propensity to have dreams which are centred on feelings of insecurity. Thus it seems that, a consistent element of the relationship between reduced psychological well-being and materialism is insecurity; materialists are insecure individuals and insecure individuals have a propensity to turn to material and external means of coping with their insecurity. Furthermore, it is possible to speculate here, that the role of insecurity (as presented by Richins and Dawson, 1992) was partly reflected in the link previously found between the need to belong and CSII (H4b). This is because, if a heightened need to belong is indicative of social insecurity, the fact that it (NB) contributes to susceptibility to consumption influence may support the notion that social insecurity, contributes to heightened focus on consumption. Therefore, in light of the current and previous evidence for the relationship between materialism and reduced psychological well-being, it seems that the direction of influence is indeed bi-directional; materialism contributes to reduced psychological well-being, and reduced psychological well-being and insecurity contributes to the formation of materialistic tendencies.

In addition, if insecurity and a need to belong are indeed central to the formation of a materialistic orientation, it may go some way in explaining why adolescents are typically more materialistic than adult consumers (Dittmar and Pepper, 1994). This is because, adolescents are at a stage in their development wherein there are several changes - in terms of their bodies, their minds and often their physical surrounding (moving to secondary school) – which give rise to heightened insecurity and contributes to their motivation to consume.

As has become clear, a high importance placed on consumption conformity, is not without consequences; it seems that it impacts not only personal development, but also detracts from social development. For example, Auty and Elliott (2001) provided evidence for their claim that consumption conformity, in relation to branded clothing amongst teenagers, has taken precedence over individuality. In this sense, it may be argued that the importance ascribed to consuming socially acceptable brands in order to fit in, has superseded the importance ascribed to developing and understanding the self. For this reason, when consumer culture theorists refer to 'consumer identity projects' (e.g. Arnould and Thomspon, 2005), it may be necessary to question the extent of importance placed on this project and thus how much it may in fact be detracting from intrapersonal development and understanding. This assertion is contrary to Drake and Ford's (1979) contention that "Permitting adolescents to dress like others, may aid in the development of self and move them toward greater self-acceptance" (pg. 290). The opposite seems true; if one considers that dressing like others results in a need and desire to acquire expensive brands, individuals can rapidly be reduced to mere consumers (as argued by Salzer-Morling and Strannegard, 2004).

Furthermore, it has been argued that in the fragmented post-modern society, consumption meanings are used in order to identify and form connections with others (e.g. De Chenecey, 2005). Similarly, this socially oriented need for consumption seems to be overtaking the development of the self. Indeed, "The consumption of ever-novel goods becomes in some part a substitute for the genuine development of self; appearance replaces essence as the visible signs of successful consumption come actually to outweigh the use-values of the goods and services in question" (Giddens, 1991, pg 198). Moreover, this loss of personal identity may not even result in closer communal connections. As Bauman (1988) argues, if consumption has replaced cultures and traditions, it follows that the extent of societal attachments are also reduced. Considering these arguments, it seems

that consumption is being used to develop the self and societal connections however, none of these goals appear to be being achieved through consumption.

As outlined in hypotheses H6c and H6d, the data were also used to examine the relationship between a specifically brand-oriented focus on material possessions and psychologically well-being. It was expected that, in a similar manner to materialism, a high brand orientation would contribute to reduced psychological well-being. However, this was not supported by the data; there was no relationship between brand-ownership and self-concept clarity or self-esteem. Given the intuitive relationship between brand orientation and materialism[46], this result was surprising. Therefore, the author felt it would be of benefit to conduct a series of post-hoc analyses to shed light on this result. The results showed that those adolescents reporting high (above the mean) brand ownership, had significantly lower self-esteem scores and higher materialism scores than those reporting low BO. This result was in line with the predicted result and suggests that those individuals who are highly brand oriented are also prone to (for a currently unexplained reason) higher levels of materialism and lower self-esteem. However, contrary to the hypotheses, the results of the post-hoc analyses did not suggest that the level of brand orientation is a contributing factor to this reduced self-esteem and high materialism. Further investigation is needed to establish the reasons behind the reduced self-esteem amongst individuals who are highly brand-oriented however, a possible interpretation for the discrepancy between the influences of brand-ownership and materialism is as follows: it may be that it is a more *general materialistic orientation* rather than a *specific brand focus* which contributes to a reduced psychological well-being amongst adolescents living in the British consumption culture.

This explanation agrees with Goldberg et al. (2003) who suggest that materialism is a mediating construct which impacts not only market-related behaviour but also happiness and satisfaction levels in consumers. Indeed, based on the above results, this seems to be the case amongst British adolescents; a high level of materialism contributes to a reduced self-concept clarity, reduced self-esteem and thus overall reduced psychological well-being. Furthermore, those who are particularly brand oriented, are also more prone to high levels of materialism and low self-esteem. Therefore, considering that levels of materialism are highest within consumption-orientated cultures - such as the UK - it is clear that a consumer culture has negative impacts on adolescents; it "frames consumers'

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[46] It seems reasonable to assume that individuals who are highly focused on acquiring branded goods, also have a more general materialistic orientation.

horizons of conceivable action, feeling, and thought, making certain patterns of behaviour and sense-making more likely than others." (pg. 869). As the supported links in the vicious cycle model have illustrated, the feelings, thoughts and patterns of behaviour and sense-making amongst commercially orientated teenagers are reduced to a more narrow horizon- one of consumption- than that of those who are able to look beyond this narrow horizon towards (perhaps) more communally oriented values (i.e. those who are less brand-oriented and less materialistic).

Given the intense importance that adolescents ascribe to material goods and possessing the correct brands, shifting their focus from material possessions and brands to wider, more personal and social goals, may be an effective means of maintaining their psychological well-being. In this sense, the Buddhist mentality, "it makes more sense to reduce desire to enhance power" (cited in Barber, 2007, pg. 258) directly applies. It makes more sense to reduce teenagers' desire for branded goods, than for parents (and indeed teenagers) to spend excessively in order to provide them. Furthermore, the support for links B to E, suggest that increasing self-esteem and reducing their need to belong, may be one way in which this materialistic orientation can be dampened, thereby weakening the links in the vicious cycle of consumption. However, considering the socio-psychological circumstances experienced by British adolescents, this is no simple task and Section 8.4.2 below, provides suggestions as to how this may be achieved.

8.3.1.5 Conclusions on the core cycle

P1: There exists a Vicious cycle whereby the antecedents and consequences of adolescents' consumerism are linked in such a way that a self-perpetuating cycle is formed.   **Partially Supported**

The empirical support for links B to E, added strength to the proposed vicious cycle model. Proposition 1 was partially supported and thus a main aim of this research was fulfilled: light has been shed on the intricate psychological consequences of adolescents' consumer orientations. Indeed it shows that a consumer orientated and materialistic orientation is closely linked to low –and subsequently reduced- psychological well being. The model suggested that insecurity and social exclusion contributes to adolescents' susceptibility to consumption influences which consequently increases their motivation to consume in a brand-oriented manner. Thus it seems that, as Humphrey et al (1971) state, "those who are less secure may use clothing as a means of coping with social situations" (pg. 246).

From this it can be argued that the strategies and tools used to cope with insecurity are the exact elements which are likely to perpetuate it.

Furthermore, with regards to the literature, it seems reasonable to assume that the extreme want/need for branded goods and clothing is heightened amongst adolescent consumers. The dominant impacts of the consumer culture on adolescents appear to involve aspects of identity and self-esteem; the exact aspects which are particularly fragile amongst this age group. It is for this reason that the consumer culture seems to be particularly harmful for adolescents; as opposed to adults who have a more established sense of identity and self-esteem because- they experience less intense pressure to 'fit in'. This reinforces the notion that perhaps the important link in the vicious cycle model, is Link E; one's social and psychological circumstances affect the want, need and orientation towards material possessions and branded goods which contributes to a reduction in psychological well-being. It is for this reason that this thesis sought to illustrate that "The high price of materialism" (Kasser, 2002; book title) is likely to be even higher amongst adolescents.

8.3.2 Are low-income adolescents more adversely affected by the vicious cycle?

The support for links B to E in the vicious cycle model, provides the basis for an empirically verified framework through which the relevant psychological differences between income groups can be examined. Therefore, the model provides a framework of psychological constructs which can consequently be used to directly compare high and low-income adolescents in terms of the impacts of contributing factors and consequences of consumerism. Furthermore, the links specified in the model, facilitate the identification of the particular aspects which are likely to have the greatest impact within the cycle of consumption. For example, it was previously suggested that link D and link E are likely to be the most important, due to their relation to insecurity and consumption orientations. For this reason, results pertaining to group difference in the constructs involved in these links, were considered as indicators for differences in the impacts and consequences of consumerism between high and low-income adolescents.

Table 8-5 Summary of hypotheses H2a and H7a - H7g

H2a: Low income adolescents will reduced self-concept clarity (SCC) in comparison to high-income adolescents.	**Not Supported**
H7a: Low-income adolescents will have a lower level of self-esteem than high income adolescents.	**Not Supported**
H7b: Low-income adolescents will be more materialistic than high-income adolescents.	**Supported**
H7c: Low-income adolescents will have a greater fear of negative evaluations than high-income adolescents.	**Not Supported**
H7d: Low-income adolescents will respond in a more socially desirable manner than high-income adolescents.	**Not Supported**
H7e: Low-income adolescents will be more susceptible to interpersonal consumer influences than high-income adolescents.	**Not Supported**
H7f: Low-income adolescents will have a greater need to belong than high-income adolescents.	**Not Supported**
H7g: Low-income adolescents will place more emphasis on, and own more branded clothing than high-income adolescents.	**Supported**

8.3.2.1 Levels of self-esteem and self-concept clarity

Despite the convincing evidence for the suspected differences in scale scores between income samples, there was limited support for group differences in scale scores. Self-concept clarity, self-esteem, fear of negative evaluations, consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence and need to belong scores did not significantly differ (H2a, H7a, H7c, H7e, H7f, respectively. Of all of the hypotheses, the most surprising finding was the lack of a statistical difference in SCC and SE scale scores; it was expected that these would constitute the most obvious differences between income groups. This is due to the wealth of reports indicating reduced psychological well being amongst low-income children/adolescents (e.g. Ridge, 2002, UNICEF, 2007/2009), but in terms of consumerism specifically; "Family financial strain may erode the child's sense of similarity to peers. Family economic cutbacks may affect important adolescent characteristics, such as appropriate dress, social activities, and the living conditions of the family contributing to a negative self-evaluation in comparison to others" (Whitbeck et al.,1991, pg. 361).

The lack of support for the expected findings could be interpreted in terms of the efficacy of the self-esteem measure. However, strong validating support for the scale was obtained through numerous tests and, although the differences were not significant, the scores pertaining to self-esteem were all in the predicted direction; the low-income group appeared to have lower SCC and self-esteem score. Furthermore, the fact that past uses of

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the RSES (Rosenberg, 1965) with British adolescents (Isaksen, 2006) resulted in counterintuitive results, suggests that the expected direction of the SE scale scores, is indicative of improvement on the measurement of self-esteem. Furthermore, the current and previous work (Isaksen, 2006) using the RSES both used similar criteria for the income-level classification of the respondents. For this reason, the author thought it possible that the unexpected results were due to insufficient discrepancy between the income-level groups. That is, it may be that the categorisation of high and low-income respondents did not result in extremely high and extremely low income groups; rather they were 'middle-to-high' and 'middle-to-low' income groups. This speculation will be further explored below. However, the most certain conclusion that can be drawn from these results, is the need to further investigate the levels of self-esteem amongst low-income adolescents. This is because, if two previous studies have failed to show the commonly cited reduction of self-esteem amongst low-income children, it may be possible that (amongst adolescents), the difference in self-esteem levels are in fact not drastically different; they may in fact have similar levels of self-esteem.

8.3.2.2 FNE, NB, CSII and MC-1 scores

It was expected that low-income teens would have a high need to belong, thus a high social desirability bias and hence a greater fear of negative evaluations and a greater susceptibility to interpersonal influence. Some possible explanations for the lack of support for these expected findings are outlined below.

The reason for the expected higher need to belong amongst low-income teenagers was based on Henry's (2004) work suggesting that low-income consumers are likely to place a greater focus on adhering to the average social status or 'reaching the status quo'. Based on this assumption, it seemed likely that in their attempts to convey an image of 'normal' or 'average', the low-income respondents would have a greater fear of being negatively evaluated. Furthermore, this difference was thought to be even greater amongst low-income *adolescents,* who already have an enhanced focus on belonging and 'fitting-in' regardless of social status. However, the lack of significant group differences on NB scores and the counterintuitive direction of the differences in BFNE scores (greater for high-income) provided no support for this argument. In terms of the NB scores, the author thought it possible that sampling issues may once more be the cause for the lack of statistical differences in scale scores. However, in terms of the BFNE scores, when one considers the nature of the scale coupled with the differences in social circumstances

between these groups, a possible explanation for the unexpected result comes to light. That is, children from high-income backgrounds are likely to be formally evaluated and assessed on a more regular basis than low-income students; for example through school entrance exams and/or frequent assessments in schools. Furthermore, high-income adolescents are likely to have wider opportunities for achievement and thus their goals and aspirations are likely to be higher (and more attainable) than those from lower income backgrounds. For this reason, high income adolescents may in fact experience more pressure from themselves and significant others to achieve and hence will be more fearful of being negatively evaluated.

In terms of the lack of group differences in social desirability scores (MC-1), it may be that the nature of the scale items (questions) in the MC-1 do not pertain to the aspects of life which are important to these adolescents. That is, considering the prevalence of brands and consumption as means of being socially accepted amongst adolescents, the lack of a significant difference may be due to the fact that the nature of the questions in the MC-1, focus on moral issues rather than more relevant behaviours such as consumption habits. It may be that a scale assessing social desirability in terms of consumption would have been a more appropriate measure for this purpose.

Isaksen and Roper (2008) showed significantly higher CSII scores amongst low-income (as compared to high-income) British teenagers. Furthermore, the fact that the difference in CSII scores between the income groups on the current sample was very near significance levels was interesting. The researcher was once again lead to suspect that the lack of significance may have been due to sampling issues; the two samples may not have been adequately different in terms of income levels. Furthermore, considering the increased levels of materialism and brand-ownership scores amongst the low-income adolescents, coupled with their focus on obtaining the 'status quo' (as proposed by Henry, 2004) it seems likely that they will be more sensitive to following the consumption patterns and interests of their peers.

Based on these unexpected results, it is clear that further research is required to clarify and perhaps eliminate a number of the suggested reasons for the lack of income group differences on the above scales. For example, future investigations might aim to test differences in – specifically- the fear of negative evaluations from social and peer groups and social desirability with regards to elements which pertain specifically to consumption habits. In addition, comparing the results on a more socially discrepant sample, might

shed light on the speculations that sampling issues are to blame for the lack of significant group differences. Indeed, despite the predictions made, it is also a possible that high and low-income adolescents do not in fact differ in terms of these psychological variables. However, before any conclusions can be drawn, further study is needed in order to build on the current findings and expand our knowledge within this field.

8.3.2.3 Materialism, brand ownership and Link E

The results suggest that low-income adolescents have a greater propensity to express materialistic values and place higher importance on brands and branded clothing. This in turn, can be interpreted as an indication of the proposition that low-income adolescents are more prone to consumerism. The explanations for this finding may lie in Henry's (2004) suggestion that low-income consumers are motivated to reach the 'status quo', and they do this through consuming items which signal the desired social status; hence the higher focus on brands. Similarly, the higher levels of materialism can also be interpreted as a display of the "aspiration gap" amongst low-income adolescents, as referred to by Mayo (2005b, pg.21). Indeed, Henry (2004) and Humphrey et al., (1971) both suggests that this aspiration gap exists as a result of low-income consumers' propensity for turning to material possessions as a means of coping with negative social circumstances (Link E).

However, as suggested by the vicious cycle model, it is important to remember that the security sought in the form of material possessions and branded goods is a *perceived* security only. That is, as suggested by both Deci and Ryan (1985) and Kasser and Ryan (1993), an external orientation for material possessions can detract from intrapsychic development and hence reduce psychological well-being. Indeed this was supported by the findings adhering to Link E in the model; materialism contributed to reduced self-concept clarity and reduced self-esteem. In addition, the findings indicating that this link was stronger amongst the low-income respondents allows for some interesting interpretations regarding the varying degree of impact that a consumer orientation has upon high and low-income adolescents. For example, it is possible that low-income adolescents have a greater propensity to experience a reduced psychological well-being as a result of their materialistic values; which they also seem to be more prone to.

This interpretation adheres to Proposition 2 which outlined that the vicious cycle, and hence its negative impacts, is magnified amongst low-income adolescents. As explained however, due to the lack of support for hypotheses H2a, H7a, H7c, H7d, H7e and H7f, this

proposition cannot be supported because the reasons for the heightened materialism, greater brand ownership and stronger link between YMS and SCC and SE, cannot be related to the differing levels within the psychological constructs included in the vicious cycle model. However, there were three findings which, when combined, led the author to believe that there is indeed a difference in the experiences of low and high income adolescents in the consumption cycle. This is because a) low-income respondents displayed higher materialistic values than high-income adolescents, b) low-income respondents reported greater brand ownership than high-income teenagers and c) the stronger link between materialism and self-concept clarity (amongst low-income respondents) suggest that their greater consumption orientation may contribute more strongly to a reduction in psychological well-being (than the consumption orientation of high-income adolescents). For this reason, the established differences between high and low-income adolescents (materialism and brand ownership) are of interest and thus serve to lay the 'foundations' and motivations for further research. For example, with regards to Link E, it would be of interest to examine why there is a stronger relationship between materialism and reduced psychological well-being amongst low-income adolescents? Is it because, as Kasser and Ryan (1993) might suggest, a material orientation is *more detrimental to self-concept* amongst low-income teenagers? Or is it because low-income adolescents are more likely to turn to materialism in *response to low self-concept* clarity (as might be argued by Chaplin and Roedder-John, 2007)?

P2: The Vicious Cycle is magnified amongst low-income adolescents.   **Not supported**

8.3.2.4 Brand Ownership of income groups

It was decided that a series of post-hoc analyses be conducted; group differences were tested based on the level of brand ownership (high vs. low). Considering the high level of brand-ownership amongst low-income adolescents, it was thought possible that brand orientation may in fact be more strongly related to the (negative) psychological characteristics in the vicious cycle. That is, it was thought possible that the vicious cycle is magnified amongst those that place a greater importance branded goods in particular. By this logic, the fact that low-income adolescents were expected to experience more negative consequences of consumerism, may be explained by their enhanced focus on branded goods (stemming from the aspiration gap). In other words, it is possible that low-income

teenagers tend to be more prone to placing importance on brands and hence are expected to be the ones who are more vulnerable to the negative impacts of the consumption culture. It is unclear whether low-income adolescents do in fact own a greater number of branded goods than high-income participants. However, considering the restricted financial resources of low-income families, it is possible that they possess a greater number of (cheaper) *counterfeit* brands or alternatively, that they simply claim to own a larger number of brands. This is because, as argued by Mayo (2005b) "children who have the least want things the most" (pg 21). However, regardless of the 'truth' behind the high Brand Ownership scores, they nonetheless signify a greater ownership, need, want and/or importance placed on branded goods amongst low-income adolescents.

The differences in scale scores showed that those who were highly focused on brand ownership had significantly lower self-esteem, higher levels of materialism and greater susceptibility to interpersonal consumption influences. This result suggests that, regardless of income level, adolescents who are particularly focused on obtaining expensive, branded goods, may be more prone to a materialistic orientation, more susceptible to interpersonal consumption influence and have lower self-esteem than those who are less brand oriented. Thus despite the lack of a relationship between BO and SE scores, this finding is indicative of some relationship between the two factors and thus, further research is needed.

Furthermore, the proportion of low-income respondents in the high brand ownership group was significantly greater than in the low brand ownership group; 57% and 37% respectively. Therefore, considering the group differences, it is possible that because they are likely to be more brand oriented, low-income adolescents are indeed more prone to heightened materialism and reduced levels of self-esteem. Furthermore, the fact that these results are similar to those expected when comparing high and low-income groups, may suggest that this classification was more effective in separating the high and low-income adolescents. Moreover, if this is the case, it may suggest that the classification system used to identify high and low-income respondents in this study (high and low-income schools), did not result in groups which were sufficiently discrepant in terms of income level. This will be further discussed in following sections.

8.3.3 What does it all mean?

Before discussing the implications of the findings in depth, it is useful to first summarize the meaning of the findings. First of all, the confirmation of the links B to E in the model, allows for a more detailed understanding of the specific impacts of consumerism on adolescents specifically. That is, rather than simply stating that the consumption culture is negatively impacting their social and psychological well-being, the vicious cycle model has identified a number of specific variables (in terms of typical teenage psychological characteristics) which may contribute to this; thereby providing directions for further research. Furthermore, although proposition 2 could not be not supported by the evidence, there were three findings (one of which was derived from post-hoc analysis) which, when considered together may be suggestive of some income-level difference in terms of the impacts of the consumption culture. These were a) the greater materialism and b) brand-ownership scores amongst low-income respondents and c) the stronger relationship between materialism and self-esteem amongst them. Therefore, the fact that they are more materialistic and have a greater desire to own branded goods may suggest that low-income adolescents have a greater propensity to assume a consumption-oriented way of life; those who are least able to consume excessively, may be the ones who have the greatest desire to do so. If this is the case, and their consumption orientation is more strongly linked to a reduced self-esteem, it is possible that they are more negatively affected by a materialistic orientation than high-income adolescents. As previously explained, the results do not support this proposition directly, however they do provide motivation for further investigation in terms of income-group differences amongst adolescents living in the consumption culture.

Furthermore, considering that the findings highlighted the important link between insecurity and materialism, it may be that amongst adolescents, it is their insecurity which lies at the heart of the vicious cycle. Therefore, although further study is needed to verify whether living on a low income magnifies the vicious cycle, this work has provided some support for the role of various factors in the model and hence, can be considered as an advanced preliminary sketch of it; one which can be strengthened with further work.

It is hoped that a main outcome of this research is to highlight the possibility that, due to their psychological and cognitive characteristics, a large number of teenagers may struggle to avoid consumption pressures. This was not only observed during the focus group interviews, but has also been discussed in terms of the heightened insecurity and need to belong amongst teenagers (for example section 8.3.1.4). Therefore, by conducting this

research from an adolescent-centred approach, we are one step closer to understanding them and seeing 'eye to eye' with adolescents. Furthermore it seems that, considering its impressive reach and hold on teenage populations, "the role of marketing cannot be ignored" in contributing to their consumption pressures (LaPoint & Hambrick-Dixon, 2003, pg. 243). This is because, an adolescent who continually compares him/herself, and is continually compared to, unrealistic and idealised images, will, over time, perceive him/herself, and possibly be perceived as inadequate in comparison (Martin & Kennedy, 1993). For this reason, it is crucial that the role of marketing and advertising in the vicious cycle is carefully considered in developing strategies to curb these impacts.

8.4 Implications and Applicability of Results

8.4.1 Are adolescents truly more 'at risk' than adults?

Despite the vast amount of extant cognitive and social developmental evidence presented in this thesis, there are some who argue that the role of marketing and advertising are not to blame for the heightened levels of consumerism and materialism amongst adolescents. Indeed, many argue that in today's world, children are growing older younger and thus they are able to rationally interpret and understand advertising images and messages at a younger age. For this reason, many executives argue that claims surrounding the negative impacts of advertising are exaggerated (as pointed out by Levin and Linn, 2003). Indeed, as expressed by Goldberg et al., (2003) childhood has been truncated and it cannot be denied that we are living in a KGOY world; a world where Kids are Growing Older Younger (as expressed by Thomas, 2007) and that the gap between childhood and adulthood has been drastically reduced (Mayo and Nairn, 2009). Indeed, ten year olds today are vastly different form ten year olds 20 years ago; their bodies, attitudes and way they dress expresses an air of maturity. However, before we start to treat adolescents as adults, we must first determine whether the differences in cognitive and social development truly do make teenagers more vulnerable to marketing and media. As Lapoint and Alleyne (2001) highlight, the effects of commercialism influences on child development must first be determined before effective strategies can be formulated to stem the negative impacts of the consumer culture. For example, if adolescents are indeed able to process advertisements and the media in the same way as adults, it would suggest that investments on increasing media literacy, may not be the most effective means of preventing this problem.

8.4.1.1 Awareness of persuasive intent

It has been argued that the cognitive developmental stage of teenagers enables them to perceive and understand selling intent and persuasive intent and therefore, for example Oates et al (2003), argue that advertisements aimed at teenagers can be considered as ethically sound. However, such arguments are based on Piaget's (1960) dated theory of cognitive developmental stages which are greatly contested. For example, it has been shown that simply because an adolescent has reached the 'Formal Operations' stage, does not mean that they are able to recognise the persuasive and selling intent of advertising messages (e.g. Sherman et al., 2008 and Rozendaal et al., (2008). This shows that, despite their increasingly mature image, children and adolescents are still not able to process advertising appropriately. Furthermore, "merely having the concepts in some latent form does little if anything to prevent children from being led astray by advertising" (Moses and Baldwin, 2005, pg. 197). For this reason, Mayo (2005a) argues that in fact, "it is entry to the commercialized society that's growing younger, rather than our children that are growing older" (pg. 48). Such statements clearly highlight the need to protect/prevent children from such early exposure to consumerism.

8.4.1.2 Evaluative conditioning

In relation to their cognitive developmental stage, the contemporary nature of advertising also contributes to adolescents' inability to be critical of it. As explained by Mayo and Nairn (2009), the use of evaluative conditioning in today's advertisements (matching products with rewarding stimuli such as social inclusion and happiness), is vastly different from previous, more traditional information based advertisements. Indeed, today's advertisements go beyond simple cognitive processing and use implicit associations to create need. These implicit associations are subconscious and thus viewers are not aware of the fact that they are forming attitudes as a direct result of advertisements. Yet again however, adolescents are most negatively impacted by this evaluative conditioning strategy because they do not have the cognitive control to override these implicit attitude formations (Sherman et al., 2008). Furthermore, this cognitive control does not and cannot develop at an earlier age (in line with the KGOY philosophy) because, as neurological evidence has clearly shown, the part of the brain (frontal cortex) responsible for this process does not complete its developments until the end of adolescence (Giedd et al., 2009 and Wallis, 2009). Therefore, although the physical gap between adolescents and adults may have been truncated, the neurological gap has not. Indeed, it is this denial of adolescents' true immaturity which has led to less stringent advertising regulations for

their age group; policies and regulations are focused on advertisements targeted at younger children and infants. Therefore the author further highlights the need for special consideration of the psychological impacts that advertisements have on *adolescents in particular.*

8.4.1.3 Advertising messages and adolescent life

The implicit attitudes which are formed as a result of advertisement exposure, are typically associated with unrealistic and unobtainable images of luxury and exclusivity in everyday life. As explained, advertisements aim to make consumers believe that, without a particular product, one will be outside the norm and amongst adolescents, these tend to focus on dominant insecurities such as physical appearance, looking cool and most importantly, fitting – in. As a result, children and adolescents are led to believe that these products are in fact necessary to fit in and without them; they will be classed as losers (Harris, 1989). As a result, adolescents, are considered a "marketer's dream" because of they have a strong motivation to consume conspicuously (Shim, 1996, pg. 567). In other words, the evaluative conditioning techniques and the appeal to insecurities used in contemporary advertising, provides adolescents with strong incentives to buy overpriced and often functionally void products.

Moreover, although advertising tactics may lay the seeds of consumerism, adolescents' socially-oriented life-stage makes them a truly attractive target segment. Teenagers are highly social creatures who are more affected by peer influence than any other influences such as parents, or even the media (Mandrik et al., 2005 and Shim. 1996). Therefore, because teenagers spend the majority of their time amongst their peers (more so than adults and infants), this influence is increased as the differences between them are more obvious and thus the level of inclusion/exclusion becomes more obvious (eg. VanDerHoek, 2005/2006). As a result, any obvious differences between peers are likely to lead to bullying and social exclusion (Elliott and Leonard, 2004; Ridge, 2002) and thus the motivation to consume socially acceptable (and heavily advertised) goods is automatically amplified.

With reference to the sociometer hypothesis and the vicious cycle model, it becomes more clear why the social incentives used in advertising are so powerful; social inclusion is an innate human need which determines self-esteem and consequently consumption behaviours. By this logic, if advertisements appeal to adolescents' need for social

inclusion, they will activate behaviours to increase it, for example conspicuous consumption. With regards to low-income adolescents, such tactics may be even more effective; they have been argued to have an even greater incentive to fit-in and seek social acceptance (e.g. Henry, 2004) and thus they may be more susceptible to consumption influences (Isaksen and Roper, 2008). Therefore, one might argue that low-income adolescents are truly the *ultimate* dream segment for marketers however, this 'dream' is unlikely to take into consideration the financial and psychological problems that may be inflicted upon the adolescent and his/her family as a result of such advertising messages.

Based on the above, it is seems likely that adolescents are more influenced by advertising and thus measures are needed to reduce its impact so as to stem the potentially negative psychological consequences of consumerism. Indeed no evidence has been found to show that children's emotional development is keeping up with their bodies and behaviours (Levin and Linn, 2003). For this reason, and in conjunction with the findings of this thesis, it may now be more clear how we can examine the potential efficacy of some suggested strategies aimed at preventing the negative consequences of consumption amongst teenagers; for example by increasing their ability to process advertising correctly. Indeed, the development of such strategies is supported by UNICEF because "Unless everyone recognizes the influence of the media, and learns how to engage with it, their ability to participate in society is curtailed", adolescents must be "well-equipped to tackle the complexities of adult life" (UNICEF, 2003; cited in Muto, 2004, pg. 37).

8.4.2 Strategies in light of the evidence

There is strong evidence to support the notion that the messages and images of advertisements can indeed contribute to the negative impacts of consumerism; adolescents are neither adequately protected nor able to critically process the persuasive and selling intent of such messages. Therefore, until the targeting of children and teenagers can be stemmed or controlled, the efforts of parents and educators is sorely needed. Indeed, "society might want to take steps to temper this (consumerist) orientation through education, public policy, or otherwise" (Goldberg et al., 2003, pg. 279, parentheses added). The vicious cycle model is suggestive of some of the specific psychological characteristics which may contribute to the development and strengthening of consumerist orientations. For this reason, by referring to the vicious cycle model, the applicability and efficacy of some 'consumerist-curbing' strategies may now be investigated with regards to a proposed framework. For example, given the proposed links between insecurity, self-esteem and

materialism (links C, D and E), strategies which focus on these areas, may be particularly useful. The following section will now look at some suggested strategies which focus on media exposure, the encouragement of intrapsychic developments and enhancing self-esteem (whilst curbing materialism) amongst children and adolescents. We are now using our increased knowledge of adolescent consumption behaviour to reduce materialism and brand focus, rather than enhance it.

8.4.2.1 Addressing the role of the media

As a result of excessive production, the need to advertise and market has grown and so has the sophistication of the strategies used. As a result, we have become a consumerist society. However, consumerism cannot be stemmed by reversing our capitalist orientation or abolishing advertising; such suggestions are unrealistic and indeed impossible. As Barber (2007) aptly states, "Even the least developed parts of the world cannot save themselves from the global consumerism that perches on their doorsteps, awaiting only the abolition of the wrenching poverty which alone insulates them from its sure Midas market touch." (pg. 258). Clearly, abolishing capitalism and reverting to a communist-style society, wherein social goals and equality are of utmost importance is not an option. For this reason, it is necessary to create realistic goals. However, "Can a balance be restored between marketing and life? Is there a way for capitalism to survive and yet reconcile itself to a culture of adults who do more than shop? (Barber, 2007, Pg. 258). Given the considerable impacts of the media in perpetuating materialistic values, it seems that the attempts to restore this balance may be aided by focusing on education, prevention and policy changes within media.

8.4.2.1.1 Education in school

A common suggestion, and one which has indeed been enforced in Britain, is the introduction of 'media literacy' education in schools. That is, in combination with citizenship, children are taught about the construction of advertising messages and their emotive intent. As the British Film Institute notes "It is important to encourage children to distinguish between different forms of moving image media such as documentary, news, propaganda, advertisements and corporate promotion, and to recognise that the sources and motivation of a text can make a difference to the truth or accuracy of what it says." (as cited in Duffy, 2004). Indeed other academics, for example Kubey (1997) and bodies such as UNICEF, are explicit in their support for such policies, however, the introduction of

these schemes have been met with much negativity. For example, comments from parents, show that they clearly disagree with the implementation of such schemes, "For God's sake, the last thing we should want is to be wasting more of our children's time with completely pointless subjects like this..." (Comment in response to Duffy, 2004). However, what many do not realise is that without such educational programs, children may in fact grow up believing that what they see in the media is true.

In light of comments such as these, it is clear that the exact reasons and aims of these schemes need to be refined. For example, considering the social comparisons that teenagers make between themselves and the 'realities' depicted in the media, a key aim of such education schemes should reiterate the fact that these idealised images are in fact NOT real and are by no means a true representation of a 'normal' lifestyle. This was very recently brought to attention in terms of the use of airbrushing in images targeted at young girls. As Jo Swinson, an MP for the Liberal Democratic Party was recently quoted "They (young girls) shouldn't constantly feel the need to measure up to a very narrow range of digitally manipulated shapes and sizes." (BBCNews, 2009). A similar argument can be used for the idealised and affluent lifestyles portrayed in the media; children need to be made aware, from a young age, that this 'normal' lifestyle is far from normal; they have been airbrushed.

The impacts of such education will not only pertain to the individual adolescent, but is likely to be reinforced on a social level. This is because, as Auty and Elliott (2001) explained, advertising has a phatic role in the lives of adolescents and therefore, if these false perceptions of reality can be corrected at an early stage, they will be prevented from becoming socially accepted 'truths'. Furthermore, and importantly for low-income adolescents, by correcting this false perception of average affluence, the stigma attached to poverty may be reduced and thus efforts to reach the 'status quo' (as described by Henry, 2004) may no longer be focused on obtaining material possessions, but rather on more important aspects such as education and skills. Thus, educational programs addressing crucial aspects such as this will help children and adolescents to develop a less frenzied and healthier attitude towards consumption.

8.4.2.1.2 Education at home

As the popular saying goes "education starts in the home" and the case of media literacy is no different. In fact, as Mayo and Nairn (2009) argue, lessons on consumerism and

spending are more efficient when they come from parents at a younger age than when they are provided in schools at a later stage. Furthermore, strong evidence for this has shown that when children discuss and deconstruct advertisements (in a critical manner) with their parents, it can stem the formation of materialistic values and negatively influences brand consciousness (e.g. Shim, 1996 and Moschis and Moore, 1982). Furthermore, by increasing parental influence, the role of peer influence may reduced and thus a crucial element of the vicious cycle may be curtailed; namely the susceptibility of adolescents to interpersonal (peer) consumption influences. Furthermore, it seems logical that media literacy will have more impact when children are exposed to the advertisements where they are typically exposed to them. The contextual setting will allow parents to address specific advertisements (according to time of day or popular programs) and thus thoroughly explain the intent and purpose of the advertisement. By doing this, parents may be able to nip the stemming of materialism and brand-consciousness in the bud.

Considering these points, it seems that media literacy will be most effective when introduced at an early stage in the home but followed up in school. Although there is evidence to suggest that adolescents are aware of marketing strategies (eg. Isaksen and Roper, 2010b), these do not seem to be sufficient and need to be strengthened.

8.4.2.1.3 <u>Limiting exposure</u>

Limiting children's exposure to media and particularly television, is possibly one of the most common suggestions for stemming materialism in children; perhaps because it seems the easiest and most obvious. The relationship between the level of media exposure and materialistic tendencies are well established; Moschis and Moore (1982) and Shrum et al., (2005) both clearly showed that long-term exposure to television advertising significantly increased materialism amongst adolescents; the effects were particularly strong amongst families who did not discuss consumption in the home. Considering the figures on television ownership in the UK- 97% of all households owning one or more sets (Mintel, 2005)- and the fact that children spend an average of 2hours and 36 minutes in front of the television a day (Childwise, 2007/2008)- it becomes clear that British adolescents are at particular risk of developing materialistic values. However, due to the predominance of television in our lives, it is unrealistic to try to prevent adolescents from watching television on the whole. As Barkham (2009) states "Television is no longer merely the drug of the nation, it is the pacifier, babysitter, wallpaper and teacher for our children." In addition, rather than simply eliminating television exposure, parents must encourage

children to fill this time in other, ways; an alternative must be offered if this solution is going to be realistic.

Television is considered a cheap form of entertainment and thus it plays a very central role amongst low-income families who may not be able to afford alternative recreational forms of entertainment. Indeed Churchill and Moschis (1979) showed that low-income families typically watch more television and communicate less about consumption; a clear recipe for the development of materialism. If low-income teenagers are typically more exposed and more susceptible to advertising messages, less likely to discuss consumption in the home and have lower levels of self-esteem (than high-income teenagers), it becomes clear that stemming media exposure amongst them is of a high importance. In light of the vicious cycle model, if it is possible to reduce materialism, it may also prevent the reduction of self-esteem (as suggested by Link E).

Furthermore, in light of the recent recession and the addition of digital services, Britons have been found to be watching more television as families are encouraged to stay in as a cheaper alternative to commercial entertainment (Khan, 2009). According to the Broadcasters' Audience Research Board (BARB), the average person watched 48 minutes more television in 2008 than they did in 2007 (cited in Khan, 2009). Given the link between television viewing and materialism (not to mention other media forms), it is likely that levels of materialism have risen in the past two years. If so, the fact that a rise in materialism is occurring at a point of recession- hence reduction of disposable incomes for the majority of the population - may imply that self-esteem is reduced and the associated negative impacts, such as anxiety, are also increasing (Link E). Interestingly however, some suggest that the reverse might be true. As Mrs Tuck argued (quoted in Brown, 2008), the recession may in fact teach British families and their children, that there are elements of life (for example family and social values) which are more important than material possessions. In terms of the vicious cycle model, this may be explained by a reduction in self-esteem which contributes to a heightened need to belong (link C), however, because consumption is no longer a feasible option, the need to belong is being satisfied by making social connections based on common experiences and values as opposed to material possessions. In this sense, it can be argued that consumers (and indeed today's adolescents) need to be reminded that a life without hyperconsumerism can also be a happy one.

8.4.2.1.4 <u>Media legislations</u>

8.4.2.1.4.1 More realistic images

The media will continue to exist and grow and the methods used by contemporary advertisements will develop as a result. Although parents and educators have a responsibility to inform and educate their children about the techniques used, there is definitely room for advertisers to take some of the responsibility. Thus, legislative restrictions placed on certain media forms are likely to help the negative impacts of advertisements. For example, in countries such as Sweden, Norway and Finland, there are laws in place that prevent any form of advertising targeted at young children. However, as they grow older, these restrictions are removed and developing children are the targets of advertising campaigns. For this reason, restrictions on certain advertising techniques (as opposed to all advertisement) need to be enforced for adolescents. Indeed a number of these exist for child marketing but due to the misperception that teenagers interpret advertisements at adults levels, there is less concern and they are much less protected. However, the proven lack of adolescents' awareness of persuasive intent, has led many authors to support the enforcements of legislations which require marketers to explicitly state when an advertisement is occurring (e.g. Linn, 2003; Schor, 2004; Mayo and Nairn, 2009). Such legislations would alert explicitly alert teenagers of advertisements and thus may reduce their implicit conditioning effects.

8.4.2.1.4.2 Stop the fear tactics

Advertisements targeting teenagers, employ fear and emotive tactics which appeal to their needs of social inclusion and looking 'cool' (Klein, 1999 and DelVecchio, 2003). In light of link C in the vicious cycle model, it may be that a fear of negative evaluation and a heightened need to belong contribute to consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence. Subsequently, as CSII is increased, so is the likelihood of materialistic values and brand orientation which detracts from self-development. Therefore, although beneficial to the producer, by specifically focusing on these adolescent social fears, teen directed advertisements may be directly contributing to the reduced psychological well-being of adolescents. For this reason, effective advertisement legislation should be constructed to prevent them from triggering the most sensitive parts of the vicious cycle of consumption. Indeed Linn (2004) supports this notion and includes that advertisements which suggest that a product promotes peer-acceptance and advertisements that demean adults, should be banned altogether. This suggestion reiterates the importance of strong parental influence

in stemming material values; if they are demeaned in the commercial world, it will be more difficult for them to make an impact in the real world.

Furthermore, the depiction of affluent as 'normal' creates an upwards social comparison amongst teenagers (Richins, 1996) and is thus particularly harmful to low-income adolescents. Consequently, those who compare their own, drastically different lives, to these affluent depictions, will feel inferior; "once convinced that the grass is greener elsewhere, one's own life pales in comparison and seems half-lived (Pollay, 1986, pg 27). Thus, policies and legislations might discourage advertisers from targeting adolescents' emotional vulnerabilities and encourage them to depict more realistic images of life in their advertisements. This may reduce negative social comparisons and thus reduce the use of consumption as a coping strategy; as is common amongst low-income consumers (e.g. Elliott, 1995 and Hill and Stephens, 1997).

8.4.2.1.4.3 Not in schools

Marketing will never disappear but the areas where it dominates can be regulated. For example, in school marketing activities (e.g. vending machines and sponsorship) are strongly contested by many authors who argue that the obligatory nature of school forces children to be exposed to marketing which they cannot walk away from (e.g.Linn, 2004, Schor, 2004). Likewise, Cort et al. (2004) insist that schools should be brand-free places where children can escape from the commercial pressures of the world. This is a strong point of controversy in society and as McCawley (2005) notes; the controversy in itself has made UK businesses more reluctant to get involved in education. However, the fact remains that (particularly in the UK) schools need money and thus they may be forced to accept sponsorship and funding, thereby exposing pupils to advertisements. However, an alternative source of education funding has been suggested by Linn (2004) and Schor (2004), who suggest that a tax be levied on advertisements which are targeted at young audiences and the money raised can be contributed to schools for the development of media literacy programs for example. Indeed it is practical and realistic solutions such as these which are needed if we are to remove the direct involvement of businesses and marketing in schools.

8.4.2.2 Reducing materialistic orientations

8.4.2.2.1 <u>Self-esteem</u>

Educating children about media, limiting their exposure and enforcing legislations will most definitely stem the development of material values within them. However, if one considers that reduced self-esteem may be a contributing factor to materialism and that materialism may contribute to reduced self-esteem (as proposed in links E and B in the vicious cycle) this must also be taken into consideration. For example, as was argued by Chaplin and Roedder-John (2007), stemming and controlling media exposure can be seen as a *preventative* strategy, but increasing adolescents' self-esteem can be more likened to a *cure* for materialism. Indeed teenagers with low self-esteem are more likely to compare themselves to advertising images (Martin and Kennedy, 1993). Thus, by encouraging children and adolescents to develop their understanding and acceptance of their internal qualities, as opposed to focusing on consumption to achieve social status, it may be possible to reduce the strength of the proposed links in the vicious cycle model which were suggested to contribute to reduced psychological well-being; Links B to E.

Interestingly however, some authors have noted that excessive focus on the individual can also be damaging. For example Burr and Christensen (1992) note some undesirable effects of enhancing self-esteem, including selfishness and disregard for others. More recently, The Good Child Enquiry report (The Children's Society, 2009) noted that "Most of the obstacles children face today are linked to the belief among adults that the prime duty of the individual is to make the most of their own life, rather than contribute to the good of others… this excessive individualism is causing a range of problems for children including: high family break-up, teenage unkindness, commercial pressures towards premature sexualisation, unprincipled advertising…". Thus as Mayo and Nairn (2009) have noted, more efforts should be placed on raising compassionate children who are able to form social bonds and hence can "set consumer action apart from citizenship" (pg. 285).

8.4.2.2.2 <u>Social connections and good friends</u>

Intrinsic motivations are associated with personal growth, affiliation to family and community feelings and focusing on such pursuits do not require external praise, hence they satisfying in and of themselves (Kasser, 2005). Indeed these intrinsic motivations are completely independent of income, job or material possessions of any sort. Furthermore,

as proposed in this thesis, a clearer concept of self (intrapsychic development) may contribute to a greater self-esteem (link B), which in turn may reduce the propensity of being susceptible to interpersonal consumption influence (Link C), thereby decreasing the likelihood of assuming a focus on external, material rewards (Link E). Furthermore, by encouraging children to foster familial and community responsibility, the core human need for social connections will be fulfilled and as a result, the sociometer will be levelled. The importance and value of social connections was made clear by Denissen et al (2008); a high quality of social connections positively impact self-esteem. In addition, teaching children to connect with others on a personal level, will also decrease the likely-hood of clothes-related bullying and hence less consumption pressures which will reduce pressures on family relations (as outlined by Mayo and Nairn, 2009). The benefits of increasing social values will also impact on how advertising messages are interpreted (Mick and Buhl, 1992); having social values as a dominant life-theme, may make the materialistic messages in advertising have less significance to the recipients. Indeed a clear example of such an effect was witnessed by the author, in 2008: a billboard advertisement (in Rusholme, Manchester) for the clothing brand Ben Sherman read "Looking good isn't important, it's everything". A few days after it was erected, the message was corrected with graffiti, to read "Looking good isn't important, ~~it's everything~~ LOVE IS!".

8.4.2.2.3 Understanding the value of money

In Britain, there is a dominant attitude towards easy money (Adam Hildreth, quoted in Mayo and Nairn, 2009, pg. 245); celebrities are often famous for nothing more than that, being famous. As a result, particularly in Britain (Saxton, 2005), children are aspiring to fame, but are not accounting for hard-work and achievements as the means of obtaining it. Indeed, a main reason for the lack of drive and determination (and hence self-worth) amongst adolescents, is the fact that they lack goals for which to work towards and hence do not develop special skills of which to be proud of (Mechanic, 1991 and Csikszentmihalyi and Larson, 1984). For this reason, Mayo and Nairn (2009) suggest that a child's resilience to the consumer culture, can be improved by instilling enterprising behaviours and giving them more responsibility for their consumption. For example, by having to earn their pocket money and having the freedom to spend it as they wish, adolescents will learn the true (often unreasonable) costs of some of their most sought after goods and brands. Furthermore, Flouri (1999) showed that children who were taught how to manage their money, were less materialistic than those who were not. Therefore, if children and adolescents learn to appreciate the value of money, they may learn to reject

unreasonable and unnecessary products and be less materialistic. Consequently if this becomes the dominant attitude amongst peers groups, the social pressure to own expensive possessions will be reduced. Indeed, "Being in control of money, rather than money being in control of you, is an essential first step" to overcoming the pressures of the consumer culture (Mayo and Nairn, 2009, pg 287). Clearly, such resilience is desperately needed amongst low-income teenagers and thus their parents should be made aware of and taught effective money management strategies, so that they can enforce it from an early age. Indeed, the current debt level in Britain, clearly shows the urgent need for adults to learn how to manage their money; the average personal debt is over £9,700 (Smithers, 2010). Children learn by example and thus, before we hope to teach children how to manage money, their parents must become appropriate role models by managing their money more effectively.

8.4.2.3 Conclusions

It is clear that, in order to stem materialism (and its negative impacts) amongst adolescents, we must be realistic. It will not be possible to ban all of forms of advertising, nor will it be possible to simply tell adolescents not to care what others think of them. In this sense, both nature and nurture have contributed to the vicious cycle. However, in light of the above evidence, there are several measures which can be enforced and are likely to be successful. The problem however, seems to pertain to education and awareness, not only amongst adolescents, but also policy makers, educators and parents. Indeed, raising awareness and illustrating the impacts of consumerism on adolescents (specifically those from low-income families), is the focus of this thesis because it is hoped that it can be used to educate and inform the individuals and organisations who have the power to make the necessary changes.

8.5 Limitations and Further Studies

Although extensive consideration and effort was placed in designing the methodology and selecting an appropriate sample of respondents, there remain some limitations to this study. Due to the special sample of teenage respondents, a number of these limitations were results of the difficulties of working with children. Furthermore, some of the unexpected findings in thesis provide the basis for some interesting further studies (which have been briefly mention in their relevant section). However, due to time and resource constraints,

further analysis was limited and thus suggestions of beneficial future research questions are presented in this section.

8.5.1 Sampling issues

It was thought that the lack of significant differences in scale scores between the income groups, may have been attributable to the way in which respondents were classified in to high and low income levels. That is, it was thought that the classification of income-level may have resulted in samples which did not represent the 'highest' and 'lowest' income groups which may suggest that the comparative analyses did not yield the predicted group differences because the samples were not sufficiently different. The reasons for this are outlined below.

The fact that low-income respondents were classed as those attending deprived schools, does not guarantee that every respondent within those schools is from a low-income family. Although the prevalence of low-income respondents is greater in schools where a high percentage receive free school meals (FSM), depending on the selection of respondents, there may have been a particularly high or low volume of low-income students in that particular cohort. Furthermore, it is also likely that the most deprived adolescents do not attend school regularly and thus they are included in the free school meal figure, but not in the respondent sample. Alternatively, it is also possible that schools which are *not* deprived and hence have low FSM figures, do in fact serve a high proportion of low-income students (yet would have been classed as high-income in this study). It is also possible that the stigma of poverty prevents these students from claiming their free school meals (this was noted in the detailed description of the sample in chapter five). Indeed this is particularly likely in schools where a majority of the pupils are from affluent families due to the feelings of inadequacy resulting from upwards social comparisons. Therefore, some of the schools categorised as high-income, may have been attended by a large number of low-income respondents, thus narrowing the income differences between the two groups.

Moreover, the OFSTED reports which provided the FSM figures of schools, were not always up to date and thus may not have reflected the current level of deprivation in the school. Indeed a reduction in the level of deprivation in a school (as marked by FSM figures) can be the result of several factors such as increases in funding and growing affluence amongst the pupils attending. Considering that the data for this study was

(repeatedly) collected over a period of three years, such changes may have occurred without being reflected in the figures. Perhaps the clearest example of such changes is the fact that, since commencing this study, three of the participating deprived schools were turned into Academies. This immediately means that the funding for the school is increased and thus may be more appealing to more affluent families in the surrounding areas (due to the 'new and improved' nature of the school). In addition, as was discussed with one of the gatekeepers, when schools become academies, they benefit from vastly improved facilities, new uniforms and often curriculum changes which can result in more time given to enterprising education for example. The result of these changes (as reported by many teachers) is an increase in student pride and often self-esteem. Therefore, the pupils in Academies may have been as deprived as those in other low-income schools, but their self-esteem levels may not have reflected it. Thus, by categorising respondents in Academies as low-income, may have reduced the psychological differences between the high and low-income samples.

Based on these sampling issues, future comparative studies may benefit from using more stringent criteria for categorising respondents' income levels. For example, it may be more precise if respondents are classified based on their post-codes as this is more likely to be a true reflection of their affluence, or lack thereof. However, considering the vast ethical and data protection issues involved in obtaining this information, it is unlikely that such sampling is feasible or indeed possible at all; especially for large scale studies. Therefore, if schools are chosen for the preferred access route, future studies may benefit from including private, fee-paying schools *only*, in the high-income sample, and severely deprived schools (not academies) *only*, in the low income schools. However, severely deprived schools are often more difficult to involve in such research due to issues such as lack of staff, high pupil absence and high proportions of ethnic minorities and low literacy levels (see Isaksen and Roper, 2010b for further explanation). Alternatively therefore, future studies may attempt to gain access to low-income youth respondents via youth groups or community projects. This may indeed be a very interesting sample as they may be less likely to have attended formal education and thus will not have been exposed to media literacy programs. However, if such samples are used, consideration must be given to reduced literacy levels and thus the formatting and delivery of any questionnaires will have to be altered; for example, the questionnaires may need to be read and explained to participants.

Other interesting samples may include different ethnic groups (for example immigrants and asylum seekers) living within the UK and other countries with a dominant consumer culture. It is possible, and indeed highly likely, that such groups may live on a low-income (as is often the case amongst immigrants); however they may in fact be less focused on material possessions than the average national born and raised in Britain. This may be because they are more likely to be focused on achieving the goals which motivated their migration in the first case. Often times this is to exit a world of severe poverty and hence the (emotional) value placed on expensive branded clothing is much lower and hence will not be a psychologically central domain. In addition, differing cultural and religious values may prevent the focus on branded clothing; for example, those who wear traditional dress may be less interested in a pair of Armani Jeans.

8.5.2 Confirming the links

The creation of the hypothetical data set, allowed the researcher to shed some light on the relationships between constructs which were assessed on different sample. Although the results based on this sample were interpreted (with caution), the results were not statistically reliable and hence could not be used to support/reject the hypotheses. For example, although BFNE and CSII scores were, as predicted, positively related, this finding could not be empirically supported. It was not possible to administer all eight scales (self-esteem, Harter's global items and six concurrent measures) to every respondent; respondent fatigue would have been inevitable. Therefore, future studies may benefit from combining the concurrent measures in different patterns; rather than combining the YMS and CSS scale in Version 1, YMS could be combined with either the CSII, NB or BFNE scale[47]. This would allow for a direct assessment of the suspected relationship between these variables; for example that consumer susceptibility to influence is related to levels of materialism (Link D). Such variations would add to the evidence for the existence of the links in the vicious cycle model and thus, may contribute to the confirmation/disconfirmations of the model. For example, if CSII scores were shown to contribute to materialism scores, added support would be gained for the proposition that the variables in the vicious cycle model are related in a cyclical manner (recall that P1 could only be partially supported). That is, such future evidence may assist to establish whether proposition 1 can in fact be statistically supported.

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[47] The remaining relationships to be tested are: SCC*BFNE; SCC*NB; SCC*CSII; BFNE*CSII; BFNE*NB; YMS*BFNE; YMS*CSII and YMS*NB.

In addition to quantitative testing of the vicious cycle model, further qualitative research will serve to deepen our understanding of the intricacies of adolescent consumption. For example, interviews or focus groups with adolescents might help us to understand more clearly, whether, or indeed why, adolescents have a tendency to turn to consumption as a means of dealing with their insecurities (as proposed by links C-D). Furthermore, by conducting qualitative research with both high and low-income adolescents, future research will help to shed light on the possible income-group differences and reasons for the greater consumption motivations often observed amongst low-income adolescents. For example, interviews or focus groups will help to ascertain whether they may feel more pressure from the consumption society and whether they have a more negative experience of it (than high-income adolescents). That is, further qualitative research is likely to expand our knowledge with regards to the differences between high and low-income adolescents living in a consumer culture. By referring to the vicious cycle model as a basis/framework for further qualitative research, it will be possible to enrich our understanding of the intricate psychological factors involved in adolescent consumption. Furthermore, considering the 'value-ladenness' of enquiry (as described by Reichardt and Rallis, 1994), triangulation of this research through further qualitative investigations, will assist in the ever present search for objectivity (pertaining to the post-positivist belief).

The continuous validity checks for the new scale will also prove beneficial, as Cronbach (1971) highlights, the validity of a scale is not assessed and confirmed in one instance with a specific scale, rather it is a continuous process of investigation and development. Therefore, further studies using the self-esteem scale will benefit by using additional concurrent measures such as anxiety and depression scales, which have previously been confirmed to be related to self-esteem. Furthermore, to confirm the new scale's improvement over the Rosenberg (RSES; 1965), the results of these two measures should be compared.

Furthermore, the repeated, and indeed critical assessment of the new scale, will assist researchers in noting changes within adolescent self-esteem. That is, because just as the bases of self-esteem have changed in the past decades, they are likely to change again. For example, the role of possessions in adolescent self-esteem may subside if societal value shifts occur; if the external consumer focus is returned to more intrinsic motivations, it may be necessary to omit the brand-ownership factor as a contributor to self-esteem. For this reason, the development of the new self-esteem scale is not, and will never be a finalised measure of self-esteem; it will need constant revisions in order to keep it

contemporary and current (Murphy and Davidshofer, 2005). This 'temporary' nature of the new scale may be considered as a limitation, however it is one which is unavoidable if we wish to measure contemporary self-esteem.

8.5.3 Group differences; gender, age and culture

The new SE scale was developed to be used on both males and females and thus, the focus was placed on identifying the 'common denominators' of self-esteem for both sexes. However, considering the reported gender differences of psychological characteristics, it is possible that males and females will differ in terms of self-esteem. Although this study was not addressing these differences, further studies may provide interesting results by using the new scale to measure self-esteem. For example, separate factor analyses for males and females may reveal a different organisation of the four factors. Indeed, in the focus groups, there was a general conception that females place greater importance on physical importance. In terms of the consumption cycle however, the strength of the links (B to E) could be compared in order to determine whether one of the sexes is generally more susceptible to the vicious cycle.

Similarly, future studies might provide empirical confirmation of the assumed differences between adolescent and adult consumers. Indeed the psychology and marketing literature strongly suggests that there are distinct differences between these ages, however, in terms of the vicious cycle, this has not been determined. This thesis argues that adolescents are particularly vulnerable to consumer susceptibility, have greater materialism, lower self-esteem, lower self-concept clarity and greater need to belong than adults and therefore, they are more prone to entering the vicious cycle. Therefore, a comparative age-study, using the framework of this thesis, would provide further evidence that it is the developmental stage of adolescents, which cause them to be so highly involved in the consumption culture and consumerism.

The factors which are psychologically central to an individual's self-esteem depend on the dominant and important aspects of that persons life, culture and indeed nationality. Therefore, further scale development strategies such as the one adopted in this thesis, may allow for the identification of specific differences in self-esteem across cultures. It is likely that the role of social acceptance in self-esteem will be common to many cultures (as shown by Denissen et al., 2008 when assessing the sociometer hypothesis), however the remaining contributing factors are likely to vary between cultures. Furthermore, it

would be interesting to see whether the vicious cycle model is supported amongst adolescents from different countries and whether they differ with regards to the concurrent measures. For example, it may be that materialism is lower in certain cultures and thus the elements of the vicious cycle may not be as relevant. Indeed, Cleveland et al (2009) agree that materialism can be applied cross-culturally, but that the impact of the construct on behaviour will vary and thus, its impact on the vicious cycle of consumerism is likely to vary.

Furthermore, by testing the model in societies which have varied levels of income-discrepancy, it may be possible to determine the extent of negative impacts that consumerism has on poor individuals living in rich countries. For example, studies in countries such as Norway, where socio-economic differences are much smaller, may not reveal differences between high and low-income adolescents in terms of their consumption influences. If it is indeed the case that the income discrepancy and high consumerism in Britain strengthen the vicious cycle, it would support Mayo's (2005b) claim that "The poverty in Britain is worse than in poor countries because it is so isolating. The discrepancy is staring you in the face all the time- on TV, in the shops." (pg.23). With regards to this, further studies may examine the differences in adolescent consumerism by comparing countries which have different policies and regulations on advertising. For example Norwegian, Swedish or Finnish adolescents may differ from British adolescents as a result of their strict ban of advertisements aimed at children. Indeed, such a study would provide even stronger evidence for the role of media in perpetuating the vicious cycle.

8.5.4 Evidence for prevention strategies

In light of the suggested strategies to combat materialism amongst British adolescents, further studies may provide evidence to support or reject their efficacy. For example, using the methods described in this thesis, a 'before and after' approach could be adopted. That is, the variables in the model (e.g. self-esteem, materialism, CSII) could be assessed before and after the implementation of educational and parental interventions regarding media literacy. Any changes in scale scores could then be interpreted within the framework of the vicious cycle model in order to examine the possible effects of these changes. Although parental communication is related to lower materialism, a before and after study might clarify whether these methods are also able to reduce materialistic values which have already been strongly developed. Furthermore, for those who express

particularly high levels of materialism, their levels could be re-measured after certain interventions such as involvement in voluntary social work or similar activities. This would help to clarify whether a focus on more social goals, can indeed increase self-esteem and self-concept and reduce materialism and thus possibly stem their contribution to reduced psychological well-being. Such findings would indeed provide strong support for implementation of schemes and policy changes in education and child-rearing.

The suggested further studies presented in light of this work will be useful in gaining a more detailed understanding of the specific influencers of adolescent consumption. However, as has been reiterated through this thesis, in order for such studies to be successful, special consideration must be given to the methodologies employed with regards to the special nature of the sample. For example, any scales used must be adapted so as to ensure they are suitable to their developmental, behavioural and linguistic abilities. Once again, it is important to remember that children are not simply human-becomings, they are actors within their own right, with their own frames of reference and conceptions of knowledge. If these factors are kept in mind, we can greatly increase the relevance of findings based on child and adolescent samples.

8.6 Contributions to Knowledge

This research has produced a number of very interesting results. Perhaps one of the most difficult tasks in reporting this work has been to present it in a manner which clarifies the effort invested, yet remains clear and concise so that it can be easily read an understood.
For this reason, the additional contributions resulting from this work are attached in the form of three academic publications in Appendix A. Upon reviewing this work, it is hoped that the reader is left with a broader and clearer conception of the possible relationships amongst the psychological aspects involved in the adolescent consumption cycle. It is also hoped that the reader understands the proposed reasons for the suggested heightened consumption orientation amongst low-income and materialistic adolescents. Moreover, the findings pertaining to low-income adolescents are hoped to evoke interest and encourage further research on the impacts of the consumption culture amongst them.

In addition to the socio-psychological findings of this thesis, a number of psychometric and methodological issues were addressed and contributions to child research and marketing theory were made. Due to the broad range of findings, in order to clarify what

the author believes to be the most significant contributions of this work, they will be summarised below.

1. <u>New measure of self-esteem for British adolescents:</u> This thesis has produced a (much needed) valid, reliable and up-to-date measure of self-esteem, specifically suited to British adolescents living in a culture of consumption. The new scale has not only successfully assessed self-esteem by including the most psychologically central aspects of adolescent self-esteem (including brand ownership), but has done so in the context of the sociometer hypothesis; the functional theory of self-esteem. Furthermore, the scale-development process has re-emphasised the importance of using in-depth qualitative analysis and interpretation (in addition to quantitative methods) in scale development, in order to include the contributions of the 'expert' respondents. By considering these important aspects, the author has created a new, multidimensional measure of self-esteem.

2. <u>The role of brands in self-esteem:</u> The scale development process has empirically confirmed the author's suggestions that brands and branded clothing play an important role in adolescent self-esteem (as seen in Isaksen and Roper, 2010b). The modelling of the dimensions of self-esteem, clearly showed that the importance placed on brands and brand ownership (amongst adolescents) account for a high percentage of the variance of self-esteem scores (see table 7-3). Thus, this thesis provides strong support for the proposition that the 'brand dimension' be included in measures of self-esteem if we are to effectively assess the self-esteem of adolescents living in a consumer culture. The extent of an adolescent's desire for brands and branded clothing has been confirmed as a marker of his/her self-esteem level.

3. <u>The Vicious Cycle Model-</u> The vicious cycle has filled an empirical gap in the literature where previous investigations have often failed to investigate the *combined* relationship between materialism, self-esteem and self-doubt using the adequate measures. Indeed, the vicious cycle is suggestive of a number of the psychological characteristics of adolescents which are may make them particularly susceptible to consumerism. Furthermore, these characteristics have been related to the evolutionary function of self-esteem. Thus, although one could argue that teenagers are "programmed to function" as "weapons of massive consumption"[48], the links in the vicious cycle model and the preventative strategies reviewed, suggest that it may be possible to 'reprogram' them to avoid this consumerist focus.

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[48] As quoted in Lilly Allen's 'The Fear'

4. <u>Development of ideas/knowledge:</u> This thesis was developed from previous work and has contributed to our understanding and conception of adolescent consumption. Initial work by Isaksen (2006) and Isaksen and Roper (2008) suggested that low-income adolescents are disadvantaged by the consumerist society because they are not able to afford the expensive possessions (brands) needed to develop their identity; this view assumed that brands are necessary for identity development. However, the investigations of this thesis have suggested that it may in fact not be *a lack of brands* which contribute to the suspected negative impacts amongst low-income adolescents, but rather an *increased desire for them.* Therefore, this thesis has built upon previous contentions and theories and resulted in a suggested framework which can assist in directing some much needed, future research. In Guba and Lincoln's (2005) terms, the research conducted in this thesis has added to out 'edifice of knowledge'.

5. <u>The special nature of adolescents:</u> The particular focus upon adolescents as a consumer group is thought to set this research apart from other research on child consumption. The extant literature and consumption-curbing strategies reviewed were specifically focused on young children and tweens and therefore, the fact that this thesis has highlighted the lack of attention given to research and policy developments specifically aimed adolescents, is considered to be an important contribution of this work. This research has illustrated the importance of truly listening to adolescents when conducting investigations that regard and/or impact them. Indeed, the lives of adolescents are already complex, if we are to understand and help them to develop into adults as opposed to shoppers, we need their insight.

In conclusion, the contributions of this thesis are hoped to provide a basis for action. That is, the findings pertaining to scale development, self-esteem, the vicious consumption cycle and the special nature of adolescents are all thought to have *practical* applications. These apply to not only academic research (in terms of methodologies), but also provide concrete evidence to support the development of policies pertaining to marketing and media regulations as well as educational programs. Furthermore, the results of this thesis, which are at times worrying (and indeed shocking), are hoped to serve as warning signals of the considerable damage that a culture of hyperconsumerism can potentially bring to a society.

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APPENDICES

<u>APPENDIX A-</u> Publications

1. The Impact of Branding on Low-Income Adolescents: A Vicious Cycle?

Katja Isaksen and Stuart Roper
Psychology & Marketing (2008)

Abstract

This study examines the impact of consumerism and consumer culture on low-income British adolescents. Specifically, it investigates the effects of branding and advertising on the formation of self-concept clarity (SCC) and consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (CSII). A comparative study was conducted between two groups; low and high income teenagers, assessing SCC and CSII by means of quantitative scales. It was found that low-income teenagers are less clear in their self-concept and are more susceptible to interpersonal influence than their high-income counterparts. A significant negative correlation between the two scales revealed that the *less clear* one's self-concept is, the *more susceptible* one is to interpersonal influence. It is proposed that an inability to 'keep up' with the latest fashion trends (due to restricted consumption opportunities) may result in a damaged self-concept amongst low-income teenagers, which leads to heightened susceptibility to consumption pressures and hence heightens the negative socio-psychological impacts of living in poverty. The results of the study are reviewed in terms of branding, advertising and consumer behavior and a proposed conceptual model of branding's impact on low-income teenagers is presented as a 'vicious cycle'.

Key Words: Brands, adolescent consumption, low-income consumers, self-concept, susceptibility to interpersonal influence.

Introduction

Recently, growing attention has been paid to the fact that we are living in a consumer culture wherein having the 'correct' possessions and brands are of optimum importance. Indeed, failing to recognize the role of consumer culture in peoples' lives is akin to ignoring the role of parents in creating and raising children (Kasser & Kanner, 2003). As a consuming population we have formed deep emotional bonds with our brands to the extent that they now determine who we are and how we are perceived. "Socio-cultural pressures to consume and to acquire goods are pervasive, indeed impossible to avoid completely" (Hill & Stephens, 1997, pg. 40). This state of "Hyperconsumerism" (Saxton, 2005) is not only pressuring adults to consume excessively but has had an even greater impact on children and adolescents. There is growing concern over children becoming increasingly materialistic as corporations (often with the help of child psychologists) find innovative and highly effective advertising strategies to establish brand loyalty and increase sales through 'pester power'.

Schor (2004) emphasizes the fact that children are growing older younger and thus are effectively foregoing their childhood as the race to 'chiq' and 'style' speeds up. Furthermore, this race for material possessions - and hence the greater value placed on financial aspirations - has been shown to be associated with heightened distress, depression and social anxiety (Kasser & Ryan, 1993). This is because, by focusing on financial aspirations and external rewards (such as material possessions) rather than self-development, consumers are overlooking essential intrapsychic development processes,

which may in turn detract from self-actualization and personal integration (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Furthermore, evidence from England and America suggests that higher rates of mental health problems exist amongst children who are pre-occupied with material possessions such as clothes and electronic goods (Ward, 2008). For this reason it is thought that the present culture of consumption may in fact be "detrimental to its younger citizens' psychological well-being" (Kasser & Ryan, 1993, pg. 421).

Children and adolescents' demand for popular products (Achenreiner, 1997), more often than not, include branded and often expensive clothing which is not only used to socially integrate with peer groups but also to avoid being bullied; branded clothes have become a tool for social survival amongst children and teenagers (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004). As Kasser and Kanner (2003) note, there is to date, a severe lack of literature surrounding the psychological impacts of this branded consumption culture. Furthermore, although limited research has been conducted on the impact of consumer culture on children and adults, less attention has been given to its impact on adolescents. This is somewhat surprising considering the central role assumed by material possessions in identity formation (e.g. Belk, 1988), coupled with the 'identity crisis' teenage years (Clarke, 2003) which are marked by enhanced importance of social comparison (Festinger, 1954). Moreover, Lapoint and Hambrick-Dixon (2003) highlight the fact that the majority of research and concern raised in this field, is predominantly focused on the 'middle class' population. Thus it seems that, to date, marketing research has largely neglected low-income consumers (Hamilton & Catterall, 2005) and hence even less is known about how *low-income teenagers* are affected by consumerism.

This paper aims to fill the gap within the consumer literature by investigating the social and psychological impacts of branding upon low-income British adolescents. The extant literature on brands and identity formation is reviewed and a speculative theoretical framework/model of consumerism's impact on low-income teenagers is offered. Data are then presented and used to empirically examine specific sections of this model through a comparison of low and high income adolescents. Subsequently, a discussion of the possible implications of the findings and suggestions for further testing of the model are reviewed.

Child Poverty in the UK

A recent UNICEF (2007) report revealed that child poverty in the UK has doubled since 1979 and that Britain is now the worst, rich country to grow up in. The report measured child well-being in 21 OECD[49] countries on 6 different dimensions including 'material well being'; in which the UK was ranked 18th, followed by Ireland, Hungary and Poland respectively. The report revealed that 16% of UK children (0-17 years old) are living in homes earning less than half the national average and more than 7% of working-age households have children without an employed parent. Considering these figures, it becomes clear that by omitting low-income adolescents from consumer research we are neglecting a large proportion of Britain's future population. For this reason, there should be a strong motive to examine how low-income teenagers are socially and psychologically affected by the current state of 'Hyperconsumerism' and what strategies they use to cope with this.

Relative Poverty

Figures of poverty are relative. While economic measures may provide statistics on poverty rates within a country, they do not suffice in explaining the extent to which individuals are affected by it. While the average family income may vary between countries, it is the equality of the distribution of incomes within a country which is likely to provide a more accurate indication of the true level of deprivation experienced by those living in poverty. Indeed, limiting investigations of class differences to the economic

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[49] Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

domain runs the risk of omitting complex social-psychological relations which may lie at the heart of these differences (Henry, 2004). Therefore, in looking at the impact of consumer culture, poverty must be examined in terms of "the relative deprivation from socially defined necessities, involving exclusion from the components of a 'normal' lifestyle" (Ringen, 1988). After all, the aspirations, goals and behaviors of individuals are largely dependent on the way in which they perceive themselves *in comparison to others*; goals are not created in a vacuum (Chang & Arkin, 2002).

Social comparison is an innate quality in humans (Festinger, 1954) and is central to an individual's self perception and evaluation. For example, if the average standard of living in a community increases in affluence, it is likely that the financial aspirations of the individuals within that community will also increase. It is for this reason that Mayo (2005b) argues that "The poverty in Britain is worse than in poor countries because it is so isolating. The discrepancy is staring you in the face all the time – on TV, in the shops." (pg 23). The discrepancy between the rich and the poor in Britain is extreme; the '80s and '90s saw the richest 20% of the population's income rise almost 10 times as quickly as the poorest 20% (Elliott, 2006). It is this discrepancy, which seems to be elevating the feelings of social exclusion amongst low-income adolescents in the UK and thus magnifying the negative, psychological experiences of living in poverty (Ridge, 2002).

It may be argued that having strong financial aspirations should benefit individuals as they are likely to work harder in order to reach their goals. However, there seems to come a point whereby an intensified focus on money and material possessions supersedes an individual's efforts to affiliate with family, friends, community and *the self* (Kasser & Ryan, 1993). Indeed, studies have shown that when individuals place high importance on financial success, they are likely to be more materialistic, less satisfied, have lowered self-esteem, less vitality, be less socially productive, and engage in more conspicuous and impulsive consumption than those who prioritize social and intrapsychic factors (e.g. Chang & Arkin, 2002; Henry, 2004; Kasser & Ryan, 1993; Shim, 1996). Furthermore, it has been reported that individuals from low-income backgrounds are more likely to focus on financial success and materialism as a result of feelings of uncertainty, hopelessness and inadequacy (Chang & Arkin, 2002; Elliott & Leonard, 2004). Similarly, Shultz, Belk and Ger (1994) argue that individuals who face restricted consumption are likely to have a greater desire for material possessions because they have a keener sense of their relative deprivation and thus feel pressured to keep up with 'the norm'.

Taking the above findings in to consideration, it seems likely that low-income teenagers are at greater risk of developing a distorted concept of self/self-image than their high-income counterparts. This is not only a result of comparing themselves to the average, more affluent population (in terms of possessions and opportunities) but also the enhanced focus on financial aspirations, which may detract from self-concept formation and self-actualization. As a result of this, it is also possible that low-income teenagers develop a greater need to 'fit in' and thus become more susceptible to pressures to conform to 'the norm'.

The 'Normal' Lifestyle.
With the above in mind, it is clear that we need to take a closer look at what is currently the 'normal lifestyle' and how different segments of society attempt or indeed struggle to achieve these 'norms'. As Nataraajan and Bagozzi (1999) point out, "The world has witnessed the dawning of the age of mass consumption and periods of conspicuous consumption… it has seen a proliferation in brands…" (pg. 633). This is particularly true for Britain and 'the West', whereby brands have become central to the formation of our identities (Baudrillard, 1998; Belk, 1988; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). The building of international brands and global advertising has turned citizens into consumers and it may even be argued that citizenship is no longer based on political rights and duties but rather, is a product of consumption (Lash & Urry, 1994). Keyfitz (1992) suggests that there is now a 'world standard package' of material goods, which people 'need' and are expected

to own; for example televisions, mobile phones and cars. Such possessions may indeed be considered as 'standard' for the average, middle class consumer, however what are the consequences of this expectation for those who cannot afford the items in the standard package? Does it awaken feelings of inadequacy and a reduced concept of self?

The term 'symbolic consumption' is increasingly referred to in the consumer behavior literature and refers to the use of products and brands to develop and communicate identity, as well as symbolize social distinctions (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004). Furthermore, the notion of 'symbolic self-completion' (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982) suggests that people engage in symbolic consumption in order to fill/disguise specific aspects of the self. For example Elliott (1995), found that the unemployed often consume excessively in attempts to restore a damaged sense of self. In addition - at the cost of those living in poverty - there is a clear social stigma attached to poverty and thus expensive brands are often consumed and displayed in attempts to disguise it (Elliott & Leonard, 2004). This finding is confirmed by figures from the National Consumer Council (NCC) which show that in comparison to 61% of high-income children, 75% of low-income children prefer clothes with popular brands (Mayo, 2005b). Roper and Shah (2007) found that children who lacked the latest fashion brands were often perceived by their peers as 'poor quality people'. This finding supports Nesselroade, Beggan and Allison's (1999) thesis which suggests that individuals judge themselves (and others) not only by social comparison but also by comparing their possessions; a comparison of 'extended selves'. It is for this reason that Elliott and Leonard (2004) argued that consumption may in fact engender social inequality as material possessions and brands are able to signify the 'quality' of an individual and his/her social status. This assessment of quality based on material possessions is particularly significant in the lives of adolescents due to the importance they place on peer acceptance, social inclusion and 'fitting in'. For example, it has been reported that lacking the 'correct' possessions can lead to bullying and social exclusion amongst children and teenagers (Elliott & Leonard, 2004; Ridge, 2002; Ross & Harradine, 2004; Schor, 2004).

Thus it seems once more that low-income teenagers, who cannot afford 'the finer things in life', may be at risk of developing a distorted self-concept and have an increased desire for expensive products and hence a greater susceptibility to consumption pressures. The maxim of the less you have the more you want, seems to be an appropriate description of consumerism's impact on low-income teenagers.

The Teenage Years and Social Inclusion

The teenage years are marked and remembered as a period of crisis, confusion, hormonal mood swings and tantrums. The drastic physical and psychological changes occurring during adolescence are typically dealt with by identifying with peer groups through language, music and importantly, clothes (Young, 2004). It is at this stage of development that teenagers start to look to peers, rather than parents, for guidance in identity formation, consumption choices and general behavior (Roper & La Niece, 2009; Ross & Harradine, 2004; Shim, 1996). For example, Mandrik, Fern and Bao (2005) found evidence to support their hypothesis that strong peer influence outweighs intergenerational influences on brand preference. Between childhood and adolescence an individual's cognitive abilities develop and as a result "One's self-concept becomes more psychological, more abstract, and more of a coherent, integrated self-portrait." (Shaffer, 2002, pg 426). Furthermore, social comparisons are central to this stage of development as teenagers are setting benchmarks for themselves and form their self-concepts based on the opinions and behaviors of their peers.

The formation of self-concept and self-esteem in adolescents is dependent, to a large extent, on their peers' evaluation of them (Wells & Marwell, 1976). It is for this reason that peer acceptance is key to adolescent well-being and hence why marketers strive to recruit the 'cool kids' for viral marketing campaigns (Levin & Linn, 2003). By

choosing popular and socially accepted children to promote their products to peer groups, a product immediately gains 'street cred'. It is such marketing techniques which enable organizations to create 'must have' frenzies for particular products and hence why certain products and brands have become tools for social survival amongst adolescents. For example Nike Airmax sports shoes in the UK.

Teenagers, Brands and Identity

As cognitive development progresses, adolescents are able to understand the complex symbolism of brands and their role in defining the self (Chaplin & Roedder-John, 2005). This is why, between early childhood and adolescence (8-16yrs), material possessions become a more salient part of an individual's self-concept. When children reach adolescence, their understanding of brands qualitatively changes from a perceptual to a conceptual level whereby the abstract, intangible features of a brand are recognized (Achenreiner & John, 2003) and a relationship is formed with the brand (Ji, 2002). These perceptual developments increase the 'demand' for brands - as can be seen by the fact that 41% of 11-12 year olds prefer wearing well-known brands, in comparison to 49% of 13-16 year olds (Keynote, 2002). Adolescents start to associate brand images with social status, group affiliations and personality traits and use them as a means of expressing the transition in-to adulthood (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004). Through brands, adolescents "can project a self-image – which is often idealized – to others" (Chang, 2005, pg. 887).

Furthermore, organizations create brand image not only via traditional advertising, but also via brand-placement in popular television programs. Such placements have been shown to implicitly alter brand image - in congruence with the viewer's image of the show - and has the added advantage of targeting even those viewers who avoid traditional TV advertising (Reijmersdal, Neijers & Smit, 2007; Roehm, Roehm & Boone, 2004). Thus, brands which are placed in popular teenage television programs are likely to benefit from a positive image and be popular amongst adolescent consumers; without them even knowing why.

Through a combination of symbolic consumption and negative symbolic consumption- avoiding brands associated with undesirable traits (Yalkin & Elliott, 2006) - adolescents use brands to establish and express their identity. Consequently, brand relationships have become "tools through which children grow up, gain competence, pursue the pleasure of life, fulfill their dreams, and become connected with others" (Ji, 2002, pg. 383).

Furthermore, individuals with a strong need to belong are likely to be predisposed to materialistic tendencies (Rose & DeJesus, 2007). Thus considering the focus placed on conformity and 'fitting in' amongst teenagers, it is not surprising that they have been identified as a highly materialistic segment of society (Chaplin & Roedder-John, 2007; Lindstrom & Seybould, 2004). This increased focus on material possessions (and especially expensive, branded goods) amongst teenagers has not evolved without consequences. Dittmar and Pepper (1994) note that adolescents are overall, a materialistic segment of society; possibly the result of high levels of self-doubt and anomie during the 'identity crisis' years (Chang & Arkin, 2002). Moreover, this increased uncertainty and a lean towards materialism in the teenage years, is exploited and possibly perpetuated by marketers as they 'raise the bar' for social comparison by showing highly idealized images of 'normal life'. These marketing and advertising messages are designed to play on the typical teenage anxieties (Richins, 1991). Considering the prices of the brands aimed at teenagers (e.g. Nike), it becomes clear that by making them a social survival tool, corporations are placing strain on both teenagers and their families.

Popular brands which are easily recognized allow for immediate peer evaluation and may thus determine whether or not an adolescent 'fits in' with their peer group.

Worryingly, Elliott and Leonard (2004) found that amongst (low-income) children as young as eight, friendships were often formed on the basis of whether or not branded sports shoes were worn. Similarly, Roper and La Niece (2009) found that consuming 'budget' brands in the High School environment, regularly lead to bullying and name-calling. Thus, considering the role of peer evaluation and acceptance in the formation of self-concept and self-esteem, it seems that "Permitting adolescents to dress like others, may aid in the development of self and move them toward greater self-acceptance" (Drake & Ford, 1979, pg 290).

Considering the impressionable state of teenagers and their typically materialistic orientation, it is surprising that there has been such limited investigation into the socio-psychological impacts of consumerism on their development. Furthermore, if the 'norm' is to wear expensive, branded clothing, it becomes clear that the social exclusion experienced by low-income teenagers may be augmented by restricted consumption opportunities. For this reason, it is necessary to examine "how a commercial world creates exclusion for some children as surely as inclusion for others" (Mayo, 2005a, pg.46). Moreover, do the ones who are excluded try harder to become a part of the commercial world?

Low-Income Teenagers, Brands and Identity

Adolescents' need for brands is clear; not only are they needed to associate and dissociate from peer groups to gain social acceptance and avoid bullying, but there is evidence to suggest that brands are integral to the formation of a stable concept of self. Piacentini and Mailer (2004) found that even when a brand was not visible to others, teenagers enjoyed wearing them as a means of reinforcing their self-identity. Our possessions play an integral part in the formation of our sense of self and therefore, it is possible that curtailed consumption directly distorts the clarity of an adolescent's perception of who he/she really is. If, as Thompson (1995) argues, the self is a 'symbolic project' whereby our possessions symbolize the self, a lack of research on low-income adolescents means that we have largely ignored what happens to those individuals who literally cannot afford the 'raw materials' to build this 'symbolic project'. There seems to be a catch-22: material possessions are central to identity formation (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004) but having a materialistic orientation is likely to result in lowered satisfaction and reduced psychological well-being (Kasser & Ryan, 1993).

There appear to be three main reasons why the consumer culture and prolific branding may impact upon the self-concept of low-income teenagers. Firstly, it is possible that an inability to afford brands directly detracts from self-concept formation because the essential 'tools' are not available to reinforce identity which often results in bullying and social exclusion; secondly, the enhanced focus on financial aspirations amongst low-income consumers may detract from intrapsychic developments which are essential for the formation of a stable self-concept; thirdly, by comparing their own possessions and brands to those of the more affluent segments of society, the self-concept of low-income teenagers may be damaged as a result of feelings of inadequacy.

This comparison of 'extended selves' is likely to increase the want for material goods and hence is likely to make low-income teenagers more susceptible to consumption pressures. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that individuals with low self-esteem, who are unsure about their self-concept/identity, are more likely to be influenced by peer pressure and advertising than those with stable self-concepts and high self-esteem (Achenreiner, 1997; Bearden, Netemeyer & Teel, 1989; Rose, Boush & Friestad, 1997; Shim,1996). Thus one would expect there to be a negative relationship between the clarity/stability of an individual's self-concept and their susceptibility to consumption influences.

Considering that growing up in poverty is associated with a materialistic orientation (Kasser, Ryan & Zax, 1995) and lowered self-esteem (Keynote, 2002), low-income adolescents may 'automatically' be more susceptible to external influences. Furthermore, children and adolescents from low-income families have a higher level of exposure to TV advertising as television is often used as a cheap form of entertainment (Huston & Wright, 1998). Therefore, it seems that low-income teenagers – who are least likely to afford it - are the ones who are the most drawn to the consumption culture.

A Vicious Cycle?

Through the literature reviewed, a proposed theoretical framework/model has been constructed in order to depict the possible antecedents and consequences of branding and advertising on low-income teenagers. It seems that low-income teenagers receive the 'shortest end of the poverty stick' due to their social and psychological developmental stage. Figure 1 shows a pictorial representation of the proposed vicious cycle.
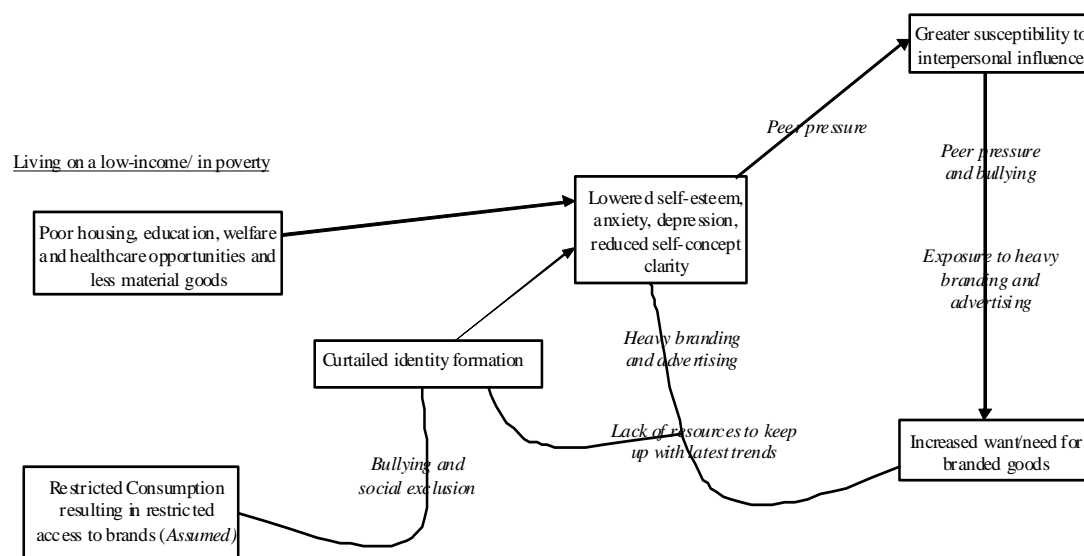
Figure 8-1. Proposed model of the impact of branding on low-income adolescents; the vicious cycle (moderating factors in italics).

Key: Examples of evidence for theoretical links

Link A	Ridge (2002); Piacentini and Mailer (2004); Elliott and Leonard (2004)
Link B	Henry (2004); Kasser and Ryan (1993); Elliott (1995)
Link C	Chang and Arkin (2002); Rose et al., (1997); Bearden et al., (1989)
Link D	Elliott (1995); Richins (1991); Moschis and Moore (1982)
Link E	Kasser and Ryan (1993); Schor (2004); Elliott and Leonard (2004)

The argument is as follows: the documented effects of child poverty include social exclusion and mental health disorders such as anxiety, lowered self-esteem and depression (e.g. Hill & Stephens, 1997; Keynote, 2002). Regarding the evidence presented, it seems that restricted access to brands (in combination with bullying and social exclusion) may augment these effects *(link A)* because low-income teenagers lack the resources and flexibility to consume 'freely,' which may again reduce self-concept clarity *(link B)*. This in turn, may increase their susceptibility to external consumption pressures *(link C)* and increase their desire to consume the things they are unlikely to be able to afford (i.e. expensive branded products); this desire is likely to be perpetuated by the known risk of being bullied and excluded by peers *(link D)*. Furthermore, this inability to afford the

things they want is likely to highlight (to themselves and others) their lower social and economic status which again perpetuates their feelings of social exclusion, damages their self-worth *(link E)* and results in greater susceptibility to interpersonal influence *(link C)*. Therefore, it seems that the need and want for status symbols in the form of external rewards such as brands, is continually reinforced while the resources to obtain them remain scarce.

If such a cycle is occurring, it becomes clear that commercialism may contribute to the lowering of self-worth and social-psychological well-being of teenagers. Furthermore, the fact that low-income teenagers may be disadvantaged to begin with, means that they are more likely to be negatively affected by the consumer culture. As Kasser and Ryan (1993) so aptly state "Individuals dispositionally high on broad factors such as neuroticism, or those with low security and sense of well-being, may be more prone to view money as a means of self-enhancement. A cycle may then be initiated that maintains, or possibly deepens, the original sense of contingent worth" (pg 420). Indeed Schor's (2004) study found that disorders such as depression and low self-esteem were a direct result of consumer involvement and that "desiring less, rather than getting more, seems to be the key to contentment and well-being" (pg. 172). Unfortunately however, due to the social and psychological state of most low-income teens, desiring *more* seems to be the reality.

Research Aims and Hypotheses

The theoretical framework presented above serves as a guide for the aims and hypotheses of the present study. The overarching research question relates to the psychological impact of branding, advertising and consumerism in Britain. Specifically, the literature review showed that low-income consumers appear to be neglected in consumer research and therefore a comparison will be made between low and high-income consumers. This will help fill the gap of the "limited interest amongst marketing academics in the psychological differences between social class groups" (Henry, 2004, pg 376). Furthermore, of the extant literature, only a limited selection focuses specifically on adolescents. Thus this paper will expressly investigate teenagers (13/14 yr. olds) as they appear to be most vulnerable to social comparisons and external consumption pressures.

Previous work on the relationship between brands and self-concept has largely used qualitative methods which provide rich data but do not provide empirical evidence that branding and advertising may have a negative impact on low-income adolescents. For this reason, this study empirically examines three specific segments of the 'vicious cycle' framework which form the bases of the hypotheses.

The first test relates to the assumption that low-income teenagers have a less clear concept of self than high-income teenagers (as a result of branding and the consumer culture) *(link A-B)*. Thus a 'Self-Concept Clarity' scale (Campbell, Trapnell, Katz, Lavallee & Lehman, 1996) was employed to directly compare how clear, high and low-income teenagers are in their identity. Considering the important role of brands in teenage identity formation, and the restricted consumption opportunities of low-income consumers, it was hypothesized that:

> **H1**: Low-income adolescents will have lower Self-Concept Clarity scores than high-income adolescents *(link A-B)*.

Secondly, the literature suggests that the psychological effects of living in poverty (e.g. lowered self-esteem) may cause individuals to become more susceptible to interpersonal influence as a result of their insecurity and self-doubt *(link A-C)*. A scale of Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (Bearden et al., 1989) was employed to measure

whether low-income teenagers are more influenced by others in their buying behavior than high-income teenagers. It was hypothesized that:

> **H2**: High-income adolescents will have lower susceptibility to interpersonal influence than low-income adolescents *(link A-C)*.

Finally, the suspected relationship between reduced self-concept clarity and heightened susceptibility to influence *(link C)* was examined using correlation and regression. It was hypothesized that:

> **H3**: Scores for self-concept clarity and susceptibility to interpersonal influence will be negatively correlated *(link C)*.

METHODOLOGY

The chosen methodology was based on previous work surrounding consumption and adolescents using quantitative measures (e.g. Bearden et al., 1989; Darley, 1999; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Rose et al., 1997). The use of a self-concept clarity scale, in conjunction with a susceptibility to influence scale, was deemed appropriate for the adolescent sample. The scales were thought to tap in to domains which are particularly salient to teenagers; self-concept and susceptibility to influence. Both scales were obtained from The Handbook of Marketing Scales (Bearden & Netemeyer, 1999).

Sample

Two schools in the Northwest of England were contacted through written letters to the head teacher: one school was categorized as impoverished and the other as affluent. Both schools were chosen based on their students' typical socio-economic status and the geodemographics of their main catchment areas (as described below). A total of 221 adolescents were recruited from both schools and consent was given by the head teacher for their participation. The participants were all 'Year 9' students with an average age of 13.8 years; 48% were males and 52% were females.

School 'A', Liverpool:
131 students (58 boys and 73 girls), were selected from this school which lies on the outskirts of Liverpool. The majority of the students are 'White British' and come from the surrounding areas, which are described as comprising of 'well-off' families living on a high income, which allows for a 'good lifestyle' (www.upmystreet.com). The surrounding areas are classified as 'Type 11' according to the ACORN[50] classification system, suggesting that the majority of the population own semi-detached houses, hold managerial positions, have a flourishing family and own two or more cars (www.caci.co.uk/acorn).

School 'B', Eccles, Greater Manchester:
90 students (48 boys and 42 girls), were selected from this school which borders on a notoriously poverty stricken council estate (public housing project) with high levels of unemployment. The majority of students are 'White British' and all come from the surrounding areas of Salford and Eccles. These areas are comprised predominantly of low-income families with a very low level of education living in council houses. ACORN

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[50] An online geodemographic classification tool – provides detailed descriptions of population segments according to postcodes (area codes)

classifies this area as 'Type 45', meaning that it is dominated by 'hard pressed' and 'struggling families' (www.caci.co.uk/acorn).

Independent Variable: Socioeconomic status.
Considering the above descriptions of the schools and their surrounding areas, 'school' was considered to be valid marker of socioeconomic status. Students attending school B were categorized as 'low-income' and those attending school A as 'high-income'.

Dependent Variables: Self Concept Clarity and Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence scores.
The scales were intended to investigate the extent to which the two groups (high and low-income) were clear in their identity and to what extent they were susceptible to interpersonal influence in their consumption choices. The scales, and changes made to them, are described in further detail below.

Self Concept Clarity Scale (SCC):
The Self Concept Clarity scale (Campbell et al., 1996) assesses the extent to which individuals are clear and confident about their identity. The SCC scale was selected in order to assess whether a low income and hence restricted consumption (of brands), affects the extent to which an individual is able to develop and understand his/her own identity. In other words, if one's consumption of branded goods is curtailed, does that mean that one's identity formation is restricted?

Although low-income consumers buy branded goods, they are likely to buy less of them but place greater value on them by for example using them more frequently. Furthermore, a constantly changing fashion environment coupled with a limited budget, makes it unlikely that impoverished consumers have the resources and hence flexibility to purchase the 'latest' brands when the need arises. Thus, it is not only the brands themselves but also the speed at which they are acquired which is important. With the emphasis teenagers place on 'keeping up' and 'fitting in', falling behind on the latest trends can result in bullying and social exclusion (Daly & Leonard, 2002; Ridge, 2002).

The SCC scale consists of a series of 12 statements regarding the stability of the self; for example "*I spend a lot of time wondering about what kind of person I really am*". Respondents are asked to mark, on a Likert-type scale, the degree to which they agree or disagree with the statement. The sum of scores yields an overall self-concept clarity score with higher scores associated with a clearer self-concept. A reliability analysis produced a Cronbach's α value of .80, which demonstrates the scale's reliability.

Although the items in the SCC scale do not specifically refer to brands and products, a separate scale, referring directly to brands and products, was used in conjunction with it.

Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (CSII):
Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence is defined as "the need to identify or enhance one's image with significant others through the acquisition and use of products and brands, the willingness to conform to the expectations of others regarding purchase decisions, and/or the tendency to learn about products and services by observing others" (Bearden et al., 1989, pg. 474). Considering the importance adolescents ascribe to appearance and group acceptance, the CSII scale was deemed appropriate for assessing whether one of the groups (high or low income) is more susceptible to external influence than the other.

The scale consists of 12 statements such as "*It is important that others like the products and brands that I buy*" and asks respondents to indicate (on a Likert scale) their degree of disagreement/agreement with the statement. The sum of the responses yields an overall score of susceptibility to interpersonal influence with higher scores indicating greater susceptibility. A reliability analysis produced a Cronbach's α value of .83, suggesting that the scale adequately measures susceptibility to interpersonal influence.

By examining the differences between the two groups and exploring the relationship between the two scales, it was hoped that some conclusions could be drawn as to whether restricted consumption results in an unclear concept of self and therefore makes a low-income adolescent more susceptible to interpersonal influence.

Alterations to Scales

The two scales were combined to produce a single, 24-item questionnaire. The response format was standardized such that all the items were marked on 5-point Likert scales ranging from 'disagree a lot' to 'agree a lot' (as used by Mayo, 2005b). A factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted in order to assess whether combining the scales altered the factors being measured. The results showed 2 main factors with the relevant item loadings as expected. However, one item from the CSII scale cross-loaded on both factors and thus the item was removed and omitted from all further analysis[51].

According to the Market Research Society's guidelines for conducting research with children and young people (Market Research Society [MRS], 2006), care must be taken to adjust the language of any surveys so as to ensure that they are appropriate for the literacy levels of the respondents and are not patronizing. Therefore, due to the age group and potentially low literacy levels of some of the respondents in this study, the wording of some of the test statements and the response scale were simplified. A pre-test was employed with 10 independent participants, which confirmed that the language changes did not alter the meaning of the statements. Upon completion, two independent judges examined the new questionnaire and agreed that it was suitable for the sample and purpose of the study.

Procedure

Prior to commencing data collection, the researcher obtained a full Criminal Records check from the CRB[52], UK. This is in line with the MRS (2006) code of conduct for conducting research with children and young people.

In the <u>high-income school</u> (School A), a brief discussion was held in 'form time' – a 25 minute period at the start of the school day. These discussions were led by the form teachers with guidelines from the researcher as follows: Explain the difference between a product and a brand, brainstorm a list of brands, as a class, and discuss the reasons for branding and the way brands are used by people. These discussions were thought to encourage the students to consider the role of brands in their lives and thus yield more thoughtful answers; especially for the CSII scale. On the following day in form time, the students completed the questionnaires.

In school B (<u>low-income</u>) the procedure was slightly different. The class discussion on brands and branding (as guided by the researcher), and the completion of the questionnaires were both carried out in one of their 40 minute 'Citizenship classes'. The first 15 minutes consisted of brand discussions and in the remaining time, the questionnaires were completed.

In return for their efforts and participation, the researcher offered each of the schools a 'reward' in the form of teaching media literacy to the teenage students. The lessons aimed to cover branding and advertising within the teen market in the hope of educating the teenagers as to how organizations attempt to push their products by playing on their inadequacies.

RESULTS

H1: *Low-income adolescents will have lower self-concept clarity (SCC) scores than high-income adolescents (link A-B).*

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[51] Reliability analysis of the CSII scale (with item removed) revealed an α value of 0.82.
[52] Criminal Records Bureau

H2: *High-income adolescents will have lower susceptibility to interpersonal influence (CSII) scores than low-income adolescents (link A-C).*

The mean scores for both the SCC and CSII scales were calculated for each group (results can be seen in Figure 2 and Table 1). The mean scores were as hypothesized; students in the high-income group (school A) appear to have a clearer concept of self and seem to be less susceptible to interpersonal influence than those in the low-income group (school B). Two independent-samples t-tests were conducted to assess whether the mean scores differed significantly between the two groups.

Self Concept Clarity (SCC):
The test showed that there was a significant difference in Self Concept Clarity scores for school A (*M*= 38.05, *SE*= 0.76) and school B (M=35.56, SE= 0.86); *t* (207) = 2.15, *p* <.05. Hypothesis 1 was supported; low-income students had lower self-concept clarity than high-income students.
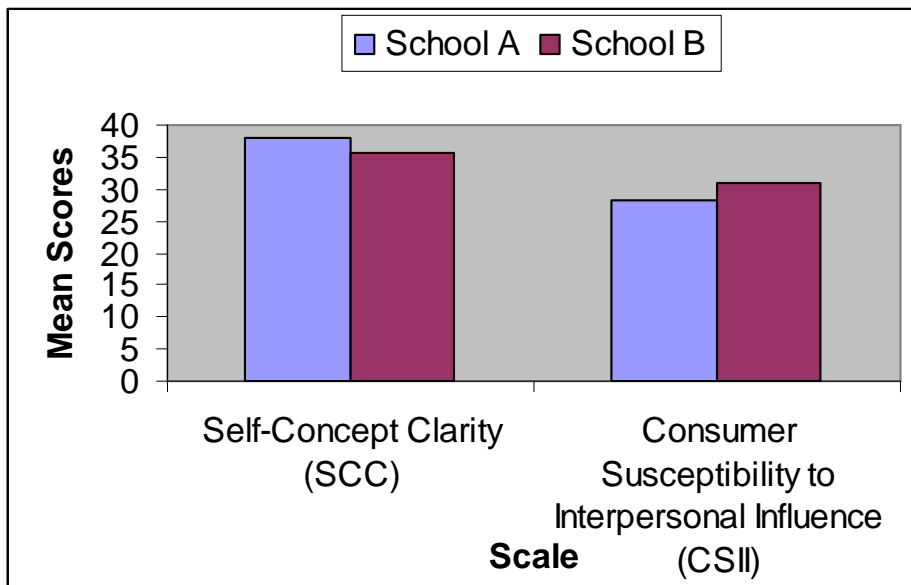
Figure 2. Means plot of SCC and CSII scores for school A and B

Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (CSII):
There was a significant difference in CSII scores for school A (*M*= 28.25, *SE*= 0.73) and school B (*M*= 31.09, *SE*= 0.82); *t* (214) = -2.56, *p*<.05. Hypothesis 2 was supported; low-income students were more susceptible to interpersonal influence than high-income students.

Table 8-6. Means, Standard Deviations and Significance Values for Self-Concept Clarity and Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence scores for School A and B.

		Self Concept Clarity	Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence
School A	Mean	38.05	28.25
	St. Dev	8.41	8.26
	Sample	N= 124	N= 128
School B	Mean	35.56	31.09
	St. Dev	7.89	7.67
	Sample	N= 85	N= 88
Sig. Values		*p* = .033	*p* = .011

H3: *Scores for self-concept clarity (SCC) and susceptibility to interpersonal influence (CSII) will be negatively correlated. The higher the SCC score, the lower the CSII score.*

The Pearson correlation coefficient showed that there was a medium[53], negative correlation between the two scales: $r = -.41$, N=206, $p < 0.001$. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported; there is a negative correlation between self-concept clarity and susceptibility to interpersonal influence (see Figure 3 for scatterplot for the correlation). In addition, a simple linear regression was conducted in order to examine, to what extent an individual's self-concept clarity can predict their susceptibility to interpersonal influence. Figure 3 shows the line of best fit.

The regression was computed with SCC score as the independent variable and CSII as the dependent variable. The result was as follows: $R^2 = 0.17$, $F(1, 204) = 41.62$, $p < .001$. This means that a person's self concept clarity score significantly predicts their susceptibility to interpersonal influence score. The R^2 value of .17 implies that SCC scores are able to account for 17% of the variance in CSII scores within the sample.

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[53] According to Cohen's (1988) guidelines

Figure 3. Scatterplot of the relationship between Self Concept Clarity (SCC) and Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (CSII).

Self-Concept and Branding

A stepwise regression was conducted in order to investigate, more closely, whether there is a link between branding, consumerism and self-concept. According to Wright (1997) the stepwise method is the most appropriate for exploratory model building. Stepwise regression retains only those variables in a multiple regression that make a unique contribution to explaining the target variable. The dependent variable was the total Self-Concept Clarity score and the independent variables were the individual questions of the Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence scale. The 11 CSII questions were plotted against the total SCC score in order to reveal which questions explained most of the variance in SCC scores. If the main questions were brand related the case for the role of brands in self-concept formation would be strengthened.

The results revealed that three dominant questions (8, 7 and 10) accounted for 19.7% of the variance in SCC scores. The detailed results are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 8-7. Results of stepwise regression: CSII items against SCC score.

	R^2	Unstandardized Beta Coefficient	Variation in SCC score accounted for by question.
Question 8[a]	0.131	-1.800	13.1%
Question 7[b]	0.181	-1.331	5.0%
Question 10[c]	0.197	-0.905	1.6%

[a] *When buying products, I generally purchase those brands that I think others will approve of.*

As can be seen in Table 2, Question 8, which accounts for most of the variance in self-concept clarity (13.1%), specifically refers to brands. From the Beta coefficient, one can see that a single unit *increase* in question 8, *reduces* self-concept clarity by 1.8. Thus one can speculate that those individuals, who are most prone to purchase brands in order to seek approval from peers, are more likely to have reduced self-concept clarity. This supports the previous assumption that an enhanced focus on obtaining 'acceptable' brands, detracts from intrapsychic developments and may interfere with the formation of a stable self-concept. It may be that brands themselves do not specifically contribute to self-concept formation but rather, an intensified aspiration for obtaining popular brands detracts from the formation of a clear concept of self. Furthermore, all three of the questions (which, if answered positively detract from self-concept clarity) are concerned with the opinions of others. It seems that the combination of adolescents' need for gaining approval from peers, and the prevalence of branding and advertising in the teen market, has resulted in an increasingly materialistic teenage generation. Furthermore, this effect is likely to be magnified amongst low-income teenagers due to their enhanced focus on reaching the status quo (Henry, 2004).

DISCUSSION

This study was carried out in an attempt to explore the socio-psychological impacts of branding and advertising on low-income British adolescents. Through an empirical, comparative study between low and high-income teenagers, some insight has been gained as to how the consumption culture relates to teenagers' psychological state. The consumer culture and its ever-growing emphasis on consuming the 'correct' brands, means that not only may low-income adolescents be excluded from social norms but due to the visibility of brands, their lower social and economic status is highlighted. This in turn leads to an enhanced focus on obtaining the 'correct' brands which may in turn detract from essential intrapsyhic self-concept formation and hence a heightened susceptibility to interpersonal influence; resulting in a vicious cycle.

Although there have been growing concerns regarding the commercialization of society, little attention has been given to those consumers who cannot afford to be a part of this commercialized world. This is especially true for teenagers who rely upon branded clothing as a means of forming their self-concept and gaining their peers' acceptance. The literature review revealed that brands are central to identity formation and expression but that a materialistic orientation in teenagers is related to distorted/incomplete values of the self and others, reduced psychological well-being (Kasser & Ryan, 1993) and a tendency towards conspicuous consumption (Shim, 1996).

The independent t-test showed that low-income adolescents had lower self-concept clarity than their high-income counterparts *(link A-B)*. This serves as an indication of the fact that low-income teenagers may be missing the 'tools' to complete their 'symbolic project' (Thompson, 1995). Furthermore, the reduced self-concept clarity of low-income teenagers can be viewed as an indication of a more materialistic orientation amongst low-income teenagers – as found by Kasser et al. (1995). This is because, as Deci and Ryan (1985) showed, a focus on materialism can detract from self-actualization and hence result in lowered security in the self. Indeed, the results of the stepwise regression indicate that a focus on obtaining others' approval through purchase decisions (e.g. brands), may detract from the formulation of a clear self-concept. Moreover, the consumer culture may hinder the formation of a secure sense of self as a result of the social comparisons drawn by low-income consumers. However, it is important to note that the argument here is *not* that restricted access to brands is the *sole cause* of curtailed identity formation among low-

income adolescents- there are clearly several other variables involved. Rather, given the symbolism that marketers have ascribed to (expensive) brands and hence their central role in adolescents' lives, a lack of, and inability to afford brands, may augment some of the already negative impacts that living in poverty has on their identities (for example social exclusion and lowered self-esteem).

The prolific use of brands in society has also made the discrepancy between 'rich and poor' immediately obvious. Due to social comparisons and the stigma attached to being poor, low-income adolescents conspicuously consume expensive brands as a means of disguising their poverty. This explanation is in line with Kasser et al.'s (1995) findings that teenagers from low-income families have a tendency to focus on material possessions and status symbols as a means of maintaining the status quo. Henry (2004) agrees that the lower classes have less feelings of hope for progress and excelling and therefore focus more intently on simply reaching the 'normal lifestyle'; the status quo.

The assumption that low-income adolescents are faced with restricted consumption opportunities is largely based on the fact that they have less money. However, it is clear that low-income consumers are highly focused on branded goods and do consume them but it is the *frequency* and *flexibility* of their purchase opportunities which sets them apart from high-income consumers. That is, a low-income adolescent may have to save for months before buying the latest fashion item whereas a high-income teenager may be able to buy them the next day. It is this lack of flexibility and the time lag in purchasing branded clothing which sets high and low-income teenagers apart in terms of identity formation through brands. Furthermore, this pressure to obtain the latest (expensive) fashion item is likely to increase the propensity of low-income teenagers' involvement in crime, theft and violence (Holloman, LaPoint, Alleyne, Palmer, Sanders-Phillips, 1996).

A t-test revealed that low-income teenagers were significantly more susceptible to interpersonal influence in their consumption than high-income adolescents (*link A-C*). The fact that low-income teenagers have a higher susceptibility to interpersonal influence, may suggest that they also experience more self-doubt than high-income teenagers. Indeed, the significant negative correlation between the SCC and CSII scale (figure 3) supports Chang and Arkin's (2002) suggestion that high susceptibility may stem from self-doubt. Again, it seems that individuals high in self-doubt and uncertainty are likely to be preoccupied with reaching the status quo (Henry, 2004). Furthermore, a greater susceptibility to interpersonal influence in combination with (potential) bullying from peers, seems to suggest that there may be an even greater incentive to be socially accepted and 'normal' *(link D)* – a concept which is often achieved amongst teenagers through consuming the 'correct' brands (e.g. Roper & La Niece, 2009; Elliott & Leonard, 2004).

The desire and indeed need to wear branded clothing is likely to be magnified amongst teenagers as a result of a materialistic orientation (Dittmar & Pepper, 1994), peer pressure and a need for social acceptance and 'fitting in'. Thus it is possible that a materialistic orientation in combination with restricted consumption opportunities, curtails the formation of identity amongst low-income teenagers, which in turn makes them more susceptible to outside influences such as peer pressure and advertising. In addition, Shim (1996) found that low-income adolescents were more receptive to TV advertising which suggests that "children who have the least want things the most" (Mayo, 2005b, pg.21).

The Vicious Cycle
The results of this study have empirically examined three of the specific links in the theoretical framework/model presented in Figure 1; link A-B, A-C and C. The data confirmed that low-income teenagers do in fact have lower self-concept clarity (*link A-B*) and a heightened susceptibility to interpersonal influence *(link A-C)*. Furthermore, the link between low self-concept clarity and high susceptibility to influence *(link C)* was confirmed.

The model produced was intended to 'set the agenda' for not only the current research but also future work. Further research is required to determine, more specifically

the link between branding, consumer culture and self-concept (*link A-B*). For example, do brands directly contribute to identity formation or is it simply because owning brands includes the individual in the consumer culture and facilitates his/her inclusion in society? Furthermore, it would be interesting to examine *link E* to determine whether an increased desire/need for branded goods further reduces self-esteem and self-concept amongst low-income teenagers. This would serve to confirm Schor's (2004) findings on a UK adolescent sample. If it was confirmed that increased involvement in consumerism negatively affects the self-esteem of poor youth, further investigations as to how to prevent this would be needed. For example, through media awareness education adolescents could be encouraged to resist the pressures of consumerism in order to protect levels of self-esteem and hence increase hopes and aspirations. In addition, further qualitative work is needed (in conjunction with empirical methods), in order to gain a deeper understanding of the emotional impacts of consumption pressures and how adolescents deal with them.

Coping With Constrained Consumption

Although desiring less may be a rational strategy to cope with the socio-psychological impacts of consumer culture, individuals do not (and cannot) always act in rational self-interest (Nataraajan & Bagozzi, 1999). This becomes clear when one considers that low-income teenagers are keener to consume and display brand names than high-income teenagers (Rose et al., 1997). Furthermore, Chang and Arkin (2002) argue that materialism is often used as a coping strategy to deal with poverty; clearly a counterproductive effort. Henry (2004) and Elliott (1995) suggest that low-income consumers use various psychological means of coping with constrained consumption. These strategies include denial and cognitive deconstruction, whereby focus is placed on the 'here and now' rather than considering the bigger picture, which would provide a more contextual, realistic illustration of one's circumstances. Indeed Henry (2004) found that low-income individuals were more present orientated than high-income individuals. In the same vein, Belk, Mayer and Bahn (1982) found that low-income individuals tend to attribute achievement or failure to external loci of control, such as fate or luck. This can be seen as a means of relinquishing responsibility of financial circumstances in order to protect the self during social comparisons with higher income populations. However, these means and ways of coping with the pressures of consumerism may not pertain to low-income teenagers due to their developmental stage and the various pressures placed on them by not only their peers but the commercial world at large.

The copious amounts of advertising and marketing that teenagers are exposed to also plays a large part in their tendency to consume conspicuously (Shim, 1996). This is because advertisements targeting children and adolescents typically play on their insecurities of fitting in and looking cool (Levin & Linn, 2003). After all "from a business perspective, consumers with social/conspicuous oriented decision-making styles (such as low-income teenagers) can be a marketer's dream" (Shim, 1996, pg, 567, parentheses added). However, 'the dream' is unlikely to take in to consideration the financial and psychological nightmare that may be inflicted upon the adolescent and his/her family as a result of advertising messages. To this, advertising and marketing practitioners often argue that children are maturing at a younger age and are thus more equipped to rationally process these messages. However, Levin and Linn (2003) point out that no evidence has been found to show that children's emotional development is keeping up with their bodies and behaviors. Therefore, messages portrayed as harmless, may in fact not be.

Implications

The findings from the current study show some of the negative impacts of consumerism on low-income adolescents. Although the causal links between commercialism and reduced socio-psychological well-being have yet to be confirmed and consolidated, "the role of marketing cannot be ignored" (Lapoint & Hambrick-Dixon, 2003, pg. 243). It

seems logical that an adolescent who constantly compares herself to unrealistic, idealized images of beauty and affluence (in advertisements) will, over time, perceive herself as inadequate (Martin & Kennedy, 1993). However, further study is needed in order to establish, specifically the cause and effect relationship between branding, marketing, advertising and low-income teenagers' psychological well being. Furthermore, these links need to be explored in the context of different countries, cultures and societies in order to establish the specific effects of commercialism on adolescent well-being around the world. The lack of such research at this point may be attributed to the fact that child and adolescent marketing is a $12 billion industry which often incorporates the help of child psychologists (Levin & Linn, 2002). Therefore, considering the financial benefits of involvement in this field, it is not surprising that "young psychologists are discouraged, censored, and even punished when they explore controversial issues related to capitalism and consumption…" (Kasser & Kanner, 2003, pg. 5).

Until the targeting of children and teenagers can be stemmed or controlled, the efforts of parents and educators is sorely needed. Considering all of the reported negative impacts of materialism, "society might want to take steps to temper this orientation through education, public policy, or otherwise" (Goldberg, Gorn, Peracchio & Bamossy, 2003, pg. 279). Whereas most incentives to reduce materialism have focused on constraining media and advertising exposure, recent findings by Chaplin and Roedder-John (2007) suggest that enhancing self-esteem may be more effective in reducing materialistic orientations amongst adolescents. Alternatively, Shim (1996) showed that parent-child discussions of advertising and exposure to consumer education in school, negatively influenced brand consciousness. Furthermore, the influence of long-term exposure to television advertising, has been shown to increase materialism in adolescents and these effects were especially strong amongst those whose families did not discuss consumption issues at home (Moschis & Moore, 1982). Thus if low-income teenagers are typically more exposed and more susceptible to advertising messages, less likely to discuss consumption in the home, and have lower levels of self-esteem (than high-income teenagers), it becomes clear that they are likely to experience the hardest 'blow' from consumerism.

Further Research

The social impact of consumerism on adolescents has received high levels of attention in recent years. However, this attention has mainly been focused on American and (more recently) British samples. Furthermore, of the work that has been conducted, there seems to be a distinct lack of 'academic rigor' to many of the discussions and books published on the topic. For this reason, there is a need for not only conducting research in more wide-spread contexts but also using more robust research designs and models to study the antecedents and consequences of commercialism more precisely. For example, the vicious cycle model could be applied to a non-British (e.g. American) sample in order to assess external validity and in the process, uncover specific cultural differences that may exist between these samples.

Such studies may aid in further examining the links within the 'vicious cycle' model (Figure 1). For example, in cultures and communities where levels of self-concept clarity and self-esteem are (relatively) higher amongst teenagers, one might find teenagers are less susceptible to interpersonal influence and hence experience a less negative impact of branding. Similarly, cultural differences and varying impacts of branding may provide suggestions as to how to 'tame' the vicious cycle. For example, Roper and Shah (2007) compared the social impact of branding on Kenyan and British tweens (7-11 yr. olds). They found that the negative impact of not having the 'cool' brands seemed to be more obvious amongst British tweens. Despite the existence of materialism amongst the Kenyan sample, it is possible that the reduced negative impact of branding can be attributed to the lower discrepancy of income levels (e.g. Mayo, 2005b), heightened community and

charitable values (e.g. Linn, 2003) and regular religious practices (e.g. Flouri, 1999) within the Kenyan culture.

It is possible that in cultures where community has taken a back-seat to a materialistic, me-orientated society, brands have emerged as commonly understood symbols. Ironically, in such societies brands provide a force for social cohesion while simultaneously highlighting social distinctions and fragmenting society. Indeed Zhou, et al (2008) found that 'social prestige' was a key dimension in 'Susceptibility to Global Consumer Culture'. Evidence from these and further cross-cultural studies may emphasize the importance of instilling feelings of shared responsibility and community amongst children and adolescents in an attempt to stagger the race for branded status symbols and social prestige.

Conclusions

This paper has explored a selection of factors which are thought to enhance the negative impacts of poverty amongst British youth; branding and advertising. The negative impacts of living in poverty are clearly multi-faceted however this study has set a conceptual scene for the link between excessive branding and advertising in the teen market, and its detrimental effects on low-income teenagers. The portrayal of the idealized 'middle class' lifestyle dominated by consumption, seems to be encouraging both high and low income adolescents to focus on little else than obtaining desirable brands in order to fit it. However, because such items are not as easily accessible to them, low-income adolescents seem to have a heightened desire for obtaining expensive brands which detracts from self-concept development and hence spurs the vicious cycle portrayed above.

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2. Research with Children and Schools: A researcher's recipe for successful access.

Katja Isaksen
Stuart Roper
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Abstract
Despite the growing literature surrounding child research, little has been written about how to access samples of children – specifically within schools. For this reason, the following paper aims to highlight potential barriers to access and provide practical guidance for child researchers wishing to work with schools. The guidance given is drawn from the experience of a doctoral researcher in a UK University examining 'The social and psychological impact of branding on adolescents'. Over the course of three years, over 60 schools were contacted, 13 accessed and data collected from over 1000 teenagers (13-15 year olds). The data collected was of both a qualitative and quantitative nature and the sample size required ranged from four to 500 participants. Through a series of anecdotes and examples, this paper aims to equip (specifically novice) researchers with the essential knowledge needed to maximise their chances of access. This knowledge includes practical advice surrounding who to contact, how best to contact them, what to expect from them and importantly, what can go wrong when working with schools as institutions.

Background
Due to their increased spending power and influence on spending within the home, children have been the focus of an increasing volume of research. A review of the literature reveals a large number of books and academic papers which focus on pertinent issues within the field of child research (for example: Christensen and James, 2000; Barker and Weller, 2003; Fraser et al, 2004; Greene and Hogan, 2005; Solomon and Peters, 2005). These texts cover issues such as the conceptual and philosophical underpinnings of child research (e.g. Christensen and James, 2000; Fraser and Robinson, 2004); ethical considerations of working with children (e.g. Morrow and Richards, 1996; Hill, 2005); the nature of the research relationship (Robinson and Kellet, 2004); legal issues affecting the research relationship and the storage/use of data (Greig et al, 2007); effective and appropriate methodologies and analytical techniques for child research (see Greene and Hogan (2005) for a comprehensive review; Christensen and James (2000)); and more specific techniques and practical advice on eliciting information from children and young people (e.g. Hazel, 1995; Barter and Renold, 2000).

However, there seems to be little information on the crucial first step of *accessing* this specialised sample: children in schools. For this reason, this paper aims to 'fill a gap' by presenting child researchers with practical advice on how to negotiate access and work with schools in the most effective way. This advice is likely to be particularly relevant to researchers working in institutions which do not have well-established links with schools (for example novice/ PhD researchers and those working with children for the first time). Schools, as organisations, differ from commercial organisations; the biggest differentiator being the increasingly security-orientated and closed nature of schools. For this reason, in attempting to contact and gain access to a school, one must know who to contact, how best to contact them, what to expect from them and importantly, what can go wrong when working with them. This guidance will assist readers in gaining and maintaining working relationships with schools and can thus be seen as a recipe for researchers to follow when preparing to negotiate access.

The Initial contact
Pre-requisites and planning ahead.
Communicating with schools can often be a slow and frustrating process; time, patience and persistence are essential; allow ample time for gaining access. This is due partly to 'competing' with the large volume of communications schools receive daily, as well as the essential pre-requisites to entering schools. For example, in order to work (in any way) with children in the UK, it is mandatory to obtain an enhanced criminal records check (a CRB check) carried out by the Criminal Records Bureau. These checks can take several months to complete (longer for non-UK nationals) and must be factored in to the planning of research.

When to approach
Secondly, the time of year at which the initial approach is made, needs to be carefully considered. This is due to the numerous curriculum requirements (e.g. exam periods), school inspections, school holidays and busy periods (e.g. start and end of the school year/term). For example, a letter sent to a school in the middle of the summer holidays is more likely to be misplaced than a letter sent during term time. For this reason, it is useful for the researcher to keep abreast of the school timetable; this information is often available on school websites or national curriculum sites. In addition, Corsaro and Molinari (2000) argue that the researcher's knowledge of the education system is also "essential in developing initial rapport with the gatekeepers and in navigating through the bureaucracy" (pg.182). From experience, it seems that the most appropriate time to contact schools (in the UK), is during periods when a significant number of students are absent; for example during work-experience weeks teachers have more free time and are more likely to be willing to organise access. Subsequently, if wishing to speak directly to a teacher it is important to remember that teachers are rarely 'at their desks' and thus making telephone contact requires patience and persistence.

The Gate Keeper.
The consent issue
As with access for any social research, an appropriate gatekeeper is essential (Seidman, 2006). However, due to the security emphasis on protecting children (Morrow and Richards, 1996) this is particularly true in schools. When working with children, it is vital (and a legal requirement) that the gatekeeper provides consent or obtains consent from a responsible adult. The Market Research Society states that "consent of a parent or responsible adult (acting loco parentis) must be obtained before interviewing a child under 16" (MRS, 2006, pg. 4). Regarding schools, consent is obtained from the head-teacher. However this can vary between schools; for example, one head-teacher asked for 'consent forms' to be produced for parents to sign. In addition, it is important to note that although the responsible adult provides the researcher permission to *approach* the child, the child him/herself must give their own consent to take part and must be made aware of their opportunity to decline participation (Masson, 2004; MRS, 2006).

Who to ask
Teachers have no obligation to grant/arrange access to researchers and thus a *relevant* and *interested* gatekeeper should be identified prior to requesting access. For example, a head-of-year in a school is likely to be a more appropriate contact than the head-teacher. This is because the head-of-year will have greater knowledge of the timetable and thus be able to select the most appropriate sample, time and location for the data collection. Similarly, it is useful to contact a teacher who is likely to be interested in helping with the research; be it due to the subject matter, the incentive provided or simply personal interest in the study.

For example, 'Enterprise Coordinators'[54] in schools have proved valuable contacts as they have experience in coordinating events, do not often teach and are thus more accessible.

The power of a name.

When contacting schools, avoid 'cold' approaches; do not underestimate the power of a name. Schools will be cautious and thus any connection to the school – via a friend, colleague or family- immediately reduces the perception of the researcher as a stranger. The person connecting the researcher to the school effectively becomes a guarantor. Networking with teachers (and friends of teachers) is perhaps the best (and sometimes only) way to gain access to a school. Indeed experience has shown that connections to schools are often made through very tenuous links and unexpected circumstances. For example a lunch-time conversation revealed that a personal friend worked within the CSR department of a bank which had close relationships with a number of schools in an inner city area of the UK. As a result of this particular conversation, access was gained to a new school.

Additionally, researchers wishing to work in schools should involve themselves in school-centred projects. These can vary from volunteering at educational events to involvement in out-reach projects through other social institutions. Where there are school children, there are teachers (gatekeepers). Over three years, nine out of thirteen schools were accessed through networking, friends, family or colleagues. The moral of the story: it never hurts to ask.

Environmental constraints

Considering the above information, it is important to remember that the financial, human and temporal resources within schools vary and are likely to affect the communication and negotiation process. During the author's experience of data collection, it was often the case that deprived schools[55] required more time (and persistence) when negotiating access. This may have been due to a number of reasons including staff resources (and thus time) being more thinly spread and more pressure on reaching performance targets (leaving less time to participate in voluntary research). Furthermore, there is a tendency for deprived schools to be of greater interest to researchers in policy and education, leading to a greater number of requests for participation in research studies (Morrow and Richards, 1996). For these reasons, a common response (particularly) from deprived schools was *"we have so many surveys and questionnaires coming in, we simply do not have time to complete another"*. Thus, when researching in schools, it is important to remember that the gatekeeper's willingness to help may be superseded by environmental constraints.

The Access Letter

Once a gatekeeper has been identified, it will be necessary to provide a written explanation of the project and the research requirements, for the purpose of briefing other staff and the head-teacher. However, letters will often be skim read, not read at all or misunderstood. For this reason, the initial approach letter must be carefully formulated; its style, tone, structure, content and length must all be carefully considered.

Style, tone and appeal

Writing a **good** letter to negotiate access may be more challenging than one would assume. A balance must be struck between gaining the interest of the reader whilst avoiding being perceived as a commercial 'mail-shot'. Indeed, the way in which one presents oneself (and the research) may determine whether or not access is granted. Through trial and error, it

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[54] These are staff members who are responsible for co-ordinating activities which integrate practical business skills in to school life.

[55] According to the Office For Standards in Education (OFSTED), a deprived school is one in which over 35% of the students are eligible for free school meals (OFSTED, 2003).

appears that an effective access letter should include: an interesting opening, a *brief* explanation of the research and *clear and simple* propositions of what is needed. Make the organisation procedure as simple and effortless (for the gatekeeper/school) as possible.

In order to illustrate the difference between styles of access letters, the following excerpts show the opening paragraphs of two different access letters used by the researcher. Note that the opening paragraph of the second letter is more direct and relevant to the teacher. The changes made to the access letters were based on feedback from teachers and advice from colleagues already involved in work with schools[56].

1st letter, Easter 2006:

"Dear Mr. Teacher,

I am a postgraduate student at the University of 'X' and am writing to ask for your help. I am currently carrying out research on the impact of restricted consumption on identity formation in adolescents (14-16 yrs). In order to examine this, I hope to compare adolescents from different socio-economic backgrounds; that is, low-income compared to middle-income adolescents. The definitions of low- and middle-income schools are set by OFSTED and 'Y' meets the required criteria for the group I am hoping to study."

2nd Letter, Easter 2008:

"Dear Mr. Teacher,
Have you noticed the race for 'the latest trainers' amongst your students? Have you noticed that 15 year olds are wearing the likes of Prada, Gucci, Armani? Have you wondered why children and teens have become materialistic and celebrity-obsessed? Have you noticed the disappearance of childhood? And what are the emotional and behavioural consequences of this growing, brand-conscious consumer culture?

With your help and participation in an academic research programme, it may be possible to provide evidence to support policy changes in media and implement measures to dampen media effects on children and teenagers. I am a doctoral student at 'X' and my research is investigating the impact of branding, advertising and the consumer culture on teenagers' social and emotional development."

Directly appealing to the gatekeeper and dampening the formality of the letter, seem to be key elements in increasing chances of access. In the second letter, the researcher appeals to the gatekeeper by highlighting the aspects of the research which are most likely to interest and benefit him/her; namely, the emotional and behavioural consequences for teenagers; their students and hence their working environment. Furthermore the letter immediately highlights the potential benefits of partaking in the study: to "*provide evidence to support policy changes in media and implement measures to dampen media effects on children and teenagers*".

Secondly the tone of the access letters progress from formal and academic to a more personal, direct and relaxed style. From the researchers' own experience, the effect of explaining the research in a way which is relevant to the gatekeeper greatly increased the response rate. The first letter had a 0% response rate in comparison with the second letter which had a 38% positive response rate. Although this could have been due to a number of factors, the feedback from the gatekeepers suggested that the presentation of the second letter was more appealing. The improved outcome of the amended letter also highlights the importance of requesting feedback; learn from your mistakes.

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[56] The researcher was involved with a not-for-profit organisation which worked to provide enterprise education events for adolescents in schools (14-15 yr. olds).

Reduce suspicion, increase legitimacy

Considering the security orientated nature of schools, the access letter must present the research in such a way that the gatekeeper/school has no doubt as to the legitimacy of the work. This legitimacy can be achieved by using letter-headed paper signalling the origin of the research. One would expect a request from a university to be perceived as less suspicious; however, if writing from a non-academic background, it is important to make it clear that there is no sales oriented objective to this research as this may restrict access. For example:

"…because this research is independent and not funded by any corporate organization …"

or alternatively, stating the source of funding:

"This research is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) …"

The little things

One has to try and minimise the chances of the unopened envelope being filtered as 'junk mail'. This can be achieved by sending letters in unmarked envelopes (i.e. no institution logo) with the addresses hand written to reduce the perception of a 'blanket mail-shot', which runs the risk of being thrown away before it is even opened. Similarly, avoid beginning the letter with "To Whom it May Concern" – either use the name of an identified gatekeeper or find the name of a relevant contact within the school[57]. As a last resort it would still be more beneficial to address it to the head-teacher – by name[58].

Your needs and expectations

When contacting schools it vital that the research requirements are mutually understood, as misunderstandings can impact both the quality and usability of the data. The following section provides examples of (real-life) potential consequences of gatekeepers and researchers failing to understand each other.

In this case the research required focus groups:

"I am asking your permission to hold two focus groups, each with 5 to 6 of your year 10 pupils. The discussions will last for approximately one hour each and will explore the students' views on…"

Despite the letter, numerous telephone conversations and emails to the gatekeepers there were a surprising number of instances whereby teachers had misunderstood the requirements. One school asked that the focus groups be conducted on separate days, however when the researcher arrived on the second day, she was presented with the same group of students as the previous day. Situations such as these can be awkward and embarrassing; who's fault was the misunderstanding and has time been wasted? In this particular case the gatekeeper rushed to organise another group of 6 students. This was a positive result as data was collected, however due to the confusion; the time available for the focus group was reduced from 60 to 30 minutes.

Researchers working with schools must expect the unexpected because the researcher is largely at the mercy of the school environment[59] and must work with what they are given. For example, according to Stewart et al., (2007), the most appropriate

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[4] A school's website is likely to contain a wealth of information including names, positions and contact details of staff members.

[5] Ibid

[6] There are debates as to whether the institutional nature of the classroom is appropriate for conducting research with school children. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss these issues; see Barker and Weller (2003) and Strange et al., (2003) for discussions on the effects of the research setting.

setting for a focus group is a quiet room with little decoration, where participants are seated at a round table facing one another. However, schools cannot always provide the optimal facilities and the environment a researcher is given to work with can -and will- impact on the methodology used and the data collected. The following 3 examples (research diary extracts) are taken from the researcher's experience of conducting focus groups; they serve to illustrate the types of misunderstandings (and their consequences) that may arise when conducting focus groups in schools.

Example 1:
I was shown to a small room which was situated in between two classrooms. It was a long, narrow room with two desks and two chairs – two of the walls were made of glass and faced on to the corridors. I explained that it would be good to have chairs for all of us; students were then sent to collect more chairs.

The adverse impact of this setting on the data collected was considerable. Firstly, the time taken to locate more chairs reduced the time for the focus group. Secondly, the location of the room (between two classrooms), led to a considerable amount of noise. This distracted participants but also severely affected the quality of the sound recording – to the extent that it was inaudible and could not be transcribed.

Example 2:
I arrived at the school, the gatekeeper apologised that there were no spare classrooms for me to use. However, I was told not to worry because the head-teacher had kindly agreed to let me use his office.

In this example, the gatekeeper's solution to use the head-teacher's office seemed appropriate to her. However, the environment and context in which data is collected, is known to influence the responses given (e.g. Scott, 2000; Strange et al., 2003). For a school child, the head-teacher's office is unlikely to be conducive to open and free-flowing discussion. Rather, it is an environment which they are likely to associate with serious matters and where they are expected to be on 'best behaviour. It is not an environment where s/he is likely to feel the anonymity they are promised by the researcher.

The final example illustrates the experience of conducting a focus group in a school which was able to provide the facilities, but in the wrong context.

Example 3:
I was greeted and brought to a room with a large table and chairs -similar to a boardroom set up. It looked like the perfect room to run a focus group- until I realised that it was in fact someone's office! I then asked whether she didn't mind us using her room – assuming that she would not stay in the room... I was told to "just ignore" her while she continued working!

Whilst the room was theoretically perfect, the fact that it was someone's working office was hugely distracting. It quickly became clear that the presence of the staff member could not 'just be ignored'. Continuous tapping of the keyboard, the phone ringing and telephone conversations in the background were not only distracting the discussion, but also impacted on the sound recording (parts of the recording were inaudible). Furthermore, the person present in the room was an authority figure within the school. There is no doubt that her presence affected the quality and depth of the data collected (see Mayall, 1996 for a discussion on power relations). Indeed this power balance is particularly important when researching with children (Robinson and Kellet, 2004)

The above situations can easily arise as a result of misunderstanding, communication breakdowns or, in the case of the final example, the gatekeeper's lack of knowledge of the required 'fieldwork conditions'. These knowledge gaps can indeed

cause problems for researchers. Barker and Weller (2003) comment on 'the politics of access' and note that teachers and staff often feel that they have a right to be present and that they can contribute valuable information to the research. For example, in one school, a member of staff asked if she could attend the focus group and 'just listen' to what the students said. As the teacher asked in front of the pupils, it was difficult to say 'no' without risking her losing face and thus the researcher agreed that she could stay. 15 minutes later she was prompting the students; "come on guys why are you so quiet?!" This was clearly a very kind attempt to help the researcher but she did not realise that her prompts would probably not have been necessary had she not been present in the first place.

Keep it simple!

To avoid confusion, it is important to present the data collection procedure in a way which is easy to understand, simple and perceived as hassle-free. The simpler the process appears, the more likely one is to gain access. Thus it is not surprising that the number of schools who agreed to take part in a Questionnaire study, far outweighed those who agreed to arrange focus groups; the latter is clearly more time consuming for both staff and students. It is equally important to present the procedure in a clear and simple manner which suggests minimum burden for the gatekeeper. The following excerpt from an access letter illustrates this:

Here are the main points to take into account:

- *Students should be given 25-30 minutes to fill out the survey (in the past this has been done during citizenship classes).*
- *Depending on the literacy level of the students, it may be necessary for a teacher (or myself) to read out the questions to the class.*
- *A brief follow up is to be administered in the next academic year.*

Ideally I would like as many responses as possible (i.e. the whole of year 10). However, I am aware that this may not be feasible, in which case responses from as many yr 10 classes as possible would be great!"

In this letter bullet points were used to present the exact requirements of the research. In addition, this letter requests for the surveys to be completed by the entire year group but 'as many as possible would be great!' This avoids the danger of presenting the research requirements in an all or nothing manner. Moreover it is *essential* that the researcher offers his/her help on all occasions; it may not always be accepted but by offering to help one shows appreciation for the school's time constraints.

The Incentive
Individual or school?
As with other marketing research, it may be helpful to provide an incentive for participation. In schools it is important that the reward is ethical, relevant and benefits not only the gatekeeper but all the participants (Hill, 2005). A 'participatory reward' will not only encourage the provision of access but an *appropriate* incentive can be key to forging good working relations with a school. However, care must be taken to ensure that the reward given does not affect the consent given *by the child.* That is, the incentive should not function as a bribe to coax children to participate in the research (see Hill, 2005 for further discussion). Furthermore, by rewarding the school *as a whole-* rather than just the individuals involved- one avoids the problem of unfairness; when those who are not asked to participate 'miss out' on rewards (Fine and Sandstrom, 1988).

What (and who) you know

One should not underestimate the value that the researcher him/herself can provide for a school. In cases where the research is likely to be of interest to the school, a brief summary of the findings can be offered. Furthermore, this willingness to share results provides transparency of the research and hence enhances trust (Bryman, 2008). Alternatively a researcher's affiliation with a particular university can be used as an incentive. Indeed, during this research, several gatekeepers wished to develop a relationship with the university for the sake of their future students. For example, one school, where the majority of students are Muslim, requested that the researcher give a presentation on the opportunities and possibilities for women in higher education. Similarly, the researcher may offer to teach a lesson, or series of lessons. Such rewards benefit not only the students, but also free some of the teachers' time (as found by Ritson and Elliott, 1999).

Tangible and feasible rewards

If offering a tangible reward, make it relevant and practical. Although monetary rewards are most common in social research, there is a debate as to whether giving money to a child participant is ethical. For this reason, a decision was made to offer the incentive to the class/school *as a whole*. For example, in one instance, the researcher was involved in an enterprise education foundation and thus purchased a number of tickets (to an enterprise event) which could be offered to the schools for free. Although the motive behind the incentive was ethical, beneficial and relevant to the study, it was not as successful as was hoped. This was because extra resources were required from the schools in order to participate: transport, staff for supervision, parental consent and in some cases, extra tickets. As a result, some schools were unable to attend, thus making the reward redundant. Based on the lessons learned from this experience, it has since become clear that the most effective and useful incentive can best be suggested by the gatekeeper him/herself. Cash or vouchers from a retail outlet (e.g. electronics or a bookshop) proved the most popular reward.

As previously mentioned, incentives can secure repeated access to schools. On one occasion for example, the researcher attempted to contact a school which had been involved in previous work and had accepted a number of the aforementioned event tickets. After two months of unanswered emails and telephone messages, they were gently reminded of the reward they had previously accepted. The following day an email was received from the head-teacher offering apologies and immediate access. This resulted in 250 completed questionnaires.

Following up.

Prepare for a low response rate and mail a large number of schools. For example, in the largest recruitment round of this research, a total of 42 letters were posted and access was granted to 9 schools– but only after several follow-up phone calls and emails.

Follow-up letters, emails and phone calls are specifically necessary when recruiting schools. Unlike businesses, they are less likely to have an organised administrative framework. Therefore researchers should not be hesitant in making numerous follow-ups; response can be very slow. Out of a total of 65 access request letters sent to schools no more than four responded *without being prompted*. Despite frustration, determined and repeated contact is the only way to gain and maintain access. Do not let a 'warm' contact go 'cold' by leaving long gaps between communications, particularly if planning longitudinal studies.

Conclusion

This paper aim is to assist researchers who wish to gain access to schools. Organisations who frequently conduct research with children in schools are likely to have well

established links allowing them access. However, novice researchers, PhD students and those from organisations lacking these links, may struggle due to the difficulties faced when dealing with schools.

Although there exists a wealth of information (and guidelines) on the philosophy, methodology and ethical/legal issues surrounding child research, there is a distinct lack of guidance available on how to increase one's chances of gaining access and what one might expect when working with schools. Considering that "access is one of the hardest stages of research with children" (Alderson, 2004, pg 105), it is clearly important to fill this gap in the literature. The paper highlights the potential barriers to access (ranging from issues surrounding child protection to simple misunderstandings in communication) and provides solutions to overcome these barriers. It is hoped that in using this paper, child researchers (in the UK) can better prepare and thus increase their chances of making contact and maintaining good, working relations with schools (and their gatekeepers) for continual access.

Although this paper has focused on secondary schools in the UK, the advice given regarding the writing of an access letter, the timing of contact and the persistence needed is likely to be of use in contexts outside the UK. For this reason, this paper should be viewed as an initial recipe for access which can be used and altered according to the specific context and requirements of the research. It is hoped that other academic and commercial researchers will be encouraged to contribute their own advice and suggestions on this topic in order to improve our reach in research with children.

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3. The Commodification of Self-Esteem: Branding and British Teenagers

Katja Isaksen
Stuart Roper

Abstract

This study explores the role of consumption in the lives of British adolescents; with a particular focus on its role in forming and maintaining self-esteem. Through a large qualitative study, over 100 adolescents revealed their attitudes and feelings towards consumption - particularly fashion. It was found that as a result of peer pressure and the importance of conformity amongst adolescents, consuming the *correct possessions* at *the right time*, is essential for social acceptance, gaining and maintaining friendships and thus self-esteem. This paper argues that self-esteem has been commodified. The consequences of failing to 'keep up' with consumption trends were revealed; these include social exclusion, negative peer evaluation and reduced self-esteem. Moreover these negative consequences were particularly pronounced amongst adolescents from low-income families who, in contrast to their financial status, were eager to purchase the more expensive brands. Adolescents appear to have a striking awareness of the role of branding, advertising and peer pressure in forming their consumption attitudes, yet they are unable to resist it. The findings from this study, highlight the need for further in-depth, qualitative research with adolescents and a rethinking of the more traditional components of adolescent self-esteem.

Key Words: Adolescent consumption, social inclusion, self-esteem, brands, branding.

Introduction

The estimated worth of the teenage market, clearly shows that adolescents are active members of the consumer culture. The child and teenage marketing industry is worth over US$12 billion. Consequently, there are many extremely well-paid child psychologists investigating the specific factors that will 'make or break' a product in this market (Levin & Linn, 2003). However, academic, exploratory investigations of adolescent consumption – its antecedents and consequences- are less common. Extant literature on adolescent consumption has tended to focus on topics such as the effects of advertising (Martin & Kennedy, 1993), consumption and search effort (Darley, 1999) and brand relationships (Ji, 2002). Although these topics are of great interest, they do not explore the adolescent consumer mindset and the central role that consumption plays in their lives; for example how does consumption affect the formation of identity in adolescence?

Adolescents form a very particular consumer group and this paper will explore the factors (in terms of consumption) that differentiate teenagers from other segments of society. For example, what are the specific socio-psychological elements that contribute to their consumption needs, and are these needs excessive? Moreover, how do teenagers themselves feel about their consumption habits? The concept that consumption has become an integral part in building and maintaining the identity of adolescents and their self-esteem, will be explored. The authors will investigate the notion that in today's consumer society, self-esteem has been commodified. For this reason, it is also necessary to investigate how, why or whether consumption practices differ between diverse socioeconomic groups of adolescents. That is, do high and low-income teenagers have different attitudes towards consumption and does it affect them in different ways?

The above questions will be addressed using a wealth of qualitative data. Considering the 'special nature' of adolescents (in comparison to adult consumers), it was necessary to

carefully consider the methodology used. For this reason the methodological specifications are discussed in-depth. For ease of interpretation, the results and discussion section are presented together.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Socio-psychological, physical and cognitive development: The consequences
The developmental stage of adolescents- both physical and cognitive – differentiates them from other consumer segments. The teenage years are marked by immense psychological and physical changes. As a child's cognitive development progresses, so does his/her understanding of 'the self'; the unique combination of physical and psychological attributes (Shaffer, 2002). As cognitive abilities develop in adolescence, they are able to understand, on a deeper level, who they *really* are; "One's self-concept becomes more psychological, more abstract, and more of a coherent, integrated self-portrait from childhood throughout adolescence." (Shaffer, 2002, pg 426). It is at this point that their identity is truly formed. It is no surprise therefore, that these changes present a time of 'crisis and confusion' as self-perceptions change and as a result, high levels of insecurity and self-doubt are experienced (Chang & Arkin, 2002). In order to deal with this identity crisis (Clarke, 2003), adolescents seek comfort in identifying and 'fitting in' with their peers through music, activities, language and often, clothes (Young, 2004). Furthermore, in their consumption behavior; adolescents distance themselves from parental and familial influence and begin to look to peers and mass media to assist their consumption decisions (e.g. Shim, 1996; Ward, 1974). Indeed, Moschis and Moore (1979) found peer influence to be the most important socialization agent in adolescence. Bachman, John and Rao (1993) specified that peer groups are especially important in situations involving publicly consumed goods (for example clothing). Furthermore, considering the close social contact that adolescents have with their peers, it is clear that the differences between them will be highlighted and peer influence will be stronger as a result. This 'group-person connectivity' is often used by advertisers to encourage participation in adolescent-directed campaigns. Okazaki (2008) found that group-person connectivity was a significant predictor of participation in mobile-based word-of-mouth campaigns. Thus, it is clear that adolescents gain acceptance and security by consuming (and dressing) in ways considered to be acceptable by their peer groups. This is why Drake and Ford (1979) argue that, "permitting adolescents to dress like others, may aid in the development of self and move them toward greater self-acceptance" (pg. 290).

Understanding of Brands
The use of possessions in the formation and communication of the self has received a considerable amount of attention (e.g. Belk, 1988). However, it seems that this extension of the self has developed to incorporate *branded* possessions specifically. Brands (and the values attached to them) have become central to consumer identities and are used to develop and express the self (Baudrillard, 1998; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Indeed, in recent years, the brand has proliferated and seems to have replaced the *product* itself (Salzer-Morling & Strannegard, 2004). The cultural discourses attached to brands (McCracken, 1993), has allowed consumers to communicate their personality, age, class, wealth and status by simply selecting a particular brand (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004). Consequently, consumers have formed 'self-brand connection' based on the congruency between the individual's 'self-image' and the 'brand-image' (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). The connection between the brand and the consumer is powerful. Recently, Fitzsimons, Chartrand and Fitzsimons, 2008 found that brand exposure can prime behavior; for example individuals primed with the 'Apple' brand, tended to display more creative motivations. These consumer brand relationships (Breivik and Thorbjornsen, 2008) and their use in consumer self-expression, has resulted in the perception that marketers are

'cultural engineers' who influence attitudes and behaviors through branding (Holt, 2002). Moreover, Lash and Urry (1994) claim that citizenship has become a product of consumption and Strizhakova, Coulter and Price (2008) agree that consumers now use branded products as 'A Passport to Global Citizenship'; global brands are a key to attaining a global identity.

As individuals enter adolescence, not only do they understand themselves better, they start to understand the concept of the brand (Chaplin & Roedder-John, 2005) and consequently, brand awareness (and interest in brands) increases as the individual enters adolescence (Ross & Harradine, 2004). This is because cognitive developments allow the child to understand the complex symbolism of the brand and its intangible features. Teenagers start to incorporate brands into their self-concepts and use them to define and communicate their sense of self as well as judge others (Achenreiner & Roedder-John, 2003; Chaplin and Roedder-John, 2005; 2007). Brands and clothing are used to highlight the link between the individual and the group they seek acceptance to; they are used as a tool for 'fitting in' (Piacentini and Mailer , 2004). Similarly, brand communities exist whereby users of a particular brand forge feelings of communal solidarity and culture through their shared experiences and interactions (Kozinets, 2001; Schau, Muniz & Arnould, 2009). In this sense, brands provide 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1984). Conversely, by avoiding specific brands (negative symbolic-consumption), teenagers can dissociate themselves from less desirable peer groups (Yalkin & Elliott, 2006). As Ji (2002) argues, brands have become "tools through which children grow up, gain competence, pursue the pleasure of life, fulfill their dreams, and become connected with others" (pg 383). Furthermore, because the most powerful brands are those which appear in several socio-cultural domains – and interact regularly - the emphasis on interconnecting consumption contexts through brands, is increasing (Diamond, Sherry, Muniz, McGrath et al., 2009).

In the world of adolescents, the 'right brand' is one which is attached to an image of 'cool', is popular amongst the majority of the peer group and is considered socially acceptable (Del Vecchio, 2002; Nancarrow & Nancarrow, 2007). Social acceptance of a brand is formed through a variety of methods ranging from Incidental Consumer Brand Encounters (ICBEs; Ferraro, Bettman & Chartrand, 2009) to brand placements in media. Schemer, Matthes, Wirth and Textor (2008) examined the effect of brand placement in music videos and found that depending on whether the actors/artists are liked or disliked, a positive or negative brand evaluation is formed through evaluative conditioning. Furthermore, considering that clothing (Darley, 1999) and sports trainers/sneakers (Hogg, Bruce & Hill, 1998) are particularly communicative in nature, it is not surprising that these item categories bear specific significance for teenagers. After all "anything that promises to gain acceptance for the adolescent receives considerable attention, particularly in the area of personal appearance" (Drake & Ford, 1979, pg. 283).

Concern about the increasing brand orientation of adolescents are not unfounded. Children and adolescents compare their possessions as a means of assessing personal self-worth and judging the worth of others; this results in important social consequences. For example, simply wearing the 'wrong brand' or lacking the 'right brand' can lead to negative peer judgments and the perception that the individual is of a lesser quality than one who is wearing the 'correct brand (e.g. Elliott & Leonard, 2004; Roper & Shah, 2007). Furthermore, these judgments often result in bullying, social exclusion and reduced feelings of self-worth (Isaksen & Roper, 2008; Piacentini & Mailer, 2004; Ridge, 2002; Schor, 2004).

The ability of brands to portray desirable images of the self to society (Elliott, 1999), means that consumers use brands to fulfill or disguise their inadequacies through 'symbolic self-completion' (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). Thus, brands also provide 'Social Capital' (Bourdieu, 1984). For example Elliott (1995) found that the unemployed often consume excessively in attempts to restore a damaged sense of self and similarly, Chang and Arkin (2002) found that people who are predisposed to feel insecure about

themselves, are more likely to look to material goods for comfort. In addition, recent findings by Rucker and Galinsky (2008), confirmed the link between feelings of powerlessness and conspicuous consumption. This means that status-signaling products (often brands) are used to combat aversive states (such as powerlessness). Thus, considering the confusion and uncertainty experienced in adolescence, in combination with their heightened focus on branded clothing, it becomes clear why consumption, material possessions and brands play such a central role in their lives (Dittmar & Pepper, 1994; Piacentini & Mailer, 2004).

Materialism

Materialistic values are manifested in different ways depending on the consumption context (Cleveland, Laroche & Papadopoulos, 2009). Therefore teenagers' consumption habits differ from adults as a result of their developmental stage and the importance they place on branded clothing. Furthermore, it has been reported that teenagers display strong materialistic tendencies (e.g. Chaplin & Roedder-John, 2007; Dittmar & Pepper, 1994); they ascribe great importance to material possessions and use consumption as a means of bringing meaning to life, pursuing happiness and defining success (Dittmar & Pepper, 1994). Hence the size and worth of the teenage market.

The reasons for the highly materialistic orientation of adolescents can be found in previous materialism research. For example, materialism has been found to be associated with a strong need to belong (Rose & DeJesus, 2007), self-consciousness and social anxiety (Schroeder & Dugal, 1995), self-doubt and uncertainty (Chang & Arkin, 2002) and low self-esteem (Chaplin & Roedder-John, 2007). As explained above, these correlates are all 'typical' adolescent emotions resulting from their experienced 'identity crisis'. This is why materialism can be seen as a coping mechanism in attempts to regain stability, certainty and a sense of identity (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 1997; Chang & Arkin, 2002; Henry, 2004). For example, when a confident person is temporarily exposed to self-doubt, s/he will often seek products (and brands) which symbolize and hence increase their identity (Gao, Wheeler & Shiv, 2009). Furthermore, materialistic individuals are more likely to judge others on the number and quality of their possessions (Richins & Dawson, 1992; Cleveland et al., 2009) which again explains why adolescents are particularly prone to focus on material goods when socializing and forming peer groups. It seems that material possessions and brand connections provide a constant amidst the continual changes faced by adolescents (Rindfleisch, Burroughs & Wong, 2009).

Despite the negative reported consequences of materialism, Burroughs and Rindfleisch (1997) suggest that material objects may aid children in dealing with family disruption. They argue that a material object can bring stability and permanence by for example representing a relationship lost (e.g. a baseball glove to represent dad). However, this argument refers to isolated instances and limited periods of time whereas arguments condoning materialism refer to materialism as a trait. For example Kasser and Ryan (1993) showed that materialism is negatively correlated with psychological well-being because the enhanced focus on external rewards detracts from intrapsychic developments and self-actualization (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Individuals who are highly materialistic, place more importance on material possessions than personal development and self-identification; as a result the individual experiences lowered self-esteem and lower life satisfaction (Chang & Arkin, 2002). This is particularly obvious in adolescent consumption, where individuality gives way to compliance with peers (Auty & Elliott, 2001). Conversely, Chaplin and Roedder-John (2007) claim that heightened materialism in adolescence is a direct result of reduced self-esteem levels. Thus is seems that materialism breeds unhappiness and lowers self-esteem yet can best be avoided by increasing levels of self-esteem; cause and consequence are alike.

Self-esteem

The confusion and 'crisis' experienced during adolescence, causes the individual to re-assess themselves and their self-worth (Clarke, 2003). It is for this reason that self-esteem levels tend to drop in mid-adolescence (Chaplin & Roedder-John, 2007). If one considers self-esteem as "the extent to which one prizes, values, approves, or likes oneself" (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991, pg. 115) it is not surprising that the changes experienced in adolescence, make teenagers unsure as to how they feel about themselves. Time is needed to adjust to their 'new self'. According to Rosenberg and Pearlin (1978), an individual evaluates him/herself on four basic levels; 1) *'The social comparison process'* whereby one measures oneself in comparison to one's peers; e.g. Am I as good or like them?; 2) *'Reflected Appraisal'* – people see themselves as they believe significant others see them (peer ratings); 3) *'Self-Perception Theory'* – one perceives oneself through observing our own actions and behaviors; and 4) *'Psychological Centrality'*- the individual judges themselves based on aspects which are of importance to him/her. Given the emphasis they place on these four aspects, it is clear why appearance and clothing are of vital importance to teenagers.

A theory of the evolutionary *function* of self-esteem refers to the relationship between self-esteem and social inclusion. The 'Socio-meter' hypothesis (Leary, Tambor, Terdal and Downs, 1995) stems from the notion that humans are instinctively social animals, who rely on group membership for survival. Thus, Leary et al (1995) argue that self-esteem evolved as a system which "monitors others' reactions and alerts the individual to the possibility of social exclusion" (pg. 518). Indeed this theory of self-esteem has been supported by recent, empirical studies (Denissen, Penke, Schmitt & van Aken, 2008; Stinson, Logel, Zanna, Holmes, et al., 2008). When an individual experiences feelings of low self-esteem, it is a sign of his/her reduced inclusionary status and hence s/he will be motivated to engage in behavior which is likely to lead to social inclusion. For example De Wall, Maner and Rouby (2009) showed that when threatened by exclusion, individuals increase their selective attention towards smiling faces- which signal acceptance. Thus, for adolescents –who typically have reduced self-esteem and strive for social inclusion- it seems logical that their sociometers will provide constant incentive to achieve social inclusion by any means possible. The importance placed on peer-evaluation is why, "among adolescents especially, compliance takes precedence over identity" (Auty & Elliot, 2001, pg. 235).

The strive for social inclusion is typically witnessed amongst adolescents and is indeed factored-in to measures of self-esteem. However, the specific role of consumption, material possessions and branded clothes in adolescent self-esteem, has been somewhat neglected. Within the school environment and amongst peer groups, lacking the 'correct' brands often leads to bullying and social exclusion (Ridge, 2002; Ross & Harradine, 2004) and in extreme cases, can determine whether or not friendships are formed (Elliott & Leonard, 2004). Thus, if consumers – especially adolescents- assess their self-worth and the worth of others, by comparing their possessions (Nesselroade, Beggan & Allison, 1999), and brands are used to fit in and connect with others (Ji, 2002), it seems likely that consumption plays a central role in the 'making or breaking' of teenage self-esteem. Furthermore, considering the established link between low self-esteem and depression in adolescence (Orth, Robins & Roberts, 2008), consumption may be linked to the mental health of adolescents.

Support for this claim is found in Darley (1999) and Rose, Boush and Friestad (1997) who found that adolescents with low self-esteem had a more extrinsic motivation for consumption; they shop with a goal of gaining approval from peers. Similarly, adolescents with an unclear concept of self are significantly more influenced by their peers in their consumption choices (Isaksen & Roper, 2008). Thus, if approval can be gained through consumption, and approval is vital to self-esteem (Leary et al, 1995), one can argue that for teenagers living in today's consumer culture, self-esteem (and psychological well-being) has been, to an extent, commodified.

Low-income adolescents

The literature surrounding identity, branding, and materialism is conflicting. It seems that through consumption, an adolescent can guarantee social acceptance and thus, self-worth. However, the negative association between materialism and psychological well-being suggest otherwise. In addition, if a key to adolescent emotional well-being is indeed consumption, one must ask: what happens to those teenagers who grow up in low-income families and cannot afford this key to well-being? The increasingly expensive demand for branded products does not suit a small budget; for example "branded luxury products like Vuitton purses fulfill the need to conform… Teenage girls want Vuitton because 'everyone has it" (DeMooij, 2004, pg 163). The inability to afford these products result in feelings of inadequacy and social exclusion and thus the consumer culture may bear worse consequences for low-income adolescents than those from middle/high-income households - who are more likely to be able to afford such goods (Isaksen & Roper, 2008).

The consequences of growing up in poverty include high levels of anxiety, reduced sense of control, stress and reduced self-esteem (e.g. Hill & Stephens, 1997; Ridge, 2002; Kraus, Piff & Keltner, 2009). This is due to a number of reasons but amongst adolescence specifically, may be largely dependent on social comparison. Adolescents are especially aware of the differences between themselves and their peers (Rosenberg & Pearlin, 1978). Furthermore, in accordance with Chaplin and Roedder-John's (2007) findings, low-income teenagers have been found to be more materialistic than high-income teenagers (Dittmar & Pepper, 1994). It has been suggested that this is attributable to the uncertainty and powerlessness experienced by low-income adolescents (e.g. Henry, 2004; Rindfleisch et al., 2009). As a result, judgments of intelligence and worth are often based on material possessions (Belk, Mayer and Bahn, 1982). Belk, Mayer and Driscoll (1984) claim that low-income consumers are more likely to compare themselves via clothing; this is supported by Elliott and Leonard (2004) and Roper and Shah (2007) who both found that low-income children have a strong tendency to evaluate peers based on the brands of their clothing/shoes. This effect has since been seen to extend to food brands in school lunch boxes (Roper & LaNiece, 2009).

Given the evidence, it is not surprising that low-income families have a tendency to engage in conspicuous consumption (Elliott & Leonard, 2004) whereby symbolic self-completion (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982) is used as a means of dealing with the feelings of uncertainty resulting from poverty (Elliott, 1995). Thus, 'affluent' brands are consumed to signal a higher social status. Henry (2004) argues that such behavior is typical of low-income consumers because their priority is to reach the 'status quo' as opposed to aspiring to more distant goals of prosperity. Kay, Gaucher, Peach, Laurin, et al., (2009) refer to 'injunctification' when describing the tendency to perceive the status quo as the most desirable and reasonable way of being. In this light, it is clear that the status quo can determine social ideals. Here it is important to note that although high-income adolescents are also likely to engage in symbolic consumption, it is likely to be less concentrated on status signaling as this is not an obvious area of insecurity for them. For this reason one would expect to see differences in the consumption habits and attitudes of high and low income teenagers. Although there is little evidence of the specific differences, Piacentini and Mailer (2004) found that low-income teens were keen to display brand names whereas those from high-income backgrounds were highly averse to it. Thus, considering their heightened susceptibility to consumer influence, low-income adolescents' want for branded goods is likely to be perpetuated through peer interaction (Isaksen & Roper, 2008).

Considering the differences found between these two social groups, it seems likely that the meanings they attach to consumption and their consumption behavior will differ. Little work has been conducted on this topic. However, when reviewing the evidence which suggests that increased anxiety, lowered self-esteem, materialism, increased susceptibility to influence and tendency for conspicuous consumption are traits of low-

income consumers, it seems that teenagers from low-income families are likely to place more importance on consumption and hence be more serious about it. Indeed it seems that "children who have the least want things the most", resulting in a large aspiration gap between the low and high-income teenagers (Mayo 2005b, pg. 21). If one considers the current state of consumerism, in combination with the tendency of low-income consumers to 'injunctify', it becomes clear how the consumer culture may contribute to the maintenance of social inequality (Kay et al., 2009). Thus, the following investigation seeks to explore what differences, if any, exist between the attitudes and beliefs of a high and low-income group in terms of consumption.

RESEARCH AIMS AND PROPOSITIONS

This study investigates the role of consumption in the lives and minds of adolescent, in terms of *their own perceptions*. That is, how do adolescents themselves conceive the role of consumption in their social lives? Qualitative data from 20 focus groups comprising of 6 adolescents each, is analyzed with specific attention being paid to the role of material possessions (and brands) in identity formation, socialization and hence, the notion of the 'commodification of self-esteem' is explored. Furthermore, the analysis seeks to determine whether the role of consumption is homogenous across different groups of adolescents or whether differences can be seen between social classes. Do teenagers from high and low income families view consumption in a similar ways or do they differ? Finally, the data is explored in order to gain an in-depth view as to how these consumption roles affect the teenagers themselves. Data was obtained solely from the adolescents and thus is their personal opinion, this is in contrast to many child/adolescent studies which attempt to examine such issues through the opinions of parents, teachers and child-psychologists. Based on the extant literature two major research propositions are investigated.

P1: Due to the role that material possessions (and branded goods) play in determining social acceptance amongst teenagers, in combination with the importance of social inclusion in self-esteem formation, it is proposed that evidence will be found to support the notion that self-esteem has been commodified. That is, adolescents, use consumption as a means of gaining and maintaining self-esteem.

P2: Considering the reportedly lower self-esteem levels amongst low-income teenagers (in comparison to high-income ones), in addition to materialism, it is proposed that low-income teenagers are likely to place more weight on the role of consumption in self-esteem development.

METHODOLOGY

All the findings were derived from a large set of qualitative data collected from English high schools. In total, over 100 adolescents (15-16 year olds) were interviewed in focus groups. Alderson (2004) states that negotiating access to schools can be "one of the hardest stages of research with children" (pg. 105). The young age of the participants but also the 'closed' nature of schools (where firm restrictions and regulations are in place to protect the students), leads to difficulties in accessing an adolescent sample (Masson, 2004). For this reason, the present study may be considered distinct in terms of the large amount of *qualitative* data obtained from adolescents. It was considered that qualitative data allows for more in-depth explorations of the role of consumption in teenage life. Thus the following sections describe, in detail, the data collection process. The level of detail reflects the differences that must be considered when collecting data from a child/teen sample as opposed to an adult sample.

Focus Groups

A total of twenty focus groups were conducted with teenagers (15-16 yr olds) at 10 different schools around England. The schools were selected based on their diverse socio-economic status in order to represent a sample of both high and low-income adolescents. The average group lasted 50-60 minutes and typically consisted of 6 participants; 3 girls and 3 boys. The discussions formed part of a wider research project and were focused around the students' understanding and perceptions of self-esteem; the researcher questioned the participants as to what they thought 'affects someone's self'.

Group Dynamics

The rationale behind using focus group, stems from their use in clinical and social psychology (Stewart, Shamdasani & Rook, 2007). Focus groups provide a means of tapping into deeply rooted thoughts and feelings which facilitates spontaneous expressions as a result of the non-threatening group setting. Obtaining such spontaneous responses allows one to obtain answers to questions which may have been difficult to ask directly. Indeed, as Morgan (1988) states, the group interaction is likely to "produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group" (pg 12). Furthermore, it is considered that human thoughts and emotions are located deeply in the neurological substrata and access to these 'mental zones' is most successful through the use of subtle and indirect questions (Zaltman, 2003). Hence, focus groups were not only chosen for the large amounts of data they provide, but also for the benefits of the 'social dynamics' provided in group discussions (as recommended by Flick, 2002). Furthermore, focus groups seemed to suit the topic of self-esteem and consumption. Indeed the use of individual interviews is often criticized because they isolate the participant (Bohnsack, 2004); the interviewee "is separated from all everyday relations" (Flick, 2002, pg. 112). For this reason, considering the socially constructed nature of self-esteem (Leary et al., 1995; Wells & Marwell, 1976) and the social dimension of consumption, it seemed counterintuitive to employ a methodology which opposes the very nature of the construct under investigation.

Groups for Teens

An added incentive for using focus groups was to put the participants at ease; as Madriz (2000) highlights, one-to-one interviews may be intimidating due to the perceived 'interrogative' atmosphere. Thus, if one considers the sample – adolescents- it is clear that the interrogative atmosphere of individual interviews is likely to be emphasized due to the age, status and power difference between the participant and researcher (Alderson,1995). A teenager's typical interaction with an adult is likely to be with a teacher or a parent and may include disciplinary or scholastic issues. This is why, as Stewart et al. (2007) argue, focus groups are appropriate for research with children; they are less likely to feel the need to defend their opinions to the interviewer.

Setting

The focus groups were conducted within the schools; in either a classrooms or an available room within the school. Situating the research within a familiar context (in which interactions typically occur) relaxes the participants and ultimately provides more realistic/natural data (Madriz, 2000). However, in terms of research within a school, and considering the power dimensions of the researcher-child relationships, the authors made special attempts to reduce the 'classroom feeling' when conducting the focus group. This was hoped to reduce the authoritative appearance of the researcher and eliminate the structured, academic feel of the discussion in order to facilitate more free-flowing discussions (Barker & Weller, 2003).

The Process

The focus groups were initiated with an introduction from the researcher and participants were given the opportunity to present themselves. Subsequently, the researcher asked the participants a series of arbitrary questions in order to relax them and remove the 'teacher image' (as suggested by Hill, 2005). The students were then thanked for their participation and were reminded that they were free to leave at any point. The purpose of the research was then vaguely explained as follows: "I'm interested in self-esteem and I would like to know what you guys think it is and what type of stuff you think might affect it". This 'demonstrative vagueness' (Bohnsack, 2004, pg 219) was used to avoid leading the respondents and imposing restrictions on the answers given. Indeed the problem of socially desirable responding is rife in research with teenagers as a result of the power differences discussed above and their extreme sensitivity to social evaluation.

For these reasons the first question was as follows: "So do anyone of you know or think you know what self-esteem might be?". Subsequently, based on the answers obtained, the interviewer encouraged the participants to elaborate and led the discussion towards the more specific elements of self-esteem. The interviewer continued to prompt the students to further explain why they thought a specific factor would affect someone's self-esteem. This method of continually asking 'why' was adapted from the 'laddering technique' (see Reynolds & Guttman, 1988) and was used in order to gain a deeper understanding of the specific reasons as to why a particular factor affects self-esteem. As Stewart et al (2007) explain, this technique can be likened to a 'funnel approach' whereby the discussion is initiated in broad terms and is then narrowed down to the specific elements of the concept being investigated.

When it was felt that the general aspects of self-esteem had been discussed and when the discussion appeared to stagnate, three Vignettes were presented. These were three separate descriptions of people and the participants were asked to asses and discuss their levels of self-esteem.

Vignettes

The use of vignettes in qualitative research with young people is discussed in depth by Barter and Renold (2000) who emphasize the benefits of using such short stories as stimulus for opening discussions. Initiating discussions with children and teenagers can often prove challenging; children are simply not used to being asked their views and are typically shy (Cloke, 1995). For this reason Barter and Renold (2000) note that the use of vignettes are beneficial when discussing sensitive and personal issues (such as self-esteem) as they provide an external focus for an internal subject matter. As Hughes (1998) aptly states, "vignettes highlight selected parts of the real world that can help unpackage individuals' perceptions, beliefs, attitudes to a wide range of social issues. The relative distance between the vignette and respondent can facilitate this" (pg. 384). In addition, the use of vignettes can help to initiate discussions (Hazel, 1995) and empowers the respondents to lead the discussion in the direction which is most relevant to them (Barter & Renold, 2000).

Sample

The members of each group - three males and three females - were selected by the gatekeeper. It was a conscious decision to use mixed groups as the socially constructed nature of self-esteem- which naturally involves members of the opposite sex- was thought to be better represented. Secondly, as Flick (2002) notes, more heterogeneous groups increase the dynamics of focus groups bring to light, issues which may have been overlooked amongst a more homogenous group. However, it was noted that a group which is 'too' heterogeneous can lack 'common ground' and lead to inequality in contributions (Watson, Kumar & Michaelsen, 1993) and thus age and income level were purposefully kept homogenous within the groups. Finally, considering the personal nature of the

discussion topic, mixed groups were chosen based on suggestions that males are likely to become more personally oriented when grouped with female participants (Aries, 1976).

Analysis

The focus groups were conducted by one researcher and were recorded with a digital recorder; a total of 20 hours of data was obtained. The analysis of the focus groups was completed in six stages. The researcher who conducted the focus groups, 1) listened to and then 2) transcribed each of the focus groups, this encouraged familiarity with the material. 3) The transcripts were subjected to thematic analysis; notes were made of common, reoccurring themes between and within groups. The first analysis was completed manually and subsequently, 4)the analysis was 're-run' using NVIVO software to highlight and code the data in to relevant themes. This, double thematic analysis allowed for a reduction of themes and resulted in more defined whilst bringing to light 'unexpected' themes which seemed common to all or some of the groups.[60]

The fifth stage of analysis involved an 'external opinion'. A selection of 4 transcripts was given to an independent researcher. The 'external judge' was familiar with thematic analysis but had no experience of the research topic. This allowed for a verification of themes and ensured that the authors did not impose their own beliefs on the focus groups. The final step 6) was to cross-check the analyses to determine whether they were in agreement. Indeed one might argue that this cross-analysis served as a 'validity check' for the data as the two separate researchers highlighted similar themes and they did not disagree on any themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following sections outline the common themes (relating to consumption) that were highlighted in the focus groups. The main theme is stated, explained and then exemplified with a selection of direct quotes from the transcripts[61]. The results and discussion are presented together so as to allow the reader to better understand the findings in relation to the extant literature.

Fashion facilitates social inclusion and avoidance of bullying.

Throughout the discussions it was noted that in the social context of adolescents, money and material possessions play a central role. When asking "*what affects self-esteem*", answers often included "*how much money you have*" or "*what stuff you have*". Indeed this finding agrees with Belk's (1988) notion of the 'extended self' whereby possessions are perceived as an extension of the self and thus are used in self-evaluation. It seems that in the adolescent world, there is a strong belief of 'what you have is what you are'. Furthermore, the teenagers' comments suggest that possessions are not only used in judging 'the self' but also play a considerable role in the evaluation of others; they seem to compare their 'extended selves' and form judgments based upon the perceived quality of possessions (Nesselroade, Beggan and Allison, 1999).

Subsequently it also became clear that the comparison of possessions tended to be centered around clothing and fashion brands. This is likely to be due to the highly communicative nature of clothing (Darley, 1999) and agrees with research which suggests that branded sports wear is a dominant factor in teenage consumption (e.g. Hogg et al., 1998). As can be seen in the excerpts below, peers are evaluated on their fashion sense (and indeed brands) which can in turn, determine social acceptance. For example, in one

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[60] Indeed it was these unexpected themes which highlighted the central role of consumption and material goods in self-esteem formation and maintenance. The results section presents a selection of these themes.
[61] Each individual excerpt from the focus groups are connoted with a letter of the alphabet – a different letter indicates a new excerpt.

group, when discussing fashion and self-esteem, there was frequent mention of specific brands; for example Converse and Nike. The researcher asked the participants to specify whether it was the fashion style or the brand alone, or both, which was important. The reply was as follows:

A1: yeah I think a lot of people like to have a brand
yeah yeah yeah (general agreement amongst group)
A2: I think it's more like... its not so much the clothes that everyone... it's just that like, when you are the same as everyone, like outwards appearances is like what everyone sees first and what everyone judges you on and what you judge people on.. so like then it's easier to like talk if like you know if you like fit in in a way...
A3:You know everyone's gonna like you so you feel more comfortable (when wearing a brand).
A2: well it's not like that everyone's gonna like you I don't think..
A4: yeah like people will accept you
A1: yeah like groups of people, like people like dress for occasions like 'oh well I'm with this certain type of crowd so like I'll put this such and such on' you know? And like when they walk in to the room they can just like blend in and make it easier.

It seems that wearing certain clothes and brands can help an individual to fit-in with his/her peers and as a result, the wearer achieves peace of mind knowing that they will be accepted. Moreover, it was surprising to note that wearing the correct clothing could in fact make it easier for an individual to speak to others - clearly a crucial part of socializing and making friends. This finding agrees with Piacentini and Mailer's (2004) suggesting that "Wearing certain clothes can have the psychological effect of reducing insecurities" (pg. 260). In addition, the final comment by A1 illustrates the fact that fashion gives these adolescents the opportunity to blend in, not only with *a* peer group but with *different kinds* of peer groups. One feels here that different styles and different brands allow the participants to become 'social chameleons'. The important thing is to conform (Auty &Elliott, 2001).

The importance that possessing branded clothing (or shoes) held amongst the teenagers was striking; for example:

B1: there's a certain type of trainer (sneaker) people expect you to wear. Even if you prefer something else – like I don't like branded trainers like Nike, Adidas, Reebok and all that – you might not like that yourself but then if everybody else is wearing it then you came in with plain white trainers or something you're more likely to get cussed (teased). Cuz to other people – that's not what you're supposed to wear....

Comments such as these suggest that brands play such a crucial role in social acceptance and group membership that they could be compared to tribal markings; the acceptable standard has been set and must be adhered to (Luedicke & Giesler, 2007). This finding agrees with claims that citizenship is a product of consumption (Lash and Urry, 1994) and that brands are passports to global citizenship (Strizhakova et al., 2008). In the case of B1, one could argue that branded trainers are his passport to acceptance. Moreover, the importance of wearing the correct brand seems to supersede personal preference; B1 does not like branded trainers but will wear them nevertheless. This clearly illustrates the central role that brands play in the adolescent community.

Brands are not only tools for social acceptance but are also essential in order to avoid being teased or bullied. There were several mentions of 'being called', 'being cussed' or 'people taking the mick out of you'[62] when wearing 'no name' fashion items. These negative consequences of lacking fashion brands have been witnessed by other researchers and indeed seems to be a common theme amongst children and adolescents (e.g. Elliott & Leonard, 2004; Isaksen & Roper, 2008; Roper & Shah, 2007). The quote above illustrates that the peer pressure and the need to conform is so strong that it can supersede personal choice. Furthermore, the following excerpt illustrates that the brand also bears more importance than an individual's character.

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[62] These are all British-English terms for teasing and name calling.

C1: cuz you couldn't like.... you could have a poor personality but then look good and people will just like go up to you and wanna try and talk to you just cuz you got good fashion...

Here the participant explains that the social clout gained through wearing fashionable clothes (which typically includes branded items), has a greater social impact than personality. The importance of fashion and clothing in socializing, making friends and gaining acceptance from others is very evident here. It may be understandable that clothes play such an important role in creating first impressions, however it seemed that dressing the 'right way' was not only important amongst *new* peer groups. It appears that even with *established* friendship groups, it is necessary to wear the correct brands in order to avoid embarrassment to one's peers. Possessing the correct brands seems to be important in not only establishing but also maintaining friendship groups amongst adolescents.

D1: but friends are worried that you might cramp their style like if all of them are looking good now and then you look the worst one like you'll be afraid you don't fit in
D2: like all your mates will have Nike on and then you bowl out with some Umbro shoes on and Diadora pants
D3: or Hi Tech
        Laughter

One can see here that looking good appears to be synonymous with wearing the *correct* brands (in this case, Nike as opposed to Umbro). This is indeed similar to findings which suggest that children perceive wearers of non-branded clothing to be of a lesser quality (e.g. Elliott & Leonard, 2004; Roper & Shah, 2007). However, it is argued that amongst adolescents, this effect is more extreme; judgment is based on the *specific brand* rather than on *whether a brand is worn* at all. Branded clothing does not suffice amongst these teenagers, it must be the right one.

From the data, the roles of fashionable clothing and brands amongst British adolescents could not be clearer. Brands are used as symbolic tools (Nairn, Griffin & Wicks, 2008) for social inclusion and peer acceptance, they provide adolescents with the ability to pass between friendship groups. Providing one wears the correct item or brand, chances of acceptance will be greatly increased. This also shows clear displays of adolescents' use of symbolic consumption as well as negative symbolic-consumption (Yalkin & Elliott, 2006). In addition, the striking importance placed on peer acceptance, suggests that in adolescent consumption, consensus has overtaken personal preference (as found by Auty & Elliott, 2001) and personality characteristics (quote B1). Thus it truly seems that amongst these adolescents, possessions and specifically branded clothing, have the power to make and break friendships. Considering this evidence, it becomes clear that fashion and brands are truly a means of gaining - in the words of Bourdieu (1984) – cultural and social capital.

Material goods -specifically fashion- can boost and reduce self-esteem.
Having established the central role of fashion brands in gaining peer acceptance and maintaining friendships amongst adolescents, it follows that fashion brands must play a central role in adolescents' feelings of self-worth. This is because, as discussed above, social acceptance and social comparison are bases of self-evaluation amongst teenagers (Rosenberg & Pearlin, 1978). As Leary et al's (1995) 'Sociometer' hypothesis argues, the central function of self-esteem is to alert the individual of his/her level of social inclusion. Depending on the result, the individual adjusts his/her behavior – and in this day and age, his/her *consumption* – in order to maintain social acceptance and approval. For this reason, one would expect that consumption of (or lack thereof) specific material possessions and fashion brands is likely to trigger a teenager's sociometer; the individual's consumption

success will be reflected in his/her feelings of self-esteem (the sociometer People who are able to satisfy their instinctual need to belong, have higher self-esteem (Denissen et al., 2008).). Indeed, the data suggested that this may be the case and the following excerpts illustrate the notion that self-esteem may in fact, be 'consumable'; the commodification of self-esteem. For example, when asking what 'types of things' affect self-esteem, common answers included fashion and new possessions, and when asked to explain *how/ why* this was the case, answers included:

E1: *yeah cuz if you got new stuff and then you walk past someone and they say oh that's nice stuff – like a good comment, then you're like 'ahh no one's gonna be lookin at me in the wrong way now'.. you think 'that's it, it's fine!'*
E2: *It makes yourself feel good as well cuz you got new stuff and it makes you feel better cuz it's new.. yeah*

F1: *yeah if you're wearing good clothes then you think.. it sort of breeds confidence.. it makes you feel confident – it makes you feel better about yourself*
F2: *well if your wearing like loads of designer stuff it makes you feel like you have the money to buy this so therefore you must be better than someone else..*

G3: *yeah if they had a poor self-esteem and they went out and bought something dead nice and then come in to school and everyone would say they liked it – that might raise your self-esteem...*

These answers suggest that consumption in itself – simply having a 'new' possession -can increase feelings of self-worth. However, it is also clear that these 'new' possessions tend to be of a certain standard (that is, 'designer') and of a certain cost. One might argue that in the minds of adolescents, self-esteem cannot be boosted with 'any new thing'; brand and price are crucial factors.

H1:*Like if there's a guy playing* (football*) with Nike he could be the centre of attention but if he comes in with Diadora (*Group laughter*) and everyone talks about him his confidence drops, his self-esteem drops.*

Here one can see that a brand name such as 'Diadora' is considered sub-standard in comparison to other more popular brands such as 'Nike'. Once again one sees that even branded (although less expensive) clothing is perceived as being of a lesser standard, despite the fact there is no mention of quality. Furthermore, it was interesting to note that the reason for the ability of these possessions and brands to boost self-esteem is two fold: the *mere ownership* of the new item (as explained above) as well as the *social impact* it has. The social impacts include the compliments and approval received from peers, in addition to effect of knowing that one's possessions are the same (or better) than one's peers' (as discussed by Nesselroade et al., 1999). Thus in terms of Rosenberg and Pearlin's (1978) bases of self-esteem, it is clear that fashion and branded clothing are *psychologically central* to teenagers in their self-evaluation. As DeWall et al., (2009), showed with smiles, it seems that amongst these adolescents, selective attention is being paid to specific brands as signs of social acceptance. Therefore by consuming fashion brands, teenagers fulfill a further two out of the four criteria on which self-esteem is based; '*the social comparison process*' and '*reflected appraisal*'. For adolescents, self-esteem has been commodified through branded clothing.

Due to the comparative and social impact of consumption, the reverse is also true; a lack of 'good clothes' can directly reduce feelings of self-esteem. A failure to possess the correct clothes creates self-doubt and the sociometer drops.

I1: But that could lower your self-esteem as well – like if your parents don't give you money, and you can't make it yourself – then you're not gonna buy fashion clothes innit?

J1: like people can be feeling low cuz they're not wearing the right stuff – say they were doing something right they may still think – oh I'm not wearing the right clothes...

Being unable to buy fashion clothes lower's self-esteem. Once again, one sees the striking importance of consumption in that, even if one is 'doing something right' and behaving in the correct way, it means little if one is not wearing the 'right clothes'. As with the example above, the right clothes supersede behavior, just as they do personality. There were several examples of the almost painfully dire consequences of not possessing the correct – and indeed expensive - clothes. For example, in one group, the discussion described a scenario of wearing 'Reebok' shoes when the remainder of one's peer group is wearing 'Lacoste'. The result was clear social embarrassment – despite the fact that Reebok is a respected brand.

*K1: yeah because the people might start rippin(teasing) them (*the person wearing Ree*bok)*
        *Yeah yeah (*group agreement*)*
*K2; yeah like say if everyone's sitting over there they'll put their feet there (*shows that person would hide feet from view of others*) – like try and cover their feet or something...*

In this example, it seems that the wrong brand was worn at the wrong time. This suggests that although self-esteem can be boosted via consumption, it will only be successful if one adheres to the rules of the peer group, or indeed the status quo. Support for this argument can be drawn from findings which suggest that during consumption, search criteria is dependent on levels of self-esteem. For example, Rose et al (1997) found that adolescents with low self-esteem focused on the display aspect of clothing. Similarly Darley (1999) found that in comparison to adolescents with high self-esteem, those with low self-esteem had a more extrinsic motivation in their search and choice of branded clothing. It thus appears that adolescents with low self-esteem are more likely to use symbolic self-completion (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982) to disguise their social insecurities by consuming specific (and correct) brands. It is the socially constructed values and symbolism attached to the brands which impact their self-esteem. Teenagers with low self-esteem are reacting to their 'sociometer' by consuming branded clothing which is likely to gain approval and acceptance. They are purchasing their self-esteem.

High versus Low-income Adolescents.
In addition to common themes, the data from the focus groups revealed a number of differences between high and low-income adolescents[63]in their attitudes to consumption. Considering the aforementioned differences found between low and high-income adolescents (self-esteem, materialism) this was to be expected. Furthermore, due to their focus on continually consuming expensive brands, it seems that the link between income level and consumption behavior is likely to be particularly relevant amongst adolescents. Considering that growing up in a low-income household is commonly associated with low levels of self-esteem (Ridge, 2002), it seems reasonable to believe that the effect of Leary et al's (1995) 'sociometer' will be especially strong in encouraging social acceptance amongst low-income teenagers. Furthermore, the established link between insecurity and compensatory consumption (Rucker & Galinski, 2008) and the social and cultural capital provided by fashionable, branded clothing, one would expect that low-income adolescents will have a greater impetus to consume these items. Indeed reports of heightened materialism amongst low-income teenagers (Dittmar & Pepper, 1994) and the fact that they are known to be focused on 'keeping up' and maintaining the 'status quo' (Henry,

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[63] Determined by the socio-economic standard of the school as set by the 'Office For Standards in Education' (www.ofsted.gov.uk)

2004), suggests that they are likely to use consumption in a different way than their high-income counterparts. The data revealed a similar story –although both groups were concerned with wearing the 'right' designer brands, it was clear that the low-income teenagers attributed more importance to fashion and clothing as a base of self-esteem. This finding agrees with Belk et al's (1984) claim that low-income adolescents have a tendency to focus on clothing as a means of social comparison whilst higher income teenagers focus on aspects such as academic competence. Furthermore, low-income adolescents tended to place more importance on the brand itself - they were less accepting of the low(er)-cost brands and strongly denied consuming them. The negative attitudes towards the low-cost brands became clear with the bursts of laughter received upon mentioning them. Although this was surprising to the researcher, similar scenarios were witnessed by Roper and LaNiece (2008) when discussing food brands with tweens (8-12 year olds). Thus, the teenagers displayed clear signs of negative symbolic consumption (Yalkin & Elliott, 2006) as they repeatedly explained that low-cost brands were avoided at all times.

The following two excerpts exemplify the typical tone of the opinions expressed towards various brands amongst low and high-income teenagers respectively.

Low-income group:
L1*: I think it's more like with younger kids cuz – like sports clothes, they always want like Nike or something – but then you get people with Umbro (*group laughter*)*
Researcher*: and Umbro is not good then?*
L2*: Compared to Nike and Adidas it's not - cuz of the price*
Researcher*: Cuz of the price?*
L1*: Yeah like if you go into school and say like oh these cost me 110 quid (*£- Pounds*) and then if you go and say like 20 quid [*group laughter].*.*
Researcher*: ok so the more expensive your clothes are, the better you'll feel about yourself?*
        Yeah, yeah sometimes (group consensus)

M1*: It changes like every month – like you'll wear trainers for a month – everyone will be like 'yeah I like them a lot' – and then you'll go (*to the*) shop now and like trainers could say like 'reduced price' – they could be half price [*laughter from others] and then they'll be like – 'why did you buy them? They're cheap they are'*
M2*: yeah that happened to me- I bought something and then went back and it was 'buy one get one free' [*nervous giggle]*

In the minds of these adolescents, it appears that in order to be acceptable, the brand must be of a certain standard, typically connoted by a high price. Indeed the emphasis on price seems to be a key issue. For example in the 'M' exchange, it is clear that even within a brand category, it is necessary to have the most expensive model. One feels a sense of embarrassment when the 'cheaper' option of the 'right' brand is consumed. These examples show the tenet amongst low-income adolescents that brands are used as a representation of wealth; anything remotely associated with a 'lack of funds' is frowned upon. This stigma attached to poverty and the risk of association with poverty was also identified by Argo and Main (2008).

Conversely, amongst the high-income groups, although there was also a focus on specific brand names, they seemed less concerned about the brand's 'wealth signal' and more about its 'style'. Furthermore, at times there seemed to be a sense of pride in buying a low-cost item, providing it was 'stylish'. Unlike the low-income groups, the participants from high-income families tended to perceive the consumption of low-cost (yet stylish) clothing as a victory.

High-income group:
N1: but it doesn't really matter about labels (brands) cuz like if you go into charity shops and everything then like uhm you can pick up like really, really good clothes and everything and it's like really cheap and it doesn't have to be a label just for it to look good.
N2: like Primark[64].
N1: Primark yeah.

The fact that these groups mentioned charity-shops and un-branded clothes immediately distinguished them from the low-income groups whom, upon the mention of a charity shop or lower-cost brands such as 'Umbro', 'Gola', or 'ASDA'[65] would laugh at even the thought of purchasing items from there.

The fact that those adolescents with less money are less likely to consume cheaper, more affordable clothes – due to social pressures – seems counterintuitive. However, when one considers the notion of symbolic self-completion, it becomes somewhat more understandable. Low-income teenagers are using expensive branded clothing as a means of disguising their poverty and hence protecting their feelings of self-worth. Conversely, the high-income groups did not feel the need to prove their social status and thus had few qualms about potentially communicating an image of being 'poor' through un-branded or inexpensive clothing. There is a distinct feeling that the lower income adolescents were overcompensating for their lower socioeconomic status.

It also became apparent that the social consequences of consuming low-cost or unfashionable brands were more severe amongst the low-income groups; giving reason to their over-compensatory consumption behavior. Whereas the high-income groups explained that wearing 'last season' or 'cheaper' clothing *might* result in feelings of lowered self-esteem and confidence and *might* attract negative comments from peers, the low-income teenagers painted a very different picture. It seemed that an inability to attain the latest fashion items could lead to, in effect, 'social suicide' amongst the low-income groups. For example, when discussing a particular designer jacket, the following comments were made:

O1*: yeah... coz if ehm you don't get that new jacket, you might think that your friend...*
O2*:: will think you're poor.. [*laughter*]*
Researcher*: But why would not having a jacket make your friends think you're poor?*
O1*: Coz they'll think that you can't afford it [*giggles*] and people like they might not want to hang around with you cuz they'll think that they look good and everything but then if say you were in a group and you all looked nice and then only one person don't look nice – that person who don't look nice.. he or she will get more noticed coz people will be saying like 'what is she wearing?' so that person would just think –'people are talking about me and I need to get that Jacket', and if your family can't afford that jacket then you'll just start getting stressed and then you'll just be scared to go out with your friends.*

It seems ironic that an adolescent from a low-income family faces a greater risk of social exclusion, bullying and stress when wearing an inexpensive item of clothing amongst his/her peer group, than someone from a higher income family.
The observed differences between the attitudes and consumption behaviors of high and low income adolescents, although surprising, can be explained by the strong communicative nature of clothing and brands (specifically in terms of status), coupled with the feelings of inadequacy and insecurity experienced by individuals living on a low income in an affluent society (e.g. Hooper, Gorin, Cabral & Dyson, 2007). That is, the focus of attaining a 'normal lifestyle' and 'reaching the status quo' (Henry, 2004) and the tendency for injunctification (Kay et al., 2009) seems to be dealt with through the consumption of status-signaling goods; typically branded clothing. It seems here that consumption is being used as a coping mechanism in attempts to regain feelings of control (Chang & Arkin, 2002; Henry, 2004; Gao et al., 2009). Furthermore, as with Piacentini

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[64] A low-cost clothing store.
[65] The English equivalent of Wal-Mart

and Mailer's (2004) work, the data revealed that amongst low-income adolescents, branded clothing was especially important for demonstrating that they were 'not poor'; hence the focus on the price as a marker of a 'good or bad' brand. Indeed, it is for this reason that Elliott and Leonard (2004) argue that consumption may engender social inequality; material possessions (and especially brands) can directly reveal a person's economic capital. The power of brands and the importance assigned to them, is clearly demonstrated by the size of the counterfeit market; the social motivation to possess value-expressive luxury brands can exceed moral beliefs (Wilcox, Kim & Sen, 2009).

Furthermore, as Isaksen and Roper (2008) have argued, this status-signaling ability of brands may increase feelings of inadequacy amongst low-income adolescents and result in a 'vicious cycle' (pg. 1071); a reduction in self-esteem increases susceptibility to influence which increases the want for brands and the inability to afford the brands results in lowered self-esteem which again increases the want for material goods and brands.

Perceptions and Insights.
The adolescents' thoughts about consumption and the emphasis and importance they place on brands (and the price of brands) in forming and displaying their identities was striking. Furthermore, their use of fashion, clothing and brands as a means of judging and classifying one another seems to suggest that there is an imminent need for education surrounding consumption and media influence. That is, it seems that these teenagers are not aware of the role of marketing in creating brand images and thus truly believe that they represent different standards of individuals. One would hope that through education, one could change this misperception and hence reduce instances of bullying, social exclusion and lowered self-esteem. However, the reality seems to be that teenagers are in fact, very aware of the role of marketing and advertising in creating these powerful brand identities. It was even more surprising that they were aware of the fact that the extreme social impact of these brands was caused by their developmental stage. They expressed awareness of the adolescent need to 'fit in' and 'keep up' and thus knew that their strong desire and need for brands is temporary and will subside as they mature and develop in to adults.

*P1: but miss – this (*the influence of brands on self-esteem*) mainly only happens when you're a teenager – when you're older you really won't care what other people think – cuz you been through it all yourself ... if you want an opinion you'll turn to your family. It's just a teenager phase miss ....*

Quotes such as these exemplify the fact that adolescents are aware of their own social state and the extreme effect of peer influence. This statement reveals how perceptive adolescent consumers are and highlights the importance of not 'dumbing down' their opinions and contributions to research (Greene & Hill, 2005). For example, in the quote above, the participant has aptly explained the findings of previous research which shows that during adolescence, the individual starts to look to his/her peers, rather than family, for consumption guidance (e.g. Ross & Harradine, 2004; Ward, 1974). In addition, statements like these support work by Shim (1996), who found that peer influence was particularly strongly related to social and conspicuous consumption amongst peers as well as Mandrik, Fern and Bao (2005) who showed that strong peer influence outweighs familial influence in brand choice. This suggests that the increase in peer influence is directly related to the adolescent need for branded clothing (conspicuous goods). Moreover, the teenagers' claims that peer influence will reduce post-adolescence, has indeed been confirmed by Costanzo and Shaw (1966) who found that conformity significantly decreased after adolescence. Thus, when this peer influence subsides it seems that the importance of displays such as branded clothing might also subside. Indeed, this finding may contribute to explaining why materialism starts to subside in later adolescents (Chaplin & Roedder-John, 2007).

The important note here is that despite their awareness, teenagers continue to consume the way they do. Perhaps even more surprising is the *extent* to which they are aware of the role of marketing and advertising in creating the identity and resulting frenzy around often expensively-priced fashion items. For example:

Q1: it's the name!
Q2: yeah it is – ain't nothing to do with the quality
Q3: they're all probably made in the same shop, it's just a different logo
Researcher:.. but then why – I mean if you know these things.. but then you were saying that one is better than the other
*Q2: yeah but it's things as well like adverts and everything cuz like the good makes like Nike and everything they get like good adverts and get all like the famous people like footballers and everything to like sponsor their [*brand*] yeah.. so it makes people wear 'em and it just goes from there.. but like those that aren't that good, can't get the sponsorship that they want*

*R1: just because of a label (*brand*) like that t-shirt would be like… I mean just that label – that t-shirt will be like £20 but if you get just that t-shirt without the labels that t-shirt will be about 6 pounds.*
R2: …it doesn't make a difference it doesn't really its just the way you know like kids our age, advertising, they brainwash you but when you're older like you know older people don't really care about their stuff – but because we're teenagers – we watch telly (TV) we look at people and watch videos and MTV and all of that and we wanna be just like them …

These comments illustrate a surprising amount of knowledge amongst teenage consumers, regarding branding and the creation of brand image as well as advertising tactics for the adolescent segment. Moreover, there seems to be an air of frustration that cannot be overcome. For example, it is clear that they realize that brand and price do not always reflect quality, yet socially, they still do (Elliott & Leonard, 2004; Piacentini & Mailer, 2004; Roper & Shah, 2007). Furthermore, they seem to be of the opinion that it is outlandish that a label/brand can influence price to such an extreme extent and one senses anger when words such as 'Brainwashing' are used. These adolescents appear to be wholly aware of the images that are being attached to brands and the resulting affect it has on consumers. For example, they are aware of the fact that, as Martin & Kennedy (1993) argue, idealized images attached to brands result in feelings of inadequacy and hence spur consumption. However, perhaps the most striking observation was that adolescents are aware that their specific age group is being exploited due to the importance they place on acceptance and 'fitting in'. As Richins (1991) explains, these advertisements are specifically designed to play on typical teenage anxieties; "their vulnerabilities are sold back to them" (Mayo 2005a, pg. 43) and they know it!

However, despite their awareness of these tactics, adolescents continue to be susceptible to them. That is, it appears that adolescents are 'trapped' in a web of consumption; its social importance seems to be stronger than their own personal preference (and rationality).

S1: Like maybe you're going out or something and say like you pass a shop with your parents – you might see something that you specifically like – it might not be Nike or anything but you specifically like it. And if your mom asks you to choose you might not like the Nike trainer but because you know that you might get treated badly, you just buy what everyone else would prefer.

The strength of adolescent consumption needs and pressures are immense. In spite of their knowledge of the 'tricks of the trade' and the frustration experienced, compliance remains more important than identity (Auty & Elliott, 2001). As Saxton (2005) has aptly stated, this state of 'Hyperconsumerism' has resulted in a "world of choice where emotion versus function, resulting in young people expressing their identity via brands" (pg. 21).

Personal opinions and private consequences of adolescent consumption.

The final (and often neglected) aspect of adolescent consumption examined, revealed the personal opinions and attitudes of the participants regarding consumption. That is, although they displayed great in-depth knowledge and perception regarding how consumption (and indeed brands) affect their social and emotional lives, a number of comments revealed their *personal opinions and private consequences* about this 'state of affairs' in general .

T1: it's like, it (bullying) *hurts you so much that you go and buy it* (fashion item*) and when you buy it then people just let you down for it and people just say 'oh look at this' and cuss (tease) you. It's like people cuss you about trainers, so like if you got Fila trainers then they're not the nicest ones and then you buy it (the nicest ones) like after 2 months and then its like "oooh its out of fashion!" – its like that – they say that...*

U1; yeah like in school if there was no school uniform your self-esteem would go down a lot cuz when you're wearing uniform everyone's the same apart from probably the shoes. The shirt – everyone's wearing the same shirt, everyone's wearing the same jumper, same tie, same trousers, some people might be (wear) Levi's or something... but if you're in a place like this with no uniform, like just a t-shirt and a jumper, everyone's always gonna watch what you got on top of your jumper and what you got below.. and everyone will always watch..
U2: so in a way it's good that we've got uniform....

There is a distinct sense of pressure and at times threat, placed on adolescents to keep up with fashion and consume the 'correct' brands *in a timely manner*. This fear of being bullied as a result of lacking the correct possessions has also been shown in previous research on adolescent consumption (e.g. Elliott & Leonard, 2004; Piacentini & Mailer, 2004). From the comments above it seems that there is a feeling of despair amongst some adolescents; even when they consume the right brand –albeit at a later stage- they are still at risk of being bullied. Indeed the pressure of wearing the right brand at the right time has made these adolescents grateful for school uniforms; they seem to provide some security in daily life. Furthermore, there is also an uncomfortable air of paranoia and a feeling of 'being watched' by peers; a feeling which is uncomfortable and distressing at any age. It is likely that this is a result of the need to belong as described by the sociometer theory of self-esteem (Leary et al., 1995; Denisson et al., 2008)

Timing seems to be crucial. Although there exists literature on the 'must have' notion within adolescent consumption, there has been little evidence regarding the urgency with which these items 'have' to be obtained. It was worrying to find that the time frame for a style or brand to be 'in' rarely exceeds a few months. This suggests that the adolescent consumer rarely has more than a few months of 'security' in his/her clothes; the next new necessity is always around the corner. This finding strongly contradicts Burroughs and Rindfleisch's (1997) suggestion that material possessions can provide stability and permanence. Conversely, in the category of clothing and fashion, possessions are far from permanent and often seem to be the cause of instability. Thus in accordance with Chang and Arkin (2002), it seems clear that "material pursuits are essentially endless" (pg. 393).

When one considers the cost of these branded items, it becomes clear that there is a considerable amount of pressure placed on parents to continually provide 'new' clothing. As DeMooij (2004) explained, teenage girls want the Vuitton brand because everyone has it. Although the adolescents are aware of (and feel guilty about) the pressure they place on their parents, they seem powerless to alter it. Furthermore, it was clear that the pressures of consumption clearly place a strain on family relations; parent-child as well as parent-parent (as seen by Roper & Shah, 2007). For example when discussing the changing nature of fashion, comments included:

V1; But their parents can't afford these things so it could defer on to the parents like splitting up – like you can hate your parents even more like that as well cuz you're gonna think 'how come so and so have so much stuff and Nike and...'

V2: and I ain't got nothing
V1: I think it will affect your parents cuz they'll think that they're not doing enough for their son or daughter – so it will affect them as well – and they will have more fights and stuff

W1: like they (parents) try and like buy stuff like you just can't afford – I've done that loads of times like 'oh mum please please why can't I have that hoodie – just buy me it!' – She buys me it and then she's skint (broke) and your like, 'I feel a bit guilty now but I like my new clothes!'

One can see that the nature of adolescent consumption and the pressure placed on them directly affects parents. It seems that parents have no simple task in keeping up and satisfying their adolescents' consumption needs. This became painfully clear in the following example:

X1: cuz look miss watch this - my friend lent me this bag because I've got a Hi-Tech bag. My mom bought me this Hi-tech bag like last week - look (takes Hi-Tech bag out from friend's bag)*. Like this is Hi-tech, that's not good... [laughter] so like my friend lent me this Nike bag so that I could look good [laughter]*
Researcher: So but why, what's wrong with Hi-Tech though?
*X2: Hi and Tech – the two words (*giggles*)*
X3: The name
X1: It's not like a big brand innit? Its like, no one wears it.

The power of the brand seems stronger than the financial investment of the parent. As shown by Mandrik et al., (2005), peer influence is clearly stronger than inter-generational influence when it comes to brand choice.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings from this research have revealed a number of interesting and indeed important facts about the consumption behaviors and attitudes of British teenagers. Furthermore, the level of detail obtained from the focus groups, and the surprisingly perceptive knowledge of the teenagers, once again highlights the need for investigating and *listening* to adolescent consumers. This is particularly true when one considers that these teenagers are 'the new generation' of consumers and will have a significant impact on future generations.

The importance of consumption, clothing and expensive brands in the adolescents' lives was striking. It became clear that the 'rules' of consumption are incredibly detailed in terms of what is 'right' and acceptable. However, if one succeeds, it appears to be the key to security, peace of mind, friendships and social acceptance. Not only do fashionable clothing and brands appear to supersede personality and personal preference, but there were clear signs that wearing the correct clothing can be considered more important than one's own behavior. As a result, it was clear that the correct clothes are essential for adolescents to be perceived in a desirable way and thus gain social acceptance. Although the role of fashion brands amongst peer groups has been previously reported, it was interesting to note that amongst adolescents, self-esteem can be directly impacted by possessing or not possessing specific brands; thus P1 was supported. This was due to the importance of peer approval amongst teenagers but also because of the social comparison of possessions and the personal gratification gained from simply owning something 'new'. Indeed, in terms of self-esteem, fashion and branded clothing are *psychologically central* (Rosenberg & Pearlin, 1978) amongst British adolescents in evaluating the self. Respondents considered material possessions before the more traditional indicators of self-esteem, for example academic performance and sporting success. For this reason, it seems that self-esteem has been commodified and hence consumption and possessions must be considered when assessing self-esteem levels amongst adolescents.

The differences observed between high and low-income adolescents' consumption behavior, clearly signify that teenagers from low-income households place greater

importance on 'status' symbols, expensive brands and money than high-income adolescents; P2 was supported. It seemed that amongst low-income adolescents, self-esteem was especially focused on possessions; they showed a greater aversion to low-cost brands and it was clear that the social consequences of consuming such brands were more negative than amongst high-income teenagers. Thus, although it seems illogical, those adolescents who have less money typically have lower levels of self-esteem, higher levels of materialism, are more susceptible to consumption influence and are thus more reliant on possessing expensive, branded clothing as a means of building and maintaining self-worth.

The apparent role of material goods in enhancing self-esteem, contradict work by Kasser and Ryan (1993) and Schor (2004) who explain that a focus on material goods breeds unhappiness and results in reduced psychological well-being. Indeed they suggest that distancing oneself from the consumer culture is necessary for the well-being of individuals. However, given the immense power of consumption and material possessions in the lives of adolescents, it seems that this may not be an option for them. If, despite their detailed knowledge of brand strategies, peer pressure and advertisement, material possessions still have a pronounced impact on feelings of self-esteem, simply avoiding them is not a feasible option. As Hill and Stephens (1997) aptly state "Sociocultural pressures to consume are pervasive, indeed impossible to avoid completely" (pg. 40), and in the case of adolescents, nothing could be more true. Due to the school environment and the social lives of adolescents, it can be argued that they live a more 'public' life than many others in society and thus their need for compliance is enhanced.

The in-depth nature of this study, and the resulting richness of the data, can be attributed to the detailed methodological considerations given to the research design. As explained previously, concerted efforts were made to collect the data in an environment which was likely to elicit honest responses on a sensitive topic from a teenage sample; small, mixed focus groups (including vignettes) conducted in-school. This setting highlights "the importance of conducting research that is closely tied to real world contexts, and real-world motivations" (Cohen, 1999, pg 355); the social nature of self-esteem is mirrored in the size and setting of the focus groups. Furthermore, the adaptation of the 'laddering technique' (Reynolds & Guttman, 1988) and the use of vignettes, provided a structure and a deeper psychological facet to the research the methodology. In addition, the methods used demonstrated the importance of considering Interpersonal relations, Sociocultural aspects, Cognition and Affect when conducting qualitative research. These represent four out of the eight psychological dimensions Cohen (1999) includes in his Dimensional Qualitative Research (DQR) approach; the remaining four include Behavior, Sensation, Imagery and Drugs. The DQR represents a comprehensive, systematic and psychological framework which, if applied to qualitative marketing research, can achieve high quality data. Therefore, although Sensation and Drugs were not directly applicable to this research, further studies on brands and self-esteem may benefit from using the DQR approach and examining the dimensions of Behavior and Imagery more closely. This would allow the researcher to witness the true consumption behaviors (through observations) of the adolescents and question the reasons for the effectiveness of the images and values they attach to specific brands.

In addition, the use of "simultaneous mixed methods (and an analysis that takes account of this interaction)" is advocated by Hall and Rist (1999, pg. 295). They argue that by combining interview, observation and document analysis methods (methodological triangulation) in qualitative research projects – one is likely to attain richer, more valid and holistic data. Hall and Rist (1999) explain that the benefits of employing integrated and triangulated qualitative studies – as opposed to a single method- is akin to the benefit of buying a three legged stool rather than a one-legged one; it is more stable. Considering the sample (adolescents) and the sensitive nature of the topic (self-esteem), future research would benefit from employing frameworks such as DQR or Methodological Triangulation in order to assist comprehension of the role of consumption in the lives of adolescents.

If one considers the extant literature and current findings, it is clear that further research is needed. Similar work carried out with teenagers in different countries will enable the assessment of the role of consumption in their lives. If consumption is less important amongst other adolescents than amongst the British, it may provide hints as to how and what strategies can be employed to curb this reliance on material possessions amongst British youth – specifically those from low-income families. Indeed the extent of consumer knowledge amongst the adolescents, suggests that the solution is not simply a matter of media education; a drastic change in social perception is needed. Therefore, more work is needed to examine the formation of social perceptions so as to identify crucial stages whereby interventions may be successful. That is, by working with children from an earlier age, it may be possible to re-introduce personal and social values centered around factors other than consumption. This may help to remove adolescent self-esteem from the store shelves.

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APPENDIX B- Vignettes

1. JANE

Jane is a quiet girl; she doesn't talk a lot and keeps to herself. She is unfit and looks scruffy in her uniform. Outside of school her clothes are not fashionable and look old school. Jane often looks tired and she is almost always by herself, unless she is with her friend Jo. Jane's school work is suffering and teachers are worried she might fail her GCSEs but she doesn't care. During lessons Jane never speaks and when the teacher asks her a question she just stares at the floor even if she knows the correct answer to the question, she is too scared to get the wrong answer. One day, the sports teacher told Jane that she should join the basketball team because she is tall and would be good at it, to that Jane replied "Oh no sorry but I'm no good at sports, I would just make the team lose or something, I'm not as good as all the others". When the sports teacher asked her to come to one of the sessions next week, she agreed but then never turned up, even though she really wanted to.

2. FELIX

Felix is a popular guy; he's good looking, fit and fashionable. Some people have said that he is a bully. In the mornings, Felix takes a long time to prepare himself for school. He fixes his hair in a specific way and makes sure that all his clothes are neat and tidy. Outside of school, Felix's clothes are always in fashion and he always has the latest styles; he has all the latest and coolest brands and very rarely wears something that doesn't have a label. Out of all of his friends, Felix is the most popular and seems to be the best at everything: he is captain of the football team and never misses a practice – even if he's really ill. He wishes he could be Wayne Rooney!

The teachers at Felix's school are sure he will do well in his GCSEs because they have seen how hard he works. For example if there is a coursework due, Felix will often stay up late at night and lose sleep because he is working on it. One day the teacher handed Felix back his maths coursework and he got a C. He got really upset about this and was depressed for the next couple of days and started saying things like "I'm just no good at maths!"

3. AMY

Amy is a kind girl. She has quite a few friends and is always willing to help them if they need her advice or opinion. She doesn't bully people and very rarely talks behind someone's back – she prefers to say it face to face. Amy works hard at school and does well but does not let it get to her if she does poorly on an assignment. If there is a discussion in class, Amy will often say what she thinks, even if other people think it's silly. She normally does what she wants. People have tried to convince her that she would be a great netball player but she is not interested at all – "not for me coach" is what she says. Amy went to the same party that Felix went to and while her friends spent hours getting ready and deciding which clothes to wear, she simply put on the first thing in her cupboard and was ready to go. Most of her friends like to go shopping on the weekend, and spend hours in town trying to find the latest labels in fashion, but Amy will buy whatever she likes, even if it's not a popular label or the latest style.

APPENDIX C – Initial 73 scale items

1.I'm not good at anything (sports, school or other stuff)
2.There are some things that I am good at.
3.I can say that I have a skill
4. I am proud of my abilities/skills
5. There's nothing that I'm really good at.
6.I am happy with the way I look, I don't want to change anything about myself.
7 I hate the way I look.
8. I wish I was better looking
9 Having a girlfriend/boyfriend can make people feel like they look good.
10.I'm not as good looking as most people
11. When people look at me they probably think I'm fashionable.
12. I usually have the latest designer labels (names/brands).
13. I feel like fashion moves too quickly.
14. I can't keep up with all the latest fashions.
15. I wear a lot of named/branded clothes
16. I can't afford to dress like most other people my age.
17. I can't afford to wear labels/brands (named clothes)
18. When I look at the stuff I own, it's the same as most people have.
19. I wish I could wear more designer labels/brands
20. When my friends are wearing a label (brand) that I don't have, it makes me feel bad
21. When I go clothes shopping I only buy good brands (labels/names)
22. I don't wear clothes that are out of fashion
23. When I buy clothes, I don't care if they're in fashion or not.
24. I often change the way I dress to look like my friends.
25. I feel better about myself when I am wearing clothes with a label (name/brand)
26. It is very important for me to fit in with other people.
27. I sometimes change the way I act to be more like my friends.
28. I don't like being different from the main crowd.
29. When I'm with a group of people I often worry about the right things to talk about.
30. I often feel like I'm the odd one out of a group.
31. I feel like I'm different from other people
32. I fit in with the people around me.
33. My friends make me feel proud when I have achieved something.
34. My family make me feel proud when I have achieved something
35. It doesn't really matter if I do good or bad, no one really notices or says anything.
36. I have lots of good friends that I can go to for help.
37. When people describe me they would probably say I have a lot of friends.
38. I wish I had more friends.
39. It makes me uncomfortable when people look at me in the eyes when they talk to me.
40. When I walk around, I hold my head high and walk tall.
41. I am not a shy person.
42. I don't like to speak up in front of other people
43. People would describe me as a quiet person
44. I feel good when people notice me and pay attention to me
45. I don't like getting a lot of attention
46. I feel most comfortable when no one notices me.
47. I'm a happy person.
48. When things go wrong, I am usually the one that sees the positive side of things.
49. I often feel bad about things and feel depressed a lot.
50. People would probably describe me as a negative person
51. I feel good about myself.
52. I am happy with the person I am

53. I often feel like I do everything wrong.
54. Sometimes I feel that I am a bad person
55. When I look at other people, I feel as though I'm not good enough
56. As a person, I'm just as good as anyone else
57. Sometimes I wish I was someone else
58. I always try my best
59. I care about myself and what happens to me
60. I am a confident person
61. I'm not as confident as most people I know.
62. I hate it when I fail
63. I like to try new things,
64. There are many things I want to do, but am too scared that I'll mess up
65. I believe that I can do anything if I try
66. If someone takes the mick out of me, I think about it for a long time afterwards.
67. I care about what other people think of me.
68. I don't worry about what other people say about me.
69. If I do something silly, I feel embarrassed for a long time
70. People would probably describe me as a sociable and outgoing person
71. I make friends easily
72. When I'm talking to people, I'm often too scared to tell them what I think
73. If a group of people are talking, I find it hard to join the conversation

APPENDIX D – Response style options

1. "Circle the number that best describes how much you agree or disagree"

1	2	3	4	5
Disagree a lot	Disagree a little bit	Don't agree or disagree	Agree a little bit	Agree a lot

2. "Circle the option that best describes you"

Less Like me   More like me

3. "Circle the number that best describes you"

1	2	3	4
Not like me at all	Less like me	More like me	A lot like me

4. "Circle the number that best describes you"

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Not like me at all   A lot like me

5. "Make a mark *anywhere on the line* in the place that best describes you."

_____

Not like me at all   A lot like me

BRIEF FOR ALL YR. 10 STUDENTS COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Could teachers please relay the following points to all of the students before they start the questionnaire:

1. This research is being conducted in several schools across the UK and aims to find out how 15-16 year olds feel about themselves and the things they buy.
2. This is a personal questionnaire and should be completed individually and in silence.
3. Read the questions carefully and answer **all** questions HONESTLY (remember the last page!).
4. ALL the information given is completely confidential and anonymous. Place the completed questionnaire back in the envelope. (Please stress that no one that knows them, i.e. teachers, will see their answers and they do not put their names on the questionnaire).
5. Please fill in age and gender before starting.
6. This is not a test or a competition- there is **NO right or wrong answer** and there is no time limit.
7. THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR TAKING PART!

NB. There are 3 slightly different versions of this questionnaire so if the students comment on this, please ensure them that it makes no difference which one they complete.

Kind Regards

Katja Isaksen,

Manchester University

APPENDIX F – Item-total correlations for items within factors

Factor 1: Effects of social comparison: Cronbach's Alpha = .833

Item-Total Statistics

	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
62. If someone takes the mick out of me I think about it for a long time afterwards	.616	.804
54. When my friends are wearing a brand that I don't have, it makes me feel bad	.490	.823
21.When I look at other people I feel as though I'm not good enough	.633	.802
41. I often feel like I do everything wrong	.642	.800
37.When I'm with a group of people I often worry about the right things to talk about	.530	.818
58. I often feel like I'm the odd one out in a group	.545	.816
60. I often feel bad about things and feel depressed a lot	.612	.805

Factor 2: Brand Ownership: Cronbach's Alpha = .638

Item-Total Statistics

	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
35. I usually have the latest designer labels (names/brands)	.581	.522
71. I wear a lot of branded (named) clothes	.574	.518
44. When I go clothes shopping I only buy good brands	.398	.777
26. I feel better about myself when I am wearing clothes with a label (name/brand)	.474	.559

Factor 3: Self-evaluation: Cronbach's Alpha = .780

Item-Total Statistics

	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
32. I feel good about myself	.654	.712
61. I am happy with the person I am	.620	.720
27. I believe that I can do anything if I try	.381	.779
66. I am happy with the way I look, I don't want to change anything about myself	.514	.751
67. There are some things that I am good at	.463	.760
69. I am proud of my abilities/ skills	.541	.741

Factor 4: Social Ability/Extraversion: Cronbach's Alpha = .709

Item-Total Statistics

	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
56. People would probably describe me as a sociable and outgoing person	.584	.623
45. I make friends easily	.465	.663
7. When people describe me they would probably say I have a lot of friends	.453	.670
11. I fit in with the people around me	.429	.676
16. People would describe me as a quiet person	.429	.676
31. I am not a shy person	.340	.710

All 23 items of the Self-esteem scale: Cronbach's Alpha = .845

Item-Total Statistics

	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
32. I feel good about myself	.596	.832
61. I am happy with the person I am	.555	.833
27. I believe that I can do anything if I try	.316	.842
66. I am happy with the way I look, I don't want to change anything about myself	.402	.839
67. There are some things that I am good at	.401	.839
69. I am proud of my abilities/ skills	.410	.839
62. If someone takes the mick out of me I think about it for a long time afterwards	.523	.834
54. When my friends are wearing a brand that I don't have, it makes me feel bad	.306	.842
21.When I look at other people I feel as though I'm not good enough	.502	.835
41. I often feel like I do everything wrong	.562	.833
37.When I'm with a group of people I often worry about the right things to talk about	.370	.840
58. I often feel like I'm the odd one out in a group	.502	.835
60. I often feel bad about things and feel depressed a lot	.558	.832
26. I feel better about myself when I am wearing clothes with a label (name/brand)	.145	.850
35. I usually have the latest designer labels (names/brands)	.282	.844
44. When I go clothes shopping I only buy good brands	.203	.847
71. I wear a lot of branded (named) clothes	.417	.838
56. People would probably describe me as a sociable and outgoing person	.416	.838
45. I make friends easily	.457	.837
7. When people describe me they would probably say I have a lot of friends	.481	.837
11. I fit in with the people around me	.462	.838
16. People would describe me as a quiet person	.303	.843
31. I am not a shy person	.219	.847

APPENDIX G – Scree plot and structure matrix for final scale

1. *Scree Plot of final 23-item scale*

Scree Plot
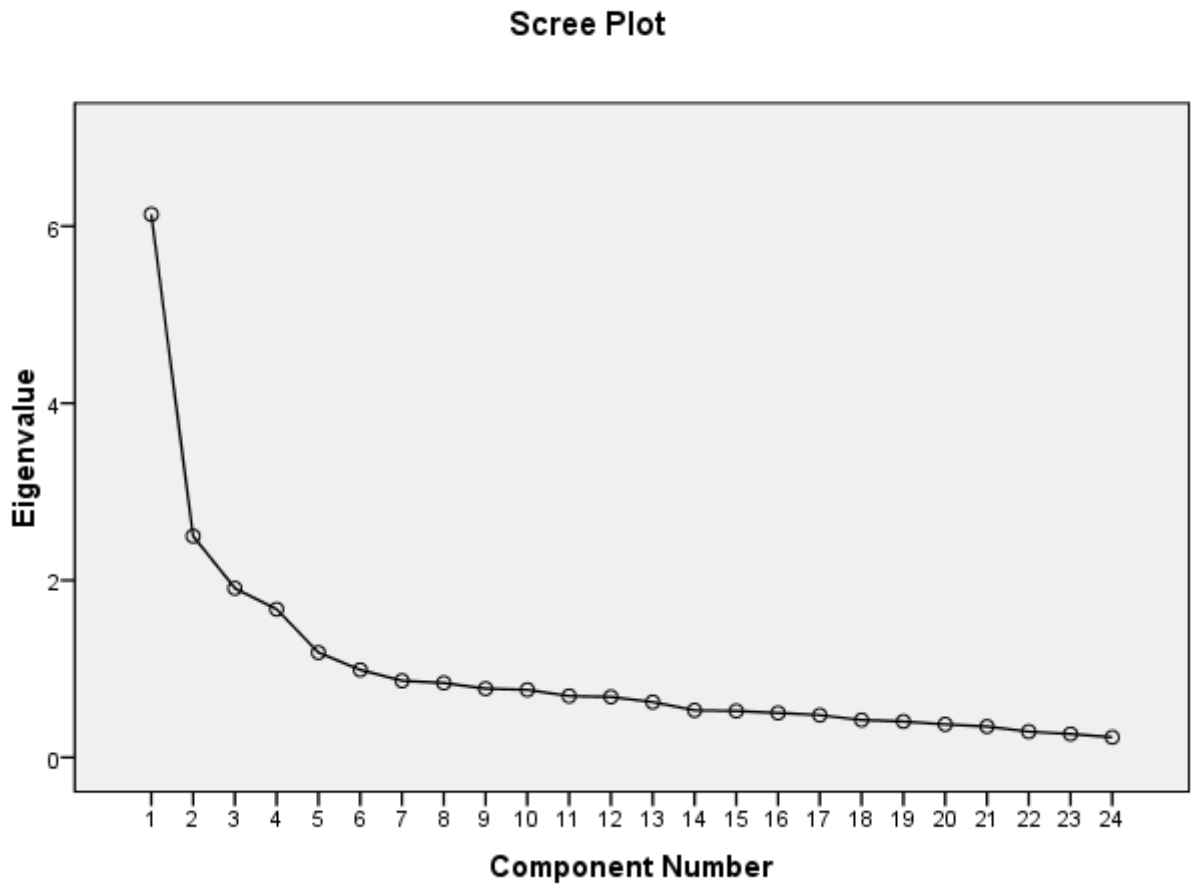
2. *Table of total variance explained by final four factor structure*

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings[a]
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	6.133	25.553	25.553	6.133	25.553	25.553	4.571
2	2.498	10.410	35.963	2.498	10.410	35.963	2.464
3	1.910	7.958	43.920	1.910	7.958	43.920	3.387
4	1.674	6.973	50.893	1.674	6.973	50.893	4.163

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. When components are correlated, sums of squared loadings cannot be added to obtain a total variance.

3. *Structure matrix of final 23-item scale*

Structure Matrix

	Component			
	Social Comparison Effects	Brand Ownership	Social Ability	Self-evaluation
62. If someone takes the mick out of me I think about it for a long time afterwards*	.753			
21.When I look at other people I feel as though I'm not good enough*	.743			
41. I often feel like I do everything wrong*	.731			
60. I often feel bad about things and feel depressed a lot*	.721			
58. I often feel like I'm the odd one out in a group*	.663			
37.When I'm with a group of people I often worry about the right things to talk about*	.647			
54. When my friends are wearing a brand that I don't have, it makes me feel bad*	.623			
71. I wear a lot of branded (named) clothes*		.820		
26. I feel better about myself when I am wearing clothes with a label (name/brand)*		.765		
35. I usually have the latest designer labels (names/brands)*		.725		
44. When I go clothes shopping I only buy good brands*		.671		
56. People would probably describe me as a sociable and outgoing person			-.771	
16. People would describe me as a quiet person*			-.634	
45. I make friends easily			-.623	
7. When people describe me they would probably say I have a lot of friends			-.569	
11. I fit in with the people around me			-.552	
31. I am not a shy person			-.533	
32. I feel good about myself	.420			-.779
69. I am proud of my abilities/ skills				-.727
61. I am happy with the person I am	.530			-.710
66. I am happy with the way I look, I don't want to change anything about myself				-.641
67. There are some things that I am good at				-.626
27. I believe that I can do anything if I try				-.554

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.

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APPENDIX H- Original and revised concurrent measures

1. Brief Fear of Negative Evaluations Scale (Leary, 1983)

a) Original
1. I worry about what other people will think of me even when I know it doesn't make any difference
2. I am unconcerned even if I know people are forming an unfavourable impression of me.
3. I am frequently afraid of other people noticing my shortcomings
4. I rarely worry about what kind of impression I am making on someone
5. I am afraid others will not approve of me.
6. I am afraid that people will find fault with me
7. Other people's opinions of me do not bother me.
8. When I am talking about someone, I worry about what they may be thinking about me.
9. I am usually worried about what kind of impression I make.
10. If I know someone is judging me, it has little effect on me.
11. Sometimes I think I am too concerned with what other people think of me.
12. I often worry that I will say or do the wrong things.

1= Not at all characteristic of me
2= Slightly characteristic of me
3= Moderately characteristic of me
4= Very characteristic of me
5= Extremely characteristic of me

b) Altered
1. I worry about what other people will think of me even when I know it doesn't make any difference
2. I'm not concerned even if I know people are forming a bad impression of me.
3. I am often afraid of other people noticing my weak points.
4. I don't often worry about what kind of impression I am making on someone
5. I am afraid others will not approve of me.
6. I am afraid that people will find fault with me
7. Other people's opinions of me don't bother me.
8. When I'm talking about someone, I worry about what they may be thinking about me.
9. I am usually worried about what kind of impression I make.
10. If I know someone is judging me, it has little effect on me.
11. Sometimes I think I am too concerned with what other people think of me.
12. I often worry that I will say or do the wrong things.

1= Not at all like me
2= A little like me
3= Kind of like me
4= very like me
5= extremely like me

2. *Harter's (1988) 'Global Self-Worth', from SPPA*

a) Original

Really true for me	Sort of true for me				Really true for me	Sort of true for me
☐	☐	Some teenagers are often disappointed with themselves	**BUT**	Other teenagers are pretty pleased with themselves	☐	☐
☐	☐	Some teenagers don't like the way they are leading their life	**BUT**	Other teenagers like the way they are leading their life	☐	☐
☐	☐	Some teenagers are happy with themselves most of the time	**BUT**	Other teenagers are often not happy with themselves	☐	☐
☐	☐	Some teenagers like the kind of person they are	**BUT**	Other teenagers often wish they were someone else	☐	☐
☐	☐	Some teenagers are very happy being the way they are	**BUT**	Other teenagers wish they were different.	☐	☐

b) Altered
1. Some teenagers are often disappointed with themselves
2. Some teenagers don't like the way they are leading their life
3. Some teenagers are happy with themselves most of the time
4. Some teenagers like the kind of person they are
5. Some teenagers are very happy being the way they are

1=Describes me very poorly
2=Describes me quite poorly
3=Describes me quite well
4=Describes me very well

3. Youth Materialism Scale (Goldberg et al., 2003)

a) Original
1. I'd rather spend time buying things, than doing almost anything else.
2. I would be happier if I had more money to buy more things for myself.
3. I have fun just thinking of all the things I own.
4. I really enjoy going shopping.
5. I like to buy things my friends have
6. When you grow up, the more money you have, the happier you are.
7. I'd rather not share my snacks with others if it means I'll have less for myself.
8. I would love to be able to buy things that cost lots of money.
9. I really like the kids that have very special games or clothes.
10. The only kind of job I want when I grow up is one that gets me a lot of money.

1= Disagree a lot
2=Disagree a little
3=Agree a little
4=Agree a lot

b) Altered
1. I'd rather spend time buying things, than doing almost anything else.
2. I would be happier if I had more money to buy more things for myself.
3. I have fun just thinking of all the things I own.
4. I really enjoy going shopping.
5. I like to buy things my friends have
6. When you grow up, the more money you have, the happier you are.
7. I'd rather not share my snacks with others if it means I'll have less for myself.
8. I would love to be able to buy things that cost lots of money.
9. I really like the kids that have the best games or clothes.
10. The only kind of job I want when I grow up is one that gets me a lot of money.

1= Disagree a lot
2= Disagree a little bit
3= Don't agree or disagree
4=Agree a little bit
5= Agree a lot

4. Self-Concept Clarity Scale (Campbell et al., 1996)

a) Original
1. My beliefs about myself often conflict with one another.
2. On one day I might have one opinion of myself and on another day I might have a different opinion.
3. I spend a lot of time wondering about what kind of person I really am.
4. Sometimes I feel that I am not really the person that I appear to be.
5. When I think about the kind of person I have been in the past, I'm not sure what I was really like.
6. I seldom experience conflict between the different aspects of my personality.
7. Sometimes I think I know other people better than I know myself.
8. My beliefs about myself seem to change very frequently.
9. If I were asked to describe my personality, my description might end up being different from one day to another day.
10. Even if I wanted to, I don't think I could tell someone what I'm really like.
11. In general, I have a clear sense of who I am and what I am.
12. It is often hard for me to make up my mind about things because I don't really know what I want.

1= Strongly disagree
2= Disagree
3= Neither agree or disagree
4=Agree
5= Strongly agree

b) Altered
1. My beliefs about myself often disagree with one another.
2. On one day I might have one opinion of myself and on another day I might have a different opinion.
3. I spend a lot of time wondering about what kind of person I really am.
4. Sometimes I feel that I am not really the person that I appear to be.
5. When I think about the kind of person I have been in the past, I'm not sure what I was really like.
6. I seldom experience conflict between the different aspects of my personality.
7. Sometimes I think I know other people better than I know myself.
8. My beliefs about myself seem to change very often.
9. If I was asked to describe my personality, my description may be different from one day to another day.
10. Even if I wanted to, I don't think I could tell someone what I'm really like.
11. In general, I have a clear sense of who I am and what I am.
12. It's often hard for me to make up my mind about things because I don't really know what I want.

1= Disagree a lot
2= Disagree a little bit
3= Don't agree or disagree
4=Agree a little bit
5= Agree a lot

5. *Short Version of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MC-1) (Strahan and Gerbasi, 1972)*

a) Original
1. I'm always willing to admit I make a mistake
2. I always try to practice what I preach
3. I never resent being asked to return a favour
4. I have nnever been irked when people expressed ideas very different form my own
5. I have never deliberately said something that hurt someone's feelings
6. I like to gossip at times
7. There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone
8. I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget
9. At times I have really insisted on having things my own way
10. There have been occasions when I felt like smashing things.

1=True
2= False

b) Altered
1. I am always willing to admit I make a mistake
2. I always try to practice what I preach
3. I never mind being asked to return a favour
4. I have never been annoyed when people have had ideas that are very different from my own
5. I have said something that hurt someone's feelings on purpose.
6. I like to gossip at times
7. There have been times when I took advantage of someone
8. I sometimes try to get even, rather than forgive and forget
9. At times I have really insisted on having things my own way
10. There have been times when I felt like smashing things.

1=True
2= False

6. Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (CSII; Bearden et al., 1989)

a) Original
1. I often consult other people to help choose the best alternative available from a product class.
2. If I want to be like someone, I often try to buy the same brands that they buy.
3. It is important that others like the products and brands that I buy.
4. To make sure I buy the right product or brand, I often observe what others are buying and using.
5. I rarely purchase the latest fashion styles until I am sure my friends approve of them.
6. I often identify with other people by purchasing the same products and brands they purchase.
7. If I have little experience with a product, I often ask my friends about the product.
8. When buying products, I generally purchase those brands that I think others will approve of.
9. I like to know what brands and products make good impressions on others.
10. I frequently gather information from friends or family about a product before I buy.
11. If other people can see me using a product, I often purchase the brand they expect me to buy.
12. I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase.

1=Strongly Agree
2=Agree
3=Neither agree nor disagree
4=Disagree
5=Strongly Disagree

b) Altered
1. I often ask other people to help me choose the best option available from a product class.
2. If I want to be like someone, I often try to buy the same brands that they buy.
3. It is important that others like the things and brands that I buy.
4. To make sure I buy the right brand, I often look at what others are buying and using.
5. I don't usually buy the latest fashion styles until I'm sure my friends will like them.
6. I often relate to other people by buying the same things and brands that they buy.
7. If there is something that I don't know a lot about, I usually ask my friends about it.
8. When buying things, I usually buy the brands that I think others will know and like.
9. I like to know what brands and things make a good impression on others.
10. I often get advice from friends or family about something before I buy it.
11. If other people can see me using something (like an mp3 player), I often buy the brand they expect me to buy.
12. I feel like I belong to a group when I buy the same things and brands that they have.

1= Disagree a lot
2= Disagree a little bit
3= Don't agree or disagree
4=Agree a little bit
5= Agree a lot

7. Need to Belong Scale (Leary et al., 2005)

a) Original Scale
1. If other people don't seem to accept me, I don't let it bother me.
2. I try hard not to do things that will make other people avoid or reject me.
3. I seldom worry about whether other people care about me.
4. I need to feel that there are people I can turn to in times of need.
5. I want other people to accept me
6. I do not like being alone.
7. Being apart from my friends for a long period of time does not bother me.
8. I have a strong need to belong
9. It bothers me a great deal when I am not included in other people's plans.
10. My feelings are easily hurt when I feel that others do not accept me.

1= Strongly disagree
2= Disagree
3= Neither agree or disagree
4=Agree
5= Strongly agree

b) Altered Scale
1. If other people don't seem to accept me, it doesn't bother me.
2. I try hard not to do things that will make other people avoid or reject me.
3. I don't worry about whether other people care about me.
4. I need to feel that there are people I can turn to in times of need.
5. I want other people to accept me
6. I do not like being alone.
7. If I am apart from my friends for a long time, it doesn't bother me.
8. I have a strong need to belong
9. It bothers me a lot when I am not included in other people's plans.
10. My feelings are easily hurt when I feel that others do not accept me.

1= Disagree a lot
2= Disagree a little bit
3= Don't agree or disagree
4=Agree a little bit
5= Agree a lot

Thank you for taking part in this survey. Please complete ALL questions by reading the statement and answering as instructed. Always choose the option which is most similar to the way you feel. Take your time to read and answer all the questions, there is <u>no time limit</u> and <u>no correct answer</u>. Write your age and gender before you begin. All your answers are anonymous so please be <u>HONEST</u>. When you have finished the questionnaire please put it back in the envelope and return it to the teacher.

Age:………   **Gender:** Male/ Female

INSTRUCTIONS:

Make a mark *anywhere* on the line in the place that best describes you

Example:

1. *I like to fill out surveys.*

————————————————————|————————

Not like me   *A lot like me*
at all

START:

1.   When I go clothes shopping I only buy good brands (labels/names).

————————————————————————————

Not like me   **A lot like me**
at all

2.   When I'm with a group of people I often worry about the right things to talk about.

————————————————————————

Not like me   **A lot like me**
at all

3.   I am happy with the person I am.

————————————————————————

Not like me   **A lot like me**
at all

4.   I often feel bad about things and feel depressed a lot.

————————————————————————

Not like me   **A lot like me**
at all

5. When my friends are wearing a brand/label that I don't have, it makes me feel bad.

            _____

Not like me   **A lot like me**
    at all

6. I often feel like I'm the odd one out of a group.

            _____

Not like me   **A lot like me**
    at all

7. People would describe me as a quiet person.

            _____

Not like me   **A lot like me**
    at all

8. I fit in with the people around me.

            _____

Not like me   **A lot like me**
    at all

9. I am not a shy person.

            _____

Not like me   **A lot like me**
    at all

10. I am proud of my abilities/skills

            _____

Not like me   **A lot like me**
    at all

11. I wear a lot of branded (named) clothes.

            _____

Not like me   **A lot like me**
    at all

12. There are some things that I am good at.

            _____

Not like me   **A lot like me**
    at all

13. When I look at other people, I feel as though I'm not good enough.

_____

Not like me   **A lot like me**
at all

14. I feel better about myself when I am wearing clothes with a label (name/brand).

_____

Not like me   **A lot like me**
at all

15. I make friends easily.

_____

Not like me   **A lot like me**
at all

16. People would probably describe me as a sociable and outgoing person.

_____

Not like me   **A lot like me**
at all

17. I often feel like I do everything wrong.

_____

Not like me   **A lot like me**
at all

18. I am happy with the way I look, I don't want to change anything about myself.

_____

Not like me   **A lot like me**
at all

19. I usually have the latest designer labels (names/brands).

_____

Not like me   **A lot like me**
at all

20. When people describe me they would probably say I have a lot of friends.

_____

Not like me   **A lot like me**
at all

21. I believe that I can do anything if I try.

_____

Not like me   **A lot like me**
   at all

22. I feel good about myself.

_____

Not like me   **A lot like me**
   at all

23. If someone takes the mick out of me, I think about it for a long time afterwards.

_____

Not like me   **A lot like me**
   at all