

Playing Along:
A Contextualised Study of
Children's Advertising Experiences

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PhD

The University of Edinburgh

2001

ABSTRACT

Much research addressing advertising to children has presented advertising as an omnipotent force and children as passive innocents struggling to attain proficiency at age-related stages. Further the child/ advertising relationship has generally been explored through decontextualised approaches, detached from the complexity and colour of children's lives. More recent work suggests the value for advertising research of looking beyond these narrow confines into the activity of child audiences, and the influences and motivations of their everyday lives.

This thesis explores the advertising experiences of children in Primary 7 and Secondary 1. It aims to provide a broader, richer, more contextualised understanding of children's interaction with advertising. It is hoped that it will inform debates about children and advertising and that it may have implications for public policy making and provide guidance for appropriate, socially responsible advertising to children.

Literature is reviewed on the current environment of children's relationship with advertising. Attention is then given to cognitive and effects based studies, followed by research into the context of children's everyday lives and new theoretical perspectives relating to their advertising experiences.

Employing an interpretive approach, qualitative methods and techniques were used to explore children's relationship with advertising from their own perspective. The fieldwork was carried out with 39 boys and girls drawn from a playscheme and three different schooling locations. Individual 'lifeworld' interviews were carried out in the children's homes. These were autodriven by informants through photographs they had taken of their bedrooms and a week in their lives. Children's advertising experiences were subsequently explored through 13 small group discussions based on existing friendship relationships.

Far from being passive, the children were actively engaged with advertising and adopted a purposeful and often critical approach to its consumption. The lifeworld interviews revealed that the children shared two existential and dialectical concerns based on the needs for autonomy and affiliation. While the autonomy theme comprised the children's focus on mastering, controlling and criticising, affiliation involved their emphasis on bonding, belonging and becoming. Together these concerns were found to motivate and shape the children's everyday experiences and the many advertising roles they assumed. The thesis concludes with a discussion of the implications of the study for public policy makers and advertising practitioners and suggests possible avenues for future research.

DECLARATION:

This thesis is my own work and has been composed entirely by me.

Alice de la F. W. Bartholomew

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>List of tables</i> _____	viii
<i>List of figures</i> _____	ix
<i>List of plates</i> _____	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i> _____	xi

Part One: Review of the Literature

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION _____	1
1. Introduction _____	1
2. Genesis of research _____	2
2. Primary research _____	4
3. Structure of the thesis _____	5

CHAPTER TWO

CHILDREN AND ADVERTISING: SETTING THE SCENE _____	6
1. Introduction _____	6
2. Childhood and advertising _____	6
3. Commercialisation of childhood _____	8
4. Children's Market _____	12
4.1 Children as a future market _____	12
4.2 Children as primary users in their own right _____	15
4.3 An influential market with growing power over parental choices _____	18
5. Concerns about children and advertising _____	20
6. Cognitive development and advertising research _____	25
7. Conclusion _____	27

CHAPTER THREE

CHILDREN AND ADVERTISING: THE EFFECTS LITERATURE _____	30
1. Introduction _____	30

2. <i>Attention to advertisements</i>	31
3. <i>Distinguishing between programmes and advertisements</i>	36
4. <i>Understanding of advertising intent</i>	41
5. <i>Attitudes towards advertising</i>	47
6. <i>Development of cognitive defences</i>	50
7. <i>Memory for advertising</i>	53
8. <i>Behavioural effects</i>	59
8.1 <i>Product preferences and purchases</i>	59
8.2 <i>Purchase Requests</i>	65
9. <i>Limitations of the traditional approach</i>	66
9.1 <i>A question of methodology</i>	67
9.2 <i>Acontextual and asocial</i>	67
9.3 <i>Assumed vulnerability</i>	68
9.4 <i>Passive consumers</i>	69
9.5 <i>Short termist</i>	69
10. <i>Conclusion</i>	70

CHAPTER FOUR

<i>CHILDREN AND ADVERTISING: BROADENING THE CONTEXT</i>	73
1. <i>Introduction</i>	73
2. <i>Meaning of childhood</i>	74
2.1 <i>Social and cultural changes: the reconfiguration of family life</i>	74
2.1.1 <i>Getting older younger</i>	75
2.1.2 <i>Spending power</i>	77
2.1.3 <i>Changing time frames</i>	77
2.1.4 <i>The move from parents to peers</i>	78
2.2 <i>Rethinking development</i>	79
2.2.1 <i>Beyond Piaget</i>	80
2.2.2 <i>A practitioner perspective of development</i>	87
3. <i>Meaning of possessions</i>	89
3.1 <i>Theoretical perspectives on the meaning of ‘things’</i>	90
3.2 <i>Empirical evidence relating to the meaning of ‘things’</i>	94
3.3 <i>Meaning of things in childhood</i>	95

3.4 Bedroom culture _____	100
4. Meaning of the media _____	101
4.1 Changes in the media landscape _____	102
4.1.1 Individualisation/ socialisation _____	106
4.1.2 Increasing choice and immediacy _____	107
4.1.3 Age compression: power and literacy _____	108
4.1.4 Interactivity _____	110
4.2 The active audience in media research _____	111
4.2.1 Media uses and gratifications of adults _____	113
4.2.2 Media uses and gratifications of children _____	114
5. Meaning of advertising _____	119
5.1 A meaning based model of advertising _____	120
5.2 Reader response theory _____	123
5.3 Advertising literacy _____	127
5.3.1 Adults' active advertising experiences _____	131
5.3.2 Children's active advertising experiences _____	136
6. Conclusion _____	142

Part Two: Methodology

CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY _____	145
1. Introduction _____	145
2. Objectives _____	145
3. Research approach _____	149
3.1 Paradigm selection _____	149
3.2 An ethnographic approach _____	153
3.3 Researching children _____	158
3.3.1 Cognitive Issues _____	159
3.3.2 Power relations and reflexivity _____	161
4. Data collection methods _____	162
4.1 Individual 'life world' interviews _____	162
4.1.1 Autodriving: The 'Photo Diary' _____	163

4.2 Friendship group discussions on advertising	166
4.3 Pilot study	170
4.3.1 Child selected advertising material	171
4.3.2 Research setting	172
4.3.3 Group composition	173
4.4 Sample	174
5. <i>Process of the fieldwork</i>	175
5.1 Recruitment process	175
5.1.1 The first approach: The playscheme	176
5.1.2 The second approach: Schooling locations	178
5.2 Selecting friendship groups in schools	180
5.3 Gaining access and building rapport	182
5.4 Procedures: Photo Diary and Individual Interviews	183
5.5 Procedures: 'Ad Lists' and friendship group discussions	185
6. <i>Analysis of the data</i>	189
7. <i>Evaluation of the study</i>	192
8. <i>Conclusion</i>	195

Part Three: The Main Study

CHAPTER SIX

<i>ENTERING THE LIVES OF THE CHILDREN</i>	197
1. <i>Introduction</i>	197
2. <i>Lifeworlds through the lens</i>	197
3. <i>Into the bedroom</i>	199
4. <i>Engaged lifestyles</i>	202

CHAPTER SEVEN

<i>AUTONOMY</i>	205
1. <i>Introduction</i>	205
2. <i>Mastering</i>	206
2.1 <i>Skill Builders</i>	206
2.2 <i>Winning</i>	209

2.3 Mastering possessions	214
2.2.1 Collecting	218
3. Controlling	222
3.1 Money and saving	227
4. Criticising	233
5. Conclusion	237

CHAPTER EIGHT

AUTONOMY AND ADVERTISING EXPERIENCES	239
1. Introduction	239
2. Masters	239
2.1 Meaning masters	240
2.2 Style Masters	246
2.2.1 Style creation	246
2.2.3 Musical styles	250
2.2.2 Humorous styles	253
2.2.4 National styles	255
2.3 Performance masters	256
3. Controllers	259
3.1 Empowered viewers	260
3.2 Ad Avoiders	261
3.3 Independent consumers	263
4. Critical onlookers	267
4.1 Precocious Planners	267
4.1.2 Aims of advertisers	268
4.1.3 Targeting	269
4.2 Reality questioners	272
4.3 Tactical technicians	275
5. Conclusion	279

CHAPTER NINE

AFFILIATION	282
1. Introduction	282

2. Bonding	283
2.1 Parents to peers: The importance of friendship	283
2.2 The nature of friendships	284
3. Belonging	290
3.1 Belonging through possessions	291
3.1.1 Sporting links	292
3.1.2 Brand belonging	294
3.1.3 Collecting communities	298
3.2 Media and technology connections	302
3.2.1 Screen media	302
3.2.2 Music	307
3.2.3 Communication media and technologies	310
4. Becoming	312
4.1 Transitions	313
4.2 Aspirational maturity	315
4.3 Appearance	321
4.4 Scanning the opposite sex	323
4.4.1 Sexual exploration	323
4.4.2 Falling in love	324
4.5 Gender identity	327
4.5.1 Gender identity and Possessions	328
4.5.2 Gender Identity and the Media	331
5. Conclusion	333

CHAPTER TEN

AFFILIATION AND ADVERTISING EXPERIENCES	335
1. Introduction	335
2. Bonders	335
2.1 The move from parents to peers	336
2.2 Ad Players	337
2.3 Gendered ad bonding: Storytellers and Experiencers	339
3. Belongers	343
3.1 Ad Talkers	343

3.2 Membership Maintainers	346
3.2.1 Group definition	347
3.2.2 Experiential togetherness	348
3.2.3 Membership mantras, melodies and mimicry	349
3.3 Status Seekers	351
3.3.1 Social positioning	352
3.3.2 Ad Acquisition	354
4. <i>Becomers</i>	357
4.1 Sensitive shifters	357
4.2 Adult Aspirers	359
4.3 Social Scanners	360
4.4 Gender Defenders	364
5. <i>Conclusion</i>	369

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CONCLUSIONS	371
1. <i>Introduction</i>	371
2. <i>Contribution of research</i>	372
3. <i>The many roles of children's advertising experience</i>	372
4. <i>Implications for advertising practitioners</i>	377
5. <i>Implications for educators and policy makers</i>	380
6. <i>Lessons and future directions</i>	382

BIBLIOGRAPHY	385
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APPENDIX A	414
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APPENDIX B	415
------------	-----

APPENDIX C	416
------------	-----

APPENDIX D	417
------------	-----

APPENDIX E	418
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LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1: Children aged 0-14 in UK:	15
Table 2.2: Average Weekly Pocket Money 1995 to 2000	16
Table 2.3: Children's Total Income 1995 to 2000	17
Table 2.4: Children's Spending Power	18
Table 2.5: Share of sales gained by 'nagging' (%)	20
Table 2.6: Piaget's stages of cognitive development	26
Table 3.1: Attention to advertisements	32
Table 3.2: Distinguishing between programmes and advertisements	40-41
Table 3.3: Understanding of advertising intent	43-44
Table 3.4: Memory for advertising	55-56
Table 3.5: Processing deficits and task factors affecting the young	57
Table 3.6: Effect of food ads on preferences/purchases	61-62
Table 4.1. Erikson's psychosocial stages of development	84
Table 4.2: Percentage of children with media in the home	103
Table 4.3: Percentage of children with media in bedroom	105
Table 4.4: Categorisation of Advertising Uses and Gratifications	135
Table 5.1: Basic beliefs of alternative inquiry paradigms	150
Table 5.2: Form of access in schooling locations	179
Table 5.3: Overview of the process of the fieldwork	188
Table 5.4: Transcription Conventions	190
Table 6.1: Percentage of children with TV in bedroom	201
Table 7.1: Average pocket money according to age and school	228
Table 7.2: Average pocket money according to age and gender	228

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.1: A meaning based model of advertising	122
Figure 4.2: A model of advertising literacy	130

LIST OF PLATES

Plate 6.1: Posters as wallpaper	200
Plate 6.2: 'Keep out' sign	202
Plate 7.1: Football skills	207
Plate 7.2 Golf swing	207
Plate 7.3 South Park 1	209
Plate 7.4 South Park 2	209
Plate 7.5 Certificates	210
Plate 7.6 Trophy shelf	210
Plate 7.7 Games console	213
Plate 7.8 Games pictures	213
Plate 7.9 Sports paraphernalia	215
Plate 7.10 Media possessions	215
Plate 7.11 Cuddly collection	219
Plate 7.12 Star Wars items	219
Plate 7.13 Bike independence	223
Plate 7.14 Bus travel	223
Plate 7.15 Part time jobs	225
Plate 7.16 Pet owners	225
Plate 7.17 Realistic TV	234
Plate 7.18 Game realism	234
Plate 9.1 Football friends	285
Plate 9.2 Best friends	285
Plate 9.3 Football magazines	293
Plate 9.4 Football posters	293
Plate 9.5 Adidas bags	295

Plate 9.6 Branded clothes	295
Plate 9.7 Nail polish collection	299
Plate 9.8 Beanie collection	299
Plate 9.9 TV as friend	305
Plate 9.10 'Sleepover' horror	305
Plate 9.11 Dance routines	308
Plate 9.12 Pop idols	308
Plate 9.13 Jack Ryder shrine	315
Plate 9.14 Drinking shandy	315
Plate 9.15 Motorbikes	318
Plate 9.16 Magazines	318
Plate 9.17 'Six pack'	322
Plate 9.18 Appearance	322
Plate 9.19 The female body 1	324
Plate 9.20 The female body 2	324
Plate 9.21 Dolls	330
Plate 9.22 Warhammer	330

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This has been a long journey and many people have helped, encouraged and cajoled me along the way. Firstly, I would like to extend a special note of thanks to Stephanie O'Donohoe for providing more support than could be expected of any doctoral supervisor. Her patience, inspiration and good counsel have helped me along every step of the way, and her friendship has been greatly valued.

I am also grateful to the Department of Business Studies for providing me with a teaching scholarship, the Development Trust for assisting with photographic costs and Jake Ansell for 'finding' resources to cover part of the onerous transcription task. Other members of the department also deserve my acknowledgement. My second supervisor Dave Marshall has provided very useful feedback at crucial stages in the project. The past and current staff in the Business Studies Office have provided friendly assistance throughout, and Phil White has always been on hand with the offer of lunch and libation.

To the children who took part, and the parents and wider families who were willing to let me invade their homes, I am very grateful. My thanks also go out to all the teachers and playscheme organisers who greeted the project with enthusiasm and assisted so generously with some of the organisational aspects of the fieldwork.

Clare Thomson, my office companion, has been a complete 'star'. Her photo editing skills, supplies of chocolate and good humour were greatly appreciated during the final stages of the project. I also wish to thank all the other postgraduates who have spent their days at 5 Buccleuch Place and have given their friendship and encouragement.

Last, but by no means least, my family and friends have stood by me through the whole process providing emotional and financial support. In particular, Jim Strang and my brother Johnny Bartholomew have graciously withstood the agonies of sharing their lives with my PhD. To them all I extend my deepest thanks and love.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Some of the adverts are made for children, because children are more intelligent than adults.... It isn't because adults are brainy, it's because children are seeing more in the adverts, they think, 'oh well, that's that, why don't we compare it with Ariel Ultra?', stuff like that. With grown-ups, they just take one look at it and go 'oh no, we'll just settle for Ariel, we'll just settle with ours'. With the children, they actually look at it and compare it, things like that.

(Girl, 8, cited in Buckingham, 1993)

1. Introduction

"Vulnerable"..... "innocent"..... "passive"..... "naive"..... "powerless"..... "in need of protection" "greatly affected". The language used to describe children in the arena of advertising has often presented an emotive picture of a meek child at the mercy of the powerful forces of advertising.

The research agenda since the early 1970s has generally assumed that there are problems when children see advertising, and that it is a case of advertiser as seducer child as innocent (Young, 1990). This perspective of presumed vulnerability arises from the marketing and psychology disciplines which are couched in the neo-positivist (Ozanne and Hudson, 1989) and behaviourist tradition (Buckingham, 1993). In this light the study of children and advertising has been dominated by experimental methods and laboratory based approaches. Further the use of linear sequential models of influence and the dominance of effects research (Bjurstrom, 1994) has tended to see children as reactive agents responding passively to ads.

The emphasis, thus, has been on what advertising does to children and there has been little consideration the child's perspective or the relevance of sociocultural context. While the dominance of this perspective has been important in ensuring the protection of young children under the age of eight years, it seems less relevant to older children and teenagers who emerge as increasingly advertising literate (Ritson and Elliott, 1999). Further as Roedder John (1999) has suggested there may be more positive aspects of advertising to consider in terms of its role in children's everyday lives.

This thesis presents a qualitative exploration of children's experience of advertising as part of their broader life worlds. In particular it aims to enhance current understanding by providing a "thick" (Geertz, 1973), richer, more contextualised description of their experiences. Further it aims to provide an alternative way of seeing the relationship between children and advertising. Mick and Buhl (1992: 317) have noted that "to advance theory and research we must look on advertising more thoroughly through the consumer's eyes". This study adopts a child centred perspective in which the eyes of the child provide the focus for further understanding.

2. Genesis of research

The research stemmed from observation of children I came across in my everyday life, a more personal reflection on my own childhood, and an exploration of the literature. Firstly, my observations led to a disbelief that the depiction of the vulnerable child was entirely consistent with the image of children I had garnered. Sightings of pre-teens hanging out on the street doing the Tango 'slap' or imitating Trebor Bassett's Mr Soft hardly seemed passive. The origin was also self reflexive in that the picture portrayed of children and advertising had little coherence with my own memories of childhood. I remembered hours spent learning and performing jingles, prolonged attempts to master the KiaOra jump, and an aesthetic attachment to a huge tobacco poster which proudly lived on my bedroom wall for several years despite my status as a

non-smoker. If these were normal interactions with advertising in the 1980s, why should the millennium child be perceived so differently?

From these reflections I began to question whether 'real' children and their perspective had been somehow overlooked in the abundant literature that had explored the subject of children and advertising. These reflections were largely confirmed by an initial examination of review papers followed by a more thorough investigation of individual studies. Adler et al (1980) noted in an early review of the literature that much research in the field has been concerned with establishing evidence of negative 'effects'. This seemed to be enhanced by the narrow perspective on children's inabilities and the application of acontextual approaches. Indeed the children in these studies emerged as isolated individuals, subjected to experimental conditions and tested according to a range of abstract message variables. Wider life experiences and other contextual elements were notably absent from these studies, indeed as Buttle (1991: 97) has argued, studies of individual effects have provided an impoverished model of humanity as they:

...conceive of individuals as islands of cognitive and affective responses, unconnected to a social world, detached from culture, removed from history and biography.

Thus, the review was broadened to allow consideration of contextual aspects, and further illumination was drawn from the growing body of research into adults as active consumers of advertising. Mick and Buhl's (1992) meaning based study of the advertising experiences of three Danish brothers was a source of considerable inspiration. The focus on the informants' own perspective and existential concerns through the use of life history interviews, and the notion that social and cultural context has an impact on the way advertising is experienced, stimulated my thinking. Mick and Buhl's work and emerging advertising literacy theories supported casting the net further to incorporate children's wider life worlds and sociocultural experiences. Thus, literature was incorporated

relating to the child in society, the role of important possessions and the use of media in their lives.

Initially the intention was to examine the development of children's relationship with advertising from the age of 7 to 14. However, given children's rapid development there seemed to be more to gain by focusing on a narrower age group. The literature indicated that one age group might provide particularly fertile ground for future research: the pre-teens. This specific group has been the subject of increasing commercial interest (Publicis, 1998; Gray, 2000). Further the transition from primary to secondary school at this stage made a closer exploration of this age group particularly intriguing.

2. Primary research

The aim of the study was to examine the relationship between children's advertising experiences and their broader life world experiences through focusing on boys and girls as they move from primary to secondary school.

Following the literature review the primary research was carried out in Edinburgh between August 1998 and June 1999 and focused on 39 children in the last year of primary and the first year of secondary school. Children were drawn from a summer playscheme and three different schooling locations to provide a diversity of sociocultural experience.

Individual interviews and friendship group discussions were employed. The appropriateness of projective techniques for children (Rook, 2001) combined with a personal interest in photography led to the employment of the photoelicitation technique (Heisley and Levy, 1991). Thus, in the first phase all the children completed "Photo Diaries" involving pictures of their bedrooms and a week in their lives. Individual 'lifeworld' interviews were carried out in children's homes, and these were driven by the photographs they had taken. In the next stage 13 single sex friendship groups were carried out. These focused

on the children's experiences of advertising including the description of advertisements they remembered, a creative task, and discussion of magazine ads they had collected before the group session.

3. Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into three main sections focusing on the review of the literature, the consideration of methodology, and the presentation of the analysis. In the first part Chapter Two sets the scene and considers the increasing commercialisation of childhood, the attractions of the children's market, concerns about children and advertising and the application of cognitive development theories. Chapter Three reviews the empirical work into the cognitive, affective and behavioural effects of advertising on children including issues such as attention to advertising and understanding of persuasive intent. Consideration is also given to the limitations of traditional approaches. Chapter Three takes an active and contextual perspective by exploring the complexity of children's lives and advertising experiences. Attention is given to the changing meaning of childhood, the role of possessions, relationships with the media, and active perspectives on children and advertising. Turning to the second part Chapter Five describes and evaluates the adoption of an interpretive, broadly ethnographic approach and explains the methods and techniques which were utilised during the study. In the last section Chapter Six introduces the analysis and invites the reader into the lifeworlds of the children. Chapters Seven and Eight explore the children's existential concern for autonomy through the dimensions of mastering, controlling and criticising. These are then considered in terms of the children's advertising experiences. Chapters Nine and Ten similarly explore the children's concern for affiliation through the emerging dimensions of bonding, belonging and becoming. Advertising experiences are then considered within these same domains. Finally Chapter Eleven concludes the thesis by summarising the findings, discussing implications for both practitioners and public policy makers, and suggesting avenues for future research.

Part One: Review of the Literature

CHAPTER TWO

CHILDREN AND ADVERTISING: SETTING THE SCENE

1. Introduction

This chapter provides a foundation for later analysis by setting the scene for the subject of children and advertising. The emergence of 'childhood' and the ubiquity of advertising are discussed, followed by a broader consideration of the commercialisation of children's lives. This is followed by an examination of the attractions of the children's market in terms of children as a future market, as primary users in their own right, and as an influential market with power over parental choices. The chapter then turns to public debate surrounding advertising and children and discusses current rules and regulations and the perceived vulnerability of children. Finally, consideration is given to the use of cognitive development theory in advertising research highlighting the Piagetian framework and information processing approaches.

2. Childhood and advertising

The segmentation of the early years of life into specific life stages, such as childhood and adolescence, is a relatively recent development in Western technological societies. In medieval Europe there were only three phases: infancy, maturity and senility. Indeed the 'psychology' at the time was to attend to no differences other than size between the young and the old, with the young conceived as 'adults in miniature' (Aries, 1962).

Over the years the emergence of the life stages of childhood and adolescence have been fuelled by the prolongation of formal schooling, the delaying of young people's

entrance into adult occupations, and the growing consciousness of the juvenile delinquent (Peterson, 1996). However, this life stage distinction was also enhanced by the growth in advertisers' appeals to a separate 'youth market', particularly in Victorian times (Demos and Demos, 1972). During this era emerging recognition of the preciousness of childhood helped ensure that children's goods expanded with other markets. In addition childhood was increasingly characterised by specific behavioural traits and products. As a result, this vivid image of a separate domain of childhood became standard in both the late Victorian arts and product appeals (Kline, 1993).

In the current environment, marketers' interest in children is growing. Children are described as living in the "age of marketing" (Kline, 1993) and their lives are closely associated with consumerism:

Nor can we find a better cultural forum than childhood to reveal the hidden dynamics of global promotional communication...the rise of multinational children's industries means children everywhere are becoming the targets of these promotional communications. (Kline, 1995:110-111)

This targeting of children is highlighted by the ubiquitous presence of global brands such as Nike, Coke and McDonalds, and the extensive segmentation of the audience with terms such as 'I-generation' (Philips, 2000), 'super youth', 'Tweenies', and 'Tweens' (Publicis, 1998) regularly applied. However, it is perhaps in the pervasiveness of advertising that the focus on children has become most apparent.

Today, in the United States, it is estimated that more than \$2 billion is spent annually on advertising directed at children, over 20 times spending levels ten years ago (Reese, 1998). In the United Kingdom advertising investment in children's programmes alone amounted to £110 million with toy manufacturers Hasbro, Mattel, and Character Group all spending over £7 million on the genre for the 12 months to March 2000 (Admap, 2000).

With high levels of commercial spending children's worlds, like those of adults (O'Donoghue, 1997), are increasingly saturated by advertising. Estimation of children's exposure has generally been considered in terms of the number of television commercials viewed. Such estimates are at best an inexact process derived from total TV viewing (Gunter and Furnham, 1998) and inevitably underestimate the total number of ads seen in other highly visible media such as billboards and posters. However, they nevertheless suggest the growth and current ubiquity of advertising in children's lives. In an early review of the children and advertising literature Adler et al (1980) approximated that the average American child viewed some 20,000 TV commercial messages each year, or just over 3 hours of TV advertising per week. Some ten years ago the average number of TV ads viewed between the ages of 2 and 11 years was placed at about 40,000 per year (Comstock and Paik, 1991). More recently practitioners have judged child viewing levels of TV ads to have reached a level of about 2,000 per week by American children. In Britain it is estimated that children see about 1,000 per week (Mathews, 1995). Despite the lower estimation of TV ad viewing for children in Britain, the figures still suggest very high levels of exposure, especially when other media and avenues for reaching children are considered.

3. Commercialisation of childhood

The notion that the commercial world is intruding too far into childhood... merits very serious consideration (Stanbrook, 1999: 4)

These words from the Director of the Food Advertising Unit suggest growing recognition, even from those within the advertising industry, of the increasing commercialisation of children's lives. Certainly the advertising and marketing industries have investigated a diverse and novel range of avenues for reaching the youth audience in recent years. While some of these rely on new media, many are simply more innovative ways of communicating with children in their everyday lives. As Watts (1999) has commented advertising and promotion to children is no longer just about a choice between television and comics but also includes a diverse

array of new approaches such as the internet, mail order, packaging, merchandising and the playground.

While the decision making process for practitioners has become more complex, what is also clear is that the proliferation of new promotional approaches has also contributed to the increasing commercialisation of childhood. Some of the most popular of these include in-school promotion, licensing and character merchandising, celebrity endorsements, kids clubs, and product placements. For example, in the UK toy market which is currently valued at around £1 billion, licensed products account for about 28% of toys on sale and 83% of action figures (Marshall and Ffelan, 1999). Popular children's characters are employed to sell a wide variety of products. In the food sector Heinz has heavily invested in a number of enduring characters such as Thomas the Tank Engine, Noddy, Sooty, Barbie and Action Man. Likewise KP McVitie's has utilised a series of licensed promotions based on classics such as Tom and Jerry, and more topical characters such as the Goosebumps books and TV series (Hardcastle, 1997).

Perhaps the most controversial and rapidly growing form of commercialisation is that of in-school promotion. Nevertheless little research has been carried out into the extent of marketing practices in schools and their effects are not well known (Richards et al, 1998). It is evident, however, that in the changing climate of advertising, the promotional battleground includes the classroom as well as the TV screen (Gray, 1999). One such venture into the promotional battleground, the launch of Channel One in America in 1990 generated widespread and continuing public debate. The programme is a 10 minute broadcast with 2 minutes of advertising aimed at middle and high school children. In exchange for delivering the programme to students on at least 90% of school days, participating schools receive a variety of telecommunications equipment (Brand and Greenberg, 1994).

Richards et al (1998) have drawn attention to the popularity of marketing practices in American schools including and beyond Channel One. They identify five basic types of marketing practices that have raised concerns. Firstly, direct advertising in

schools, that is the presentation of traditional forms of advertising in school settings¹. Secondly, the provision of free or discounted products including product samples, coupons, proof-of-purchase vouchers, and in-school giveaways². Thirdly, curricular involvement with brand identification, in which companies distribute brochures, lesson plans, videos, films, software, and direct character demonstrations in class³. Fourthly, the direct sale of products through schools, extending from vending machines to other areas, in particular the cafeteria⁴. Finally, the implementation of fund-raising activities in schools⁵.

British children have also faced increasing commercialisation within the school context. Indeed the National Consumer Council estimates expenditure on marketing to schools at £300 million annually (MacIndoe, 1999). Many different forms of commercial activities exist. For example a number of companies have introduced incentive voucher programmes such as Tesco's Computers for Schools scheme. Rupert Murdoch's News International teamed up with Walkers Crisps in a Free Books for Schools promotion. The promotion, which won the backing of the Department of Education, encouraged schools to collect coupons from News International papers and Walkers crisps in exchange for books (Gray, 1999). In a similar promotional venture the 'Maths Stuff for Schools' scheme was set up by The Mirror and United Biscuits to provide schools with free Maths equipment in exchange for tokens collected from Mirror newspapers and United Biscuits products (Wilkinson, 1999). Other approaches have included activity sponsorship, as in Procter and Gamble's sponsorship of an in-school 'three-on-three' basketball programme (Gray, 1999) and the distribution of 'School Cards'. These free postcards are available for advertising or sponsorship and are currently present in

¹ The authors draw attention to a variety of examples including Channel One (which is viewed in 350,000 classrooms, in 12000 schools across America), selling of advertising space on athletes' warm-up suits, placement of ads on the sides of school buses.

² For example Nike's provision of new athletic shoes to sports teams in schools, and provision of free stick-on tattoos and textbook covers that display corporate logos (like Calvin Klein's "CK").

³ They highlight certain practices such as Kellogg's publication of nutrition posters depicting Rice Krispies cereal boxes, and McDonald's provision of free school visits from the character Ronald McDonald to talk about self-esteem.

⁴ They note, among other practices, Taco Bell's presence in about 3000 school cafeterias as of 1994, Pizza Hut's presence in 4500 schools as of 1994, and established in-school sales by Kentucky Fried Chicken, Church's Fried Chicken, Dairy Queen, Otis Spunkmeyer cookies, and Dunkin' Donuts.

1000 schools, reaching approximately 1.4 million secondary pupils (MacIndoe, 1999).

A number of companies in Britain have targeted lessons more directly. Gray (1999) has highlighted the activities of companies like Unilever in their promotion of the margarine brand Stork through a 'Make it, Bake it' programme developed to encourage baking in home economics lessons. The programme featured branded packs offering advice on baking and was endorsed by the National Association of Teachers of Home Economics and Technology. Similarly Lloyds TSB launched the 'Lloyds TSB Live!' programme for 11 to 16 years olds. The programme aimed to explore the role of technology in creating and rerecording music through an interactive CD ROM and a 'music bus' that toured schools to offer workshops for children. Perhaps one of the most successful, and widely publicised, school media has been Jazzy Books which supplies schools with free exercise books, on the condition that these texts carry advertising on their covers and on a number of inside pages. Since its launch in 1996 Jazzy Books has grown significantly and the company's reach to date is claimed to be over 2 million children (Gray, 1999).

Certainly a wide range of in-school promotions exist but some forms may be considered more controversial and invasive than others. It would appear that the in-school sales of consumer products may be judged less worrying to parents and other concerned bodies than the use of corporate educational materials that are embedded with subtle industry-supported messages (Richards et al, 1998). However, controversial or otherwise the examples provided demonstrate not only the growth of high profile schemes within schools but also the tacit support which is often provided by government to creeping commercialisation. Targeting children in this way seems to be less off-limits than in the past. This suggests a fundamental shift with sectors of society regarding children as able and ready to cope with such commercial advances. Researchers in America have begun to examine the cognitive and

⁵ The authors give examples such as Campbell Soup Co.'s establishment of a "Labels for Education" programme, and Microsoft Corporation's offer to schools of Family Technology Nights.

attitudinal effects of these embedded promotional tactics within school⁶, but it is already apparent that with governmental support commercial messages are no longer confined to traditional avenues but increasingly take many forms and permeate most of the waking hours of children.

Clearly the advertising and marketing industries have found the young impossible to resist and commercialisation is well established in children's lives. Closer consideration will be given to the temptations and allure of child consumers to advertisers in the following section. Particular attention will be paid to the attractions of the children's market in terms of its size and dimensions.

4. Children's Market

McNeal (1987, 1992) explains the increase in child targeted communications in post-war years by reference to three main factors. Firstly, he considers children as a 'future market', in which light childhood is regarded as the basis of lifelong habits, formative brand images and loyalties. Secondly, he sees children as an 'influential market' with growing power to influence parental choices. Thirdly, he describes children as 'primary users' in their own right, with a growing amount of disposable income and power to purchase certain products. The relevance of these factors in the current British context will be assessed.

4.1 Children as a future market

Commentors have observed that older children, and particularly teenagers are intensely brand aware (Reed, 1994). Going back more than a decade a report by McCann Erickson⁷, described by Rawstorne (1989), concluded that marketers who

⁶ In an examination of the impact of Channel One advertising Brand and Greenberg (1994) found that Channel One viewers evaluated products advertised on the programme more highly than did their non-viewing counterparts. They also expressed more consumer-oriented attitudes than non-viewers, and were more likely than non-viewers to report purchase intentions for Channel One advertised products. However, viewers were no more likely than non-viewers to report actual purchases of those products.

⁷ The report, entitled "The New Generation", was based on 10,000 individual interviews and 40 group discussions in 10 countries.

do not establish their brands in the 'New Wave' youth generation will endanger their future markets.

However, more recent commentators have encouraged marketers to look at children at ever younger ages with growing evidence that children of this generation have an earlier and closer relationship with brands:

In these post-modern days, children are seeking relationships with brands at an ever decreasing age and have an understanding of, and levels of expectation from, brands that we would have associated with a 16 year old until only recently (Pillot de Chenecey 1999: 336).

Practitioner studies⁸ have demonstrated that brand awareness develops early on and is clearly apparent in children by the time they are ten years old (Philips, 2000). Much of the academic research into age related abilities is dated but studies have demonstrated that children's brand awareness increases with age (Rossiter, 1976) with awareness of adult-oriented products developing later than for child-oriented products (Ward et al, 1977). For example, Rossiter (1976) in an investigation of children's visual and verbal memory asked children to draw a cereal box, a test which led 67% of children in first grade, and 100% of those in third and fifth grade, to include brands in their drawings. The 1970s focus of most of the research, combined with the dramatic increase in advertising levels already mentioned and the phenomenon of 'getting older younger' (Cohen and Cahill, 1999), suggests that brand awareness may be emerging at an ever earlier age. Indeed, more recent studies have shown that, long before they go to school, children as young as two to three are able to recognise familiar packages and characters in store (Haynes, 1993). Also children in their preschool years are able to recall brand names, which they learn through association with certain visual cues (Macklin, 1996).

Further, it is not just awareness but also brand loyalty and reliance that develops early. The seven to ten year olds in Hogg, Bruce and Hill's (1999) study of branded

⁸ Philips (2000) describes research into the 'i-generation' conducted in 1999 by MORI among 1,161 children aged 10 to 16

clothing found that children were not only adept at recognising brands but keen to differentiate between sportswear brands and those from high street stores and supermarkets. Examining younger children Hite and Hite (1995) have shown that brand reliance, reflected in choices of name brands in familiar advertised packages is evident amongst two to five year olds. In this age group nearly three-quarters (74%) chose name brands over store brands. The very youngest children in the sample, the two to three year olds were particularly swayed by brand cues and chose name brands in a ratio of 10:1 over store brands. This understanding of the early age at which brands become important to children may lay down “the foundation to better predict the evaluative judgements and purchase decisions made and influenced by children, as well as the decisions made by those children when they become adults” (Hite and Hite, 1995: 185).

Taking children’s connection with brands further, Tully (1994) believes that children are increasingly ‘bonding’ with brands, particularly international brands, and that, despite increasing conformity, brands are being used to fulfil a need for self expression. For this reason a growing number of large companies are employing the notion of brand bonding to ensure that young converts stay with their brand in later years. Millward Brown has built a Brand Pyramid which quantifies the closeness of children’s brand relationships through over 5000 interviews with 7 to 15 year old children in the United States and the United Kingdom (Walshe, 2000). They have found that across six product categories the average brand achieves a ‘presence’ level (that is, children know something about it) of 65%, a ‘relevance’ level (that is, they feel that the brand meets their needs, and is neither too expensive or too cheap compared with other brands) of 49%, a ‘performance’ level (that is, the brand is considered to provide at least parity performance) of 42%, and an ‘advantage’ level (that is, brands with some perceived advantage) of 31%. Finally, brands that get to the ‘bonding’ level are those that achieve the major share of advantages. Children who bond with brands represent a valuable 5% of the total, a figure which is replicated in the United States. Although average bonding rises to 8% for adults in both countries, the figures demonstrate the significant level of brand bonding, by children.

4.2 Children as primary users in their own right

The first stage in estimating the significance of children as primary users is by analysing their numbers. In Britain children comprise a significant proportion of the total population. According to OPCS data there are now over 11 million children between 0-14 years, though the birth rate is now in decline (Hardcastle, 1997). Table 2.1 illustrates the change in numbers of 0 to 14 year olds since 1988. Numerically speaking British children represent a large target market for advertisers but with numbers now moving into decline they also have increasing scarcity value.

Table 2.1: Children aged 0-14 in UK:

1988	10.76 million
1991	11.05 million
1996	11.72 million
2001	12.04 million
2011	11.26 million

Source: James, C. (1994) 'Children in the 90s: new directions', Research Plus: The Magazine of the Market Research Society, February, 1

Figures from the United States provide some indication of the power of children as primary users. In pure spending terms the child market has rapidly expanded over the past thirty years and the 1990s have seen particularly dramatic increases. Children aged 4 to 12 spent \$2.2 billion in 1968, and \$4.2 billion in 1984. In 1994 the figure was \$17.1 billion, and by 1997 spending had reached \$23.4 billion (McNeal, 1999). Turning to international comparisons Marshall (1997) reports on recent research for the ABC Global Kids study. The survey of 2400 7-12 year olds and their mothers in the UK, US, France, Germany, China and Japan revealed that children have far greater spending power than ever before. UK children came second only to the Germans, with a total of pocket money and presents worth about

\$506 a year. The research demonstrated that the segment's potential spending power was \$2.3 billion in the UK, and \$11.3 billion in the US.

These figures suggest that despite declining numbers of children in Britain, the attractions of the market are enhanced by the financial means of the youth generation. Research evidence points to children as individuals with increasing 'income' and surveys have shown that pocket money has easily outstripped the headline rate of inflation. Thus, while pocket money figures have doubled over the last ten years, the headline rate of inflation went up by 46% (54% in real terms) over the same period (Electronic Telegraph, 1997). Recent figures from the long running Walls Pocket Money monitor (Birds Eye Walls, 2000) provide detailed illustration of children's improving fortunes. This annual survey is carried out through in-home interviews with a nationally representative sample. In the 2000 study the sample comprised 1,183 adults with children in the 5 to 16 year age group. The figures in Table 2.2 show that the year from 1999 to 2000 saw a large 29% rise in average weekly pocket money which now stands at £3.10. Pocket money appears to increase steadily with age, with boys and girls gaining similar amounts.

Table 2.2: Average Weekly Pocket Money 1995 to 2000

YEAR	TOTAL	BOYS	GIRLS	AGE 5-7	AGE 8-10	AGE 11-13	AGE 14-16
1995	£2.05	£2.06	£2.05	£0.75	£1.35	£2.64	£3.98
1996	£2.40	£2.39	£2.41	£1.09	£1.69	£2.73	£4.40
1997	£2.33	£2.19	£2.48	£1.06	£1.69	£2.85	£4.25
1998	£2.31	£2.53	£2.06	£0.82	£1.56	£2.86	£4.40
1999	£2.40	£2.33	£2.46	£1.10	£1.67	£3.01	£4.17
2000	£3.10	£3.13	£3.08	£1.38	£2.16	£3.74	£5.66

Source: Bird's Eye Wall's (2000) The Authoritative Survey on British Children's Pocket Money, Walton-on-Thames: BMRB International, 4

More comprehensive figures concerning children's financial resources can be gained from research into children's total income. This comprises not only pocket money

from parents, but also earnings (from paper rounds and odd jobs), and handouts (gifts from friends and relatives). Table 2.3 reveals that average total income has increased 11% between 1999 and 2000 to £6.09. All age groups have seen increases, with a 23% rise for 5-7 years olds, an 11% rise for 8-10s, 19% for 11-13s, and 4.5% for 14-16 year olds. Although the greatest percentage increase has been amongst the 5-7s this is clearly from a relatively low base. Perhaps the most notable rise is that for 11-13 year olds whose total income increased by over £1.

Table 2.3: Children's Total Income 1995 to 2000⁹

YEAR	TOTAL	BOYS	GIRLS	AGE 5-7	AGE 8-10	AGE 11-13	AGE 14-16
1995	£4.18	£4.08	£4.28	£2.14	£2.34	£4.30	£8.90
1996	£4.85	£4.51	£5.26	£2.41	£2.81	£4.32	£10.53
1997	£4.49	£4.31	£4.67	£2.07	£2.59	£4.41	£10.25
1998	£5.73	£6.65	£4.66	£2.41	£3.13	£5.46	£13.06
1999	£5.48	£5.47	£5.49	£2.53	£3.62	£5.25	£11.55
2000	£6.09	£6.08	£6.09	£3.12	£4.04	£6.27	£12.10

Source: Bird's Eye Wall's (2000) The Authoritative Survey on British Children's Pocket Money, Walton-on-Thames: BMRB International, 9

Finally regional figures across the United Kingdom indicate a significant disparity between areas. Scottish children are positioned at the top of the league table for pocket money, and second in the tables for odd job earnings and handouts (Birds Eye Walls, 2000). Overall they have the highest total income in the United Kingdom gaining £9.29 a week, almost £3 more than children in second placed Northern Ireland. Thus, Scotland emerges as an attractive and financially thriving market.

Considering these large increases in income it is useful to provide an overview of what children are buying with their own money. Table 2.4 indicates that food items including sweets, chocolate and ice-cream make up the largest percentage of

⁹ Total incomes are derived from three main sources: parental pocket money, earnings (from paper rounds and odd jobs), and handouts (gifts from friends and relatives).

children’s spending, followed by magazines and music. Perhaps predictably gender differences in spending patterns are apparent. Notably more boys (30%) than girls (5%) spend money on computer games and equipment, while more girls (18%) than boys (4%) use their money for the purchase of clothes and shoes.

Table 2.4: Children’s Spending Power¹⁰

SPENDING	TOTAL	BOYS	GIRLS
Ice-cream/ sweets/ chocolate	57%	57%	56%
Magazines/ comics	28%	22%	36%
Music	24%	18%	31%
Save some/ all of it	21%	19%	24%
Computer Games and equipment	18%	30%	5%
Soft/ fizzy drinks	18%	20%	17%
Sporting activities	14%	17%	10%
Cosmetics	13%	1%	27%
Clothes and Shoes	10%	4%	18%
Stationery	10%	6%	13%
Mobile Phones	1%	1%	1%

Source: Bird’s Eye Wall’s (2000) The Authoritative Survey on British Children’s Pocket Money, Walton-on-Thames: BMRB International, 18

Certainly these figures would suggest that British children today represent a market which is financially buoyant. With their increasing spending power they emerge as prime targets for the interests of the advertising and marketing industries.

4.3 An influential market with growing power over parental choices

In addition, children in the current environment are credited with having augmenting influence on parental spending, a notion commonly referred to as ‘Pester Power’.

Roedder John (1999) has noted that children exert substantial and diverse forms of influence on family purchases both through overt purchase requests of frequently purchased packaged goods, and over time through more passive influence whereby parents know what their children like and make purchases accordingly. In addition children exert influence over less frequent purchases, such as cars, vacations, computer and home furnishings through the collection of information about alternatives, the suggestion of retail outlets, and participation in the final decision.

Reviewing studies of children's consumer socialisation Roedder John (1999) describes how children's influence on purchases is dependent on several factors. Firstly, older children exert more influence than younger children. Secondly, children have the most influence over purchases of child-relevant items, a moderate degree of influence for family activities, and the least influence for purchases of consumer durables and expensive items. In these later categories, the influence of the child is greatest in the early stages of family decision making and declines as the final decisions are made. Finally, children tend to exert more influence in higher income families, and families with a less restrictive, less authoritarian, and more concept-oriented communication style.

A comparison of figures over the past three decades demonstrates the growing significance of children's influence on purchases. In the 1960s children influenced about \$5 billion of their parents' purchases. By 1984 the figure had increased ten-fold to some \$50 billion, and by 1997 it had tripled to £188 billion (McNeal, 1998). Hardcastle (1997) has reported that in research carried out by Saatchi and Saatchi Kid Connection into housewives with children up to 15 years old, children influence over £31 billion of UK adult spending annually. Key areas of influence include toys (73% of child influence over purchase), breakfast cereals (73% influence), children's clothes (70%), soft drinks (60%), day-to-day meals (54%), holidays (44%), computer (33%), restaurants (30%), TV/ hi-fi (22%), house (22%), and car (17%). Although the Advertising Association has downplayed the effects of 'pestering', the existence

¹⁰ Figures for the most frequent or new categories

of research carried out by them (Children's Programme, 1999a) suggests that they at least feel the need to respond to growing concern about the issue.

The interaction between parents and children when the children request a product for their own consumption has been explored in recent research by Lieberman Research Worldwide (see Table 2.5). Requests for products were assessed to account for between 20% to 46% of sales in key businesses that target children (Morales, 2000). The results indicate that children have an important role to play in parental purchase decisions, although their contribution to sales varies by product category.

Table 2.5: Share of sales gained by 'nagging' (%)

Toys	46
Food	34
Movies	34
CD-ROMs	33
Home video	32
Theme parks	20

Source: Morales, E. (2000) 'The nag factor: measuring children's influence', Admap, March, 37

In summary, McNeal's three dimensions of the increased targeting of children have considerable salience when applied to present day Britain. Children emerge as individuals with an important role in future sales, increasing levels of disposable income, and enhanced influence in family purchases. It is perhaps not surprising that within this increasingly saturated commercial arena the subject of children and advertising has become a battleground of conflicting interests. It is to these contrasting viewpoints that we now turn.

5. Concerns about children and advertising

Children and advertising has long been a contested area. Since the late 1960s the subject has elicited a vigorous public debate about 'fairness'. Critics (including some

parents, consumer groups, and even governments) question the fairness of advertising aimed at children arguing that this age group is more susceptible to the persuasive appeals of commercial messages because their psychological immaturity renders them vulnerable. It is claimed that advertisers take advantage of children's natural credulity and lack of experience. In addition, it is thought that advertising creates artificial needs among young people, which parents may be unwilling or unable to gratify, thus producing unnecessary intra-family tensions and conflict (Gunter and Furnham, 1998: 173).

Over time the debate about the fairness of advertising to children has waxed and waned, coming to the forefront initially in the United States, and more recently figuring highly on the political agenda in Britain and the rest of Europe with the potential challenge to advertisers' freedoms during Sweden's Presidency of the European Union (Gray, 1999). In America the first foray into research in the early 1970s indicated that young children were limited in their understanding of advertising's persuasive intent and viewed advertising as informative, truthful and entertaining. The heated public discussion which followed led in 1974 to the Federal Communications Commission imposing time restrictions on children's advertising. Following this move, and a further review of published studies of children and advertising commissioned by the National Science Foundation, in 1978 the Federal Trade Commission issued a trade rule proposal to ban all advertising directed at children too young to understand a message's persuasive intent. Following the vigorous backlash and defeat of this proposal in 1980, and the resulting reduction of the Federal Trade Commission's powers, the debate over children and advertising initially dissipated. However, discussion was renewed by emerging issues such as the use of 'programme-length' commercials for action figures and toys connected to television programmes, advertisements for cigarettes and alcohol that appeal to children through the use of cartoon characters (Roedder John, 1999), and more generally the growth in marketing to children through a variety of communication media (Kline, 1993).

Continuing concerns about children's cognitive abilities in relation to advertising have led to the establishment of regulatory frameworks in many countries. Indeed children have been regarded as a special case right from the introduction of advertising regulations (Young, 1990). The UK employs a self-regulatory system which allows, through statutory codes, the application of flexible guidelines (Children's Programme, 1999b: 3). Based on the founding principle that all advertising should be 'legal, decent, honest and truthful', the codes are enforced by the Independent Television Commission (ITC), the Radio Authority (RA) and the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) and are periodically revised. Each has a specific section governing advertising to and featuring children (Bas, 1996; 1998). While each body deals with different forms of media, and their codes reflect this, they also share a substantial number of common guidelines. Bas (1996; 1998) has provided a summary of the codes (Appendix A and B) governing advertising to children. Although these tables do not include an exhaustive, or verbatim documentation of the codes, they do provide a succinct overview of the guidelines as they currently exist in Britain today.

In particular it is possible to highlight a number of central issues dealt with by the codes in response to public concerns. Firstly, the codes require that advertisements should not contain anything that might cause physical, mental or moral harm to children. Thus, there are far reaching and detailed restrictions to limit children's exposure to adult ads for cigarettes and alcohol. Secondly, they specify that advertisements should not exploit the credulity, immaturity or inexperience of children. Thirdly, they demand that advertisements should not exhort children to purchase or ask parents or others to purchase for them. The first two elements have long been central issues concerned with protecting children, indeed Young (1990) has cited their emphasis in the 1955 Principles of Television Advertising. However, it is the third element that has raised a deluge of press coverage, industry comment and even conferences in recent years with the increasing references to children's 'Pester Power'. According to research by NOP Solutions (1999) one of the justifications given for banning television advertising to children is the protection of parents from constant requests ('pestering') to purchase advertised goods. The

influence of television advertising, it is claimed, undermines the authority of parents who eventually succumb to children's advertising-driven demands. In addition advertising is seen as placing even more pressure on parents who cannot afford such purchases.

Despite the existence of current regulations there is mounting pressure for change in Britain and across Europe. In the frontline of the move for change the Swedish regulators believe that children are unable to fully understand what advertising is, and in particular that children below a certain level of maturity cannot tell the difference between TV advertising and other TV programmes (Edling, 1999). Sweden already bans TV advertising to children under 12¹¹ and has indicated its desire to extend the ban across Europe during its presidency of the European Union (Gray, 1999). Other countries likely to support such a move include Greece, Poland and Germany (Dresden, 1999).

Support for stricter regulations in the UK has been headlined by concerned pressure and consumer groups. For example the National Food Alliance has heavily criticised the amount of advertisements for high fat and sugar content foods targeted at children (Dibb, 1993). More recently, Friends of the Earth has lobbied MPs and staged a day of action calling for a ban on television advertisements aimed at children raising concerns that they foster a 'throw-away mentality' that has negative consequences for the planet (Gray, 1999).

The advertising industry generally believes that controls are already more than adequate, and has countered the Swedish position by highlighting advertising's importance in consumer socialisation. In addition they have emphasised parental responsibilities, and the importance of education on consumption in schools and at home. Those defending children's television advertising have raised several specific arguments. Firstly, they have emphasised that TV advertising is vital for the funding

¹¹ There has been a ban in Sweden since 1991 which is now contained in the country's Radio and Television Act. Television advertising directed at children under twelve is banned, as well as all kinds of advertising directly before, in the middle of, or after, children's programmes. The ban covers products such as toys and food but is not aimed categorically at any specific product type (Edling, 1999)

of programmes, and therefore for the existence of children's programmes on commercial television. They raise examples like Greece whose children's programming was largely reduced to American cartoons following its recent advertising ban (Dresden, 1999). Secondly, they have argued for commercial freedom of speech, especially the application of Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights. Thirdly, they argue that children are often greatly underestimated and understand advertising better than parents believe (Edling, 1999).

In concrete moves the Advertising Association established the 'Children's Programme' in February 1999. The campaign, and publication of commissioned research, aims to defend advertising's place in the market and, thereby, counter the call for stricter regulations and minimise support for Sweden's position. In essence the main message of the Children's Programme is that appropriately regulated advertising, as opposed to a complete ban, benefits children (Stanbrook, 1999).

Thus, conflicting viewpoints and interests are clearly evident in the current environment. The advertising industry has generally highlighted the abilities of children, even referring to them as 'hardened realists' (Stoltman, 1999). However, at the basis of current guidelines, the majority of research (to be analysed in chapter three), and the call for further protection of children by bodies such as the National Food Alliance, is the premise that children lack the sophistication and maturity needed to deal appropriately with advertising. It is a view of child-as-innocent and advertiser-as-seducer (Young, 1990, 1998), encapsulated by Dibb (1993:1):

Children are more responsive to and influenced by advertising than adults...Young children may lack the skills to assess let alone understand advertising's purpose.

Likewise a much cited proposal to the European Parliament concerning children and advertising stated:

Children are children; they are trusting and naive. The techniques at the disposal of TV advertising carry considerable impact. (National Swedish Board For Consumer Policies 1994:1)

Such references to children's "lack of skills" and "naive" nature highlight their presumed vulnerability and existence as a 'deficit system' (Anderson, 1981). This focus on children in terms of what they lack, and as more or less 'incompetent' compared with adults, has tended to be supported by the pervasive application of cognitive development theories, particularly Piaget's theory of child development (Buckingham, 1993).

6. Cognitive development and advertising research

Theories of cognitive development have provided the framework for the majority of research into children and advertising (Gunter and Furnham, 1998; Roedder John, 1999). Children move through a series of cognitive changes as they grow from dependent child to independent adult. These developments have been used to explain children's changing abilities with the advertising genre, and Jean Piaget's theory has been the most pervasively applied (Young, 1990).

Within Piaget's model developmental processes are directly related to age. Thus, childhood can be seen as a clearly defined developmental pattern through which all children must pass, by the same sequence of stages, before they gain the ability to perceive, reason and understand in mature and rational terms (Smith, Cowie and Blades 1998). Cognitive development is divided into four distinct chronological stages which are characterised by a predictable set of features. The first of these, the sensorimotor stage, occurs from birth until the age of about two years. During this period children discover aspects of the world, both separately and jointly, through their sensory impressions and motor activities. Following this stage the child moves into the core childhood years (2 to 14 years) which are central to the relationship with advertising. During these years the child proceeds through three further stages, the preoperational (2 to 7 years), the concrete operational (7 to 11 years) and the formal operational (11 years plus). These cognitive development stages and their distinct characteristics are outlined in Table 2.6.

Table 2.6: Piaget's stages of cognitive development

PERIOD	ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS
Preoperational (2-7 years)	<p>Children are not yet able to manipulate and transform information in logical ways, but they can now think in images and symbols.</p> <p>They become able to represent something with something else, acquire language, and play games of pretend. Children at this age are egocentric because they are not able to appreciate other's point of view, and intelligence is intuitive because they can not make general, logical statements and animistic, because they believe that inanimate objects are alive and have intentions and feelings etc.</p>
Concrete operational (7-11 years)	<p>Children can understand logical principles that apply to concrete external objects. They can appreciate that certain properties of an object remain the same, despite changes in appearance (conservation), and sort objects into categories. They can appreciate the perspective of another viewer. They can think about two concepts, such as shorter and longer, at the same time.</p>
Formal operational (11+ years)	<p>Adolescents and adults can think logically about abstractions, can speculate, and can consider what might or what ought to be. They can imagine other worlds, especially ideal ones, and they can work in probabilities and possibilities.</p> <p>They can reason about purely verbal or logical statements. They can relate any element or statement to any other, manipulate variables in a scientific experiment, and deal with proportions and analogies. They reflect on their own activity of thinking.</p>

Source: Bernstein, D. A. et al (1988) Psychology, Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 52

In the preoperational stage children are egocentric and unable to appreciate another person's point of view. They are governed by the concepts of 'perceptual boundness' and 'centration'. Thus, they place greatest emphasis on the perceptual properties of stimuli in the world around them, and tend to focus on a single concept or limited amount of information. Within the concrete operational stage the child is able to think about a number of different concepts at any one time. In addition he or she can relate concepts in a more logical and thoughtful manner and is able to take the perspective of another viewer. In the formal operational stage children's thought patterns become more like those of adults and they are able to reflect on their own activity of thinking. They can think logically about abstractions and consider what might or what ought to be. They can imagine other worlds and work in probabilities and possibilities.

However, despite the ubiquity of the Piagetian framework, concepts associated with information processing theories have also been used to provide additional explanation of the child/ advertising relationship. Various approaches to information processing have been taken. However, in general the emphasis has been on the children's developing ability to acquire, encode, organise, and retrieve information from memory (Roedder John, 1999). For example, in an important contribution to the literature, Roedder (1981) outlined three developmental stages in information processing. Under the age of seven children are regarded as limited processors due to the difficulty they normally encounter in using storage and retrieval strategies, even when prompts are provided. From age seven to 11 children are labelled as cued processors. While they are able to use a range of strategies for storing and retrieving information these are not spontaneously drawn upon but must be prompted or cued. Finally, children over the age of 12 are considered strategic processors because they are able to store and retrieve information through a range of strategies including rehearsal, verbal labelling and memory retrieval cues.

Taken together these Piagetian and information processing stage differences have been used to explain children's developing knowledge and understanding of advertising. It is this focus on children's developing understanding and the application of cognitive development theories that has structured the main body of literature on children and advertising. This extant literature will be examined in the following chapter.

7. Conclusion

As we have seen children today live in the "age of marketing". Their worlds are increasingly saturated by commercial messages with children seeing as many as one thousand advertisements a week. Commercialisation is seeping into all aspects of children's lives, not only through traditional media, but also through other avenues such as licensing, merchandising, celebrity endorsements, kids clubs and the internet.

The invasion into British schools has been evidenced in the widespread incentive voucher schemes, and other promotional ventures. The appeal of the children's market and the increasing targeting of the young by advertisers was explained in terms of three main factors. Firstly, children emerged as an important future market and childhood was seen as the foundation for lifelong brand relationships and loyalties. Brand awareness was found to develop at an early age with children as young as two able to recognise familiar packages and characters in store. Secondly, children appeared to be primary users in their own right representing significant, but declining numbers, in the population. Income figures including pocket money, handouts and earnings suggested significant increases in buying power amongst the young with Scottish children emerging at the top of the regional income tables. Thirdly, children emerged as an influential market with growing power over parental choices through both overt requests and more passive influence. Power over parental choice was dependent on several factors and while influence was greatest for child-related items it extended across a wide variety of purchases.

Consideration was also given to the public debate surrounding children and advertising from beginnings in the late 1960s in America. Some parental and consumer groups and even governments have questioned the appropriateness of advertising aimed at children arguing that they are more vulnerable to its persuasive appeals. Continuing concerns have led to the establishment of regulatory frameworks. Nevertheless there is increasing pressure for change within the European Union, and from concerned pressure and consumer groups. Amidst these concerns the advertising industry maintains that controls are more than adequate and that children are often underestimated in their advertising abilities.

Finally the chapter considered the role of cognitive development theories in understanding children's age-related abilities with advertising. The predominance of Piaget's theory as a framework for research and the focus on children's developing skills as they move from the preoperational into the concrete operational stage of development was noted. In addition attention was drawn to the application of

information processing theories as a further explanation of children's relationship with advertising.

On the basis of these preliminary insights into the issues, opinions and theories surrounding the subject area the next chapter will consider the broad base of research into the effects of advertising on children.

CHAPTER THREE

CHILDREN AND ADVERTISING: THE EFFECTS LITERATURE

1. Introduction

The preceding chapter noted that stage theories, particularly Piaget's theory of cognitive development, have provided a popular framework for the study of children and advertising. The pervasive use of such frameworks will be commented upon through the course of this chapter. The research to be detailed also highlights the application of behavioural effects models. As Lannon (1985) has commented most studies within advertising research are based on hierarchy of effects and linear sequential models in which effects take place in a stepwise manner, and measurements are applied discretely to each individual stage in the process. Research into children and advertising has similarly been based on a model influenced by the S-O-R paradigm in experimental psychology which presumes a sequence of influence with a stimulus (S) affecting an organism (O) with a response (R) being elicited (Young and Hetherington, 1996). Interest is directed towards the reactions and responses resulting from advertising stimuli (Bjurstrom, 1994).

From the very extensive body of existing empirical work, the chapter will address key research into the cognitive, affective and behavioural effects of advertising on children. It will examine children's attention to advertising, their ability to distinguish between advertisements and programmes, their understanding of advertising intent, their development of attitudes and defences towards advertising, their memory for advertising, and the effects of advertising on product requests and purchases. Finally, consideration will be given to the limitations of extant literature within the traditional approach.

2. Attention to advertisements

Studies of attention provide a logical starting point for an examination of the empirical work into children and advertising. Attention has been viewed as a necessary condition in information processing (Gunter and Furnham, 1998) which allows people to choose which elements within their perceptual environment will be processed further. In addition attention may be directly related to the effects, with low attention levels generally leading to low levels of effects (Young, 1990). The subject of children's attention to advertising has been addressed in a number of studies during the 1970s and early 1980s (see Table 3.1).

Drawing conclusions from the various studies is a difficult process. On the one hand a limited number of studies indicate that children's attention to advertisements may increase as children get older (Bechtel, Achelpol and Alcers, 1972; Wartella and Ettema, 1974). Other research suggests that, even at quite an early age, children exhibit a drop-off in visual attention to the TV when advertisements come on, and that attention decreases, often quite substantially, with age (Ward, Levinson and Wackman, 1972; Atkin, 1978; Zuckerman, Ziegler and Stevenson, 1978).

Table 3.1: Attention to advertisements

STUDY	METHOD	SAMPLE	RESULTS
Bechtel, Achelpol and Alcers (1972)	Observation of children in own homes	1-19 year olds	-Under 11s watched ads 40% of time broadcast -Older/teenage children watched ads 55% of time
Ward, Levinson and Wackman (1972)	Mothers observed children watching commercial TV. Judged on 3 point scale of full/partial/ no attention.	5 - 12 year olds	-Younger children pay higher/more stable attention throughout ads and progs -Older children - attention drops off towards end of a block of ads -All children - decrease in attention when ads on compared to previous programme. Decrease greatest for older children -All children - full attention to ads highest for ads at beginning of programmes and at start of block of ads
Wartella and Ettema (1974)	Children in pairs observed while viewing sitcom including 12 ads divided into blocks of 4, 3 and 5. Ads categorised according to visual/ auditory complexity.	120 upper/ middle class children of 3- 8 years old	-All children - greater attention to high complexity ads -Younger children (3-4 yr olds) - difference in attention (high/low complexity ads) is greater than for those older -All children - auditory complexity gains greater attention -Auditory variation has stronger effect on attention than visual variation -Youngest children displayed less attention stability
Levin and Anderson (1976)	Measured children's visual attention to varied TV material	Preschoolers	-Specific features (eg. lively music, active motion, generalised auditory and visual changes) increased their attention to the screen
Atkin (1978)	Mothers observed children	Preschool to 11 year old children	-4-9 year olds paid close attention >50% of the time -only 29% of 9-11 year olds paid close attention
Zuckerman, Ziegler and Stevenson (1978)	Researchers videoed and coded viewing behaviour of children in lab play room. Shown programme containing pairs of 8 30 second cereal ads. Shown video segments and asked to identify which they had seen.	112 children of 7.5 to 10.5 years	-All children - 27% attentive to programme and only 17% attentive to ads -All children - attention dropped during first ad and declined further during second ad regardless of type/context of ads -Attention decreased with age but no significant sex differences -Attention greatest at start of ad, and least at end -Some ads more effective at gaining attention than others
Winick and Winick (1979)	Observation of children at home	Over 300 children	-Children as young as 2 years old regularly left room when ads came on - authors concluded that children regarded ads as relatively unimportant
Alwitt, Anderson, Larch and Levin (1980)	Over 3 visits each child watched 1 of 3 different videos containing 6 minutes of ads, cartoons, and a children's programme. Observers pressed hand-held button when child looked at TV	60 preschoolers equally divided by sex and age (3, 4, and 5 year olds)	-Children's visual attention varies due to the presence or absence of various auditory and visual attributes -Attention was enhanced by attributes such as the presence of black men, animation, female voices, peculiar voices, children's voices, and sound-effects in general -Ads were associated with depressed attention, but they paid more attention to ads aimed at children
Greer, Potts, Wright and Huston (1982)	Shown TV programme with ads dispersed individually or clustered. Ads either high or low in salient features (action, pace, and visual change)	32 boys and 32 girls (Average age 54.83 months)	-All children were most attentive when exposed to dispersed high salience ads -Boys more attentive and better at maintaining attention across ads than girls -Girls - attention tended to decline after first 5-10 seconds

The problems involved in attempting to summarise such results are encountered throughout the research on children and advertising and can be usefully illustrated at this point. There is a widespread belief that much of the research on advertising 'effects' on children remains unequivocal (Buckingham, 1993; Goldstein, 1999). Often this can be seen to stem from the varying methodologies employed by different researchers. For example, in the attention research, although some studies such as Zuckerman et al (1978) use direct observation by researchers, a large proportion use indirect parental observation with varying types of measurement (Bechtel et al, 1972; Ward et al, 1972). Experimental observational techniques have concentrated on children's general visual attention, or more specifically noted the exact number of times children looked at (Alwitt et al, 1980) the television screen. However, there are problems in considering attention purely in visual terms as a person may not be watching the screen but still attending to what is being said or presented. Thus, attention to advertising cannot be split into 'on' or 'off' (Gunter and Furnham, 1998).

In addition the testing environment used such as home, school and laboratory locations varies between studies. In other cases the context of advertisements within different types of programmes is altered. Thus, while a number of studies observe children's attention to ads within programming generally, in others (cf Wartella and Ettema, 1974) attention is assessed in the context of a specific type or style of programme. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there are problems resulting from the date and geographical location of the research. It is evident that the vast majority of research has been carried out in the United States during the 1970s and early 1980s. This may create problems in transposing the findings to modern day Britain since the effect of passing time and different cultures may be considerable (Young and Hetherington, 1996). Despite such problems it is possible to note on the basis of existing research that generally where observations or reports of children's viewing have been conducted in more naturalistic environments, such as homes or special viewing rooms with distracters present, attention to television advertising tends to decrease among older children (Smith and Sweeney, 1991).

However, the consideration of attention is inevitably more complex. The extent to which attention is paid to elements within the environment may be variously influenced by internal factors, like motivation or interest, and by external factors such as the attributes of the stimulus. In this way children may pay attention to advertisements for products they are interested in or find appealing, or because ads use production devices such as fast-moving images, music, sound effects or favourite characters (Gunter and Furnham, 1998). Certainly the data does provide indications, though not always conclusive, as to the complex nature of attentional shifts. Firstly, it would appear that the type and style of the advertisement is an influencing factor in determining attention. Zuckerman, Ziegler and Stevenson (1978) found that some ads were more effective at gaining attention than others, in particular those with more visually and auditorally complex formats (Wartella and Ettema, 1974; Levin and Anderson, 1976). Alwitt et al (1980) found that children's visual attention varies due to the presence or absence of various auditory and visual attributes. Gunter and Furnham (1998) suggest that auditory features and music are particularly important in keeping children's attention to the commercial and that they also play an important triggering function in bringing lost attention back to the screen. However, they stress that for young people it is often the type of music played during the advertisement that is of great significance. Other content elements which may increase attention include a significant (but not too high) degree of novelty, complexity and unpredictability (Young, 1990), plus the presence of humour (Gunter and Furnham, 1998).

Secondly, attention may fluctuate depending on the level of clustering of advertisements. Attention has been shown to be higher when pre-schoolers are exposed to dispersed advertisements (Greer et al, 1982). In addition when blocks of advertisements are shown attention seems to be highest at the beginning of programmes and at the start of the block (Ward, Levinson and Wackman, 1972). Thirdly, some research suggests that there may be some difference in attention levels between sexes (cf Greer et al, 1982). Whilst boys were more attentive in the Greer et al study the more normal finding across research is that girls at least report greater attention to advertising (Greenberg, Fazal and Wober, 1986). Fourthly, attention

levels do not support the notion that children are irresistibly attracted to advertisements. Indeed some research indicates that children regard TV adverts as being relatively unimportant (Winick and Winick, 1979) with the percentage of children attending to adverts as low as 17% in some studies (Zuckerman, Ziegler and Stevenson, 1978). These studies provide considerable detail and insight but can not be seen as definitive due to the methodological caveats raised above and the problems of referring to relatively old American research which may not reflect present day circumstances in Great Britain.

Nevertheless, how can we explain the results of the attentional studies? Much of the research is based on Piagetian theories of cognitive development and, thus, the development of children's abilities moving into the operational stage of development are seen as crucial. For example, Wartella and Ettema (1974) developed an attention change measure in order to test the hypothesis that younger children exhibit greater differentiation in their attention to stimuli which vary in terms of perceptual aspects. The attention of the younger subjects changed more between observations than that of the older groups. The authors suggested that the data indicated not only a shorter attention span but also supported the hypothesis that younger more perceptually bounded children are more sensitive to the perceptual changes involved in shifting from programme to commercial, and vice versa.

Others have drawn on theories of information processing to explain attentional differences. Young (1990) highlights children's information processing skills and explains the results by relating them to three main 'developmental threads' experienced by children: schemata, attentional control and attentional inertia. Firstly, schemata are systems of mental organisation which allow the prediction of future events. In relation to advertising they allow people to hold expectations based on past experience of TV and advertising. Thus, when watching adverts schemata allow people to process the information in an advert by occasional attention. Young children do not have a fully developed schemata and are, therefore, more stimulus-driven than schema-driven with attention determined by visual and auditory features rather than past experience of advertising. Secondly, attentional control develops

over a period of time. The young child is influenced by the stimulus properties of adverts and is not able to use attention strategies such as focusing on or sampling relevant parts of the advert. Attentional inertia, the third developmental thread, is seen in children as young as one year old. It has the effect that the longer a viewer looks continuously at the TV screen, the more likely it is that he or she will carry on doing so, although attention can be broken by stimulus or schema information. Attentional inertia becomes a less important source of influence as the child grows older and develops more complex schemata.

The main gap in existing research seems to be the lack of contextual, and particularly, cultural focus. The dramatic cultural changes outlined in chapter one emphasise the weakness of dated research. In particular these changes suggest that attention may also be usefully related to media and technological developments including the pervasive use of rapid action computer games, remote controls, video recorders, and not least the increasing quantity of advertising children encounter on a daily basis. Although research is needed in this area it is possible to surmise that the cultural environment is creating a situation in which attention spans in general are lower.

Attention research provides a useful, if dated and acontextual, starting point for understanding children's relationship with advertising. However, even if children are attending to advertisements the effect of those executions will depend on the child's understanding of them. It is to the question of understanding, and specifically research into children's ability to distinguish between programmes and advertisements, that we now turn.

3. Distinguishing between programmes and advertisements

Following on from children's attention to advertising, a large body of research has examined children's ability to distinguish between television advertising and other

television content. This ability has been seen as an important prerequisite for further information processing to take place.

In analysing this distinguishing ability it is pertinent to firstly consider the differences between the two forms that children might recognise. Young (1998) has noted that advertising is different from the rest of television both in terms of structure and content. Structurally, commercials are short, they usually occur in breaks between programmes, or between parts of programmes, and are frequently repeated in identical or abbreviated form over a long period of time. In terms of content, the television advertisement has a simple discourse structure described by linguists as a 'topic-comment' type. The topic is the brand and the comment is the promotional activity in the commercial surrounding the brand. The comment element serves three roles, that is the informative, advocacy, and rhetorical functions of advertising. The informative function is the message from advertiser to target market, a selling proposition that positions the brand as distinctive and different. The advocacy function is concerned with the fact that advertisers do not intentionally present negative information, and instead present positive information about the brand. Finally, the rhetorical function is concerned with the creative execution of the commercial. It aims to attract the audiences' attention and make them feel good about the brand in order to persuade them to buy the product.

Gunter and Furnham (1998) also add other points of difference including formal features such as the presence of jingles, rapid cuts, differences in sound intensity, and the frequent use of humour, 'personality' endorsers and topicality. However, they highlight the fact that differences may not always be obvious. For example, some music videos, public service announcements and programme trailers are structured similarly to television advertisements. In addition, the use of programme length advertisements, popular figures or sponsorship all blur the edges between programmes and advertisements.

A summary of key studies can be found in Table 3.2. In keeping with the pervasive use of the cognitive development framework, the existing studies have explored and

supported the notion that the ability to distinguish improves with age (eg. Blatt, Spencer and Ward, 1972; Zuckerman and Gianino, 1981; Stutts, Vance and Hudleson, 1981; Butter, Popovich, Stackhouse and Garner, 1981). What is less certain is when the ability to distinguish between adverts and programmes emerges. The results of the relevant studies suggest that this ability may be attributed to children at any time from the age of 2 years (Jaglom and Gardner, 1981) to over 7 years (Palmer and McDowell, 1979).

Once again the problems involved in trying to ascertain an exact age are in part due to methodological differences between studies. Two main measures have been used which involve verbal responses to open-ended questionnaires, and changes in levels of visual attention between programmes and advertisements. For example, Jaglom and Gardner (1981) studied only 3 children in-depth at regular intervals over a number of years using varying methods such as parental interviews, observation, sorting tasks and games. They found that the children were able to distinguish advertisements from 'the rest' of TV as early as the age of 2 in the case of one child, and 3 to 3 1/2 on average. Indeed they also made the unexpected finding that 'advertisements' was the earliest category to emerge as distinct from the rest of television in the children's developing understanding of television content. From the Blatt, Spencer and Ward (1972) study of 5-12 year olds it is possible to argue that studies which indicate very young children may have distinguishing abilities may simply be assessing children on their ability to perceive the basic difference in form and style between adverts and programmes, such as the fact that 'commercials are shorter than programmes' and 'commercials are more funny'. This may help to explain why research, like the Blatt, Spencer and Ward study, using direct interviews or observation techniques, tends to present the emergence of distinguishing abilities at a higher age, from about 4 years onwards.

Similarly, Gaines and Esserman (1981) found that 90% of 4 year olds were able to correctly identify animated advertisements as being distinct from a Mighty Mouse animated programme, and Butter, Popovich, Stackhouse and Garner (1981) revealed that the majority of 4 and 5 year olds were able to distinguish between commercials

and programmes. At the higher end of the age scale Palmer and McDowell (1979) found that younger children were less proficient. In this study the children were shown a tape containing ads within a programme. The tape was stopped at particular points and the children were asked whether what they had just seen was part of the show or a commercial. The researchers revealed that 5-7 year olds had only limited awareness of the difference between adverts and programmes since they were able to identify adverts only 53% of the time and programmes 70% of the time. This finding attributes children with less ability to distinguish between ads and programmes than the later Levin et al (1982) study which used a broadly similar methodology. However, Levin et al provided children with the perceptual cue of reducing all segments of ads and programmes to 10 seconds. Under these conditions it is perhaps not surprising that the children were more adept than those in Palmer and McDowell's study at identifying ads which are shorter by nature.

Once again most of the studies are based on a framework of Piaget's theory of cognitive development. In the light of this theory it is possible to explain the ability to distinguish between advertising and programming in terms of the move from preoperational to the concrete operational stage. In particular it is notable that many of the younger children in the studies demonstrated their perceptual boundness. They distinguished the two forms according to perceptual features, such as advertising length. Only as they entered the concrete operational stage were they able to draw on other distinguishing factors such as the motive behind the advertisement.

Table 3.2: Distinguishing between programmes and advertisements

STUDY	METHOD	SAMPLE	RESULTS
Blatt, Spencer and Ward (1972)	Children shown videotape of Saturday morning programming and commercials then interviewed.	Pilot study of 20 children from 5-12 years old	-Children in all groups could identify the term 'commercials' -Younger children showed some confusion about concept. They judged relationship between commercials and programmes on basis of affect ("commercials are more funny") or coincidental reasoning ("commercials are shorter than programmes")
Butter, Popovich, Stackhouse and Garner (1981)	Children shown videotape of programme with ads. Asked to tell researcher when ad comes on: if not recognised asked if still part of programme	80 children of 4 to 5 years old	-Majority of 4 and 5 year olds - able to distinguish between commercials and programmes -More 5 yr olds (than 4 yr olds) were able to distinguish between the two
Duffy and Rossiter (1975)	Children shown clustered or distributed ads. Visual attention assessed.	Children of 5 to 10 years	-No evidence (based on visual attention) that clustering aids younger children's ability to distinguish between programmes and commercials
Gaines and Esserman (1981)	Children shown 2 animated ads in Mighty Mouse cartoon programme. Ad stopped, asked if part of show about mouse	104 children of 4 to 8 years old	-Almost all children able to identify ad correctly -Even for 4 yr olds identification reached 90%
Jaglom and Gardner (1981)	Studies over 3 yrs; parental interviews, analysis of symbolic play episodes, naturalistic reactions to TV viewing, sorting tasks, guessing games.	3 preschoolers	-'Advertisements' were the first category, in child's understanding of the world of TV, to appear as distinct from 'the rest' of TV -3 to 3.5 yrs old was the mean age of emergence of this distinction -one child observed to differentiate between ads and the rest of TV at the age of 2 years old
Levin, Petros and Petrella (1982)	Children shown 10 second segments of programmes and ads. Asked after each segment if seen a commercial or a programme	72 children of 3 to 5 years old	-Ability to identify programmes and ads improved with age -Many as young as 3 yrs could identify ads and programmes -For all ages correct identifications were above chance -Used auditory and visual cues in identifying segments
Palmer and McDowell (1979)	Children shown programme and ads. Tape stopped at certain points and asked if 'part of show' or a 'commercial' and how could tell.	60 children in 2 groups: 1) 5 to 6 year olds 2) 6 to 7 year olds	-5-7 yr olds cannot recognise difference between ads and programmes (able to identify ads only 53% of time, able to identify programmes 70% of time)
Stutts, Vance and Hudleson (1981)	Children shown animated ad within animated cartoon. Asked to put hands on red square when see ad and on knees when show returns. Each behaviour timed	108 children	-5 and 7 yr olds were able to distinguish between ad and prog -3 yr olds not able to distinguish between ad and programme -Preschoolers - separators do not influence their ability to recognise a commercial more quickly -7 yr old plus - speed of ad recognition may be aided by separators

Table cont.

Zuckerman and Gianino (1981)	Children shown collections of TV and ad animated characters. Shown pairs of characters and asked to identify	64 children from middle-class background. Equal groups of 4, 7 and 10 year olds	-Recognition/ identification of characters increased with age -50% of age 4s identified ad character in all pairs -A quarter of 4 yr olds made significantly incorrect responses (ie could discriminate between prog. and ad. characters but did not apply correct labels to characters) -7 and 10 yr olds identified characters almost perfectly
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4. Understanding of advertising intent

If the ability to distinguish between ads and television programmes is regarded as an important prerequisite for further information processing to take place, then a child's recognition of advertising's persuasive intent is viewed as a "developmental milestone" by both researchers and policy makers (Moore and Lutz, 2000).

The last section suggested that there are problems associated with trying to pin-point children's cognitive relationship with advertising merely from examining their awareness of it as distinct from programming. A more effective measure of children's understanding of advertising emerges from research into children's developing awareness of what adverts are specifically designed to achieve. Children's understanding of advertising's intent can be seen as a more advanced form of the ability to distinguish between adverts and programmes, since it demands not only that they can identify one from the other but that they can describe the differences in terms of function and purpose. This integral link means that there is considerable overlap between the distinguishing ability studies and studies of understanding of intent.

Table 3.3 provides a summary of the key 'intent' research. As in the 'distinction' studies the results present a positive link between increasing understanding of advertising intent and age (eg. Blatt, Spencer and Ward, 1972; Ward, Reale, Levinson, 1972; Robertson and Rossiter, 1974; Zuckerman and Gianino, 1981; Stutts, Vance, Hudleson, 1981; Macklin, 1987). However, in trying to determine

when a full understanding emerges, it is necessary first of all to recognise that studies may interpret 'intent' differently. Roberts (1982) argues that the 'informational function' of advertising is distinct from the 'persuasive function'. Full comprehension of the purpose of advertising only exists when individuals can understand the perspective of both the buyer (in seeing products to buy) and the seller (in persuading an audience in order to profit). Thus, in the Blatt, Spencer and Ward (1972) study some of the youngest children (5 year olds) were able to label advertising as a source of information, older children in the second grade were able to recognise that ads intended to sell but it was not until the age of 11 to 12 that they were able to clearly recognise the purpose of advertising and the motives of advertisers.

Likewise in a seminal study by Robertson and Rossiter (1974) the authors distinguished between two types of attribution of intent; 'assistive' in which adverts are seen as informational, and 'persuasive' in which adverts are seen as attempting to make you buy things. Attributions of assistive intent were found to emerge much earlier than attributions of persuasive intent, although by the age of 10 to 11 almost all the children (99% of 5th Graders) were able to associate advertising with persuasive intent.

Table 3.3: Understanding of advertising intent

STUDY	METHOD	SAMPLE	RESULTS																				
Blatt, Spencer and Ward (1972)	Shown ads and questioned in group interviews. Measurement: "What are commercials for?"	(Pilot study) 20 children aged 5 to 12: 5 each in grades K, 2, 4, and 5	-Grade K - some thought ads were for information and others did not know, semi-recognition that ads intend to sell -Grade 2 - recognised ads were intended to sell -Grade 4 and 6 - clearly recognised purpose of commercials and motives of advertiser, evidence of emerging understanding of techniques advertisers use in constructing ads																				
Ward, Reale and Levinson (1972)	Each child asked standardised questions. Responses attributed to 3 levels of awareness. Measurement: "Why are commercials shown on TV?" (No ads shown)	67 children aged 5 to 12: 28 5 to 7 year olds 19 8 to 10 year olds 20 11 to 12 year olds	-Three levels of awareness defined; low (confused, unaware of selling motive/profit-seeking), medium (some recognition of selling motive and some awareness of profit-seeking), high (clear recognition of selling motive and some awareness of profit-seeking) -Awareness increased positively with age (%): <table border="1" style="margin-left: 20px;"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>5-7yrs</th> <th>8-10 yrs</th> <th>11-12 yrs</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Low</td> <td>39.3</td> <td>31.6</td> <td>15</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Medium</td> <td>25</td> <td>42</td> <td>60</td> </tr> <tr> <td>High</td> <td>25</td> <td>42</td> <td>60</td> </tr> <tr> <td>D/K</td> <td>28.6</td> <td>15.8</td> <td>0</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> -recognition of intent influences assessment of truth/falsity		5-7yrs	8-10 yrs	11-12 yrs	Low	39.3	31.6	15	Medium	25	42	60	High	25	42	60	D/K	28.6	15.8	0
	5-7yrs	8-10 yrs	11-12 yrs																				
Low	39.3	31.6	15																				
Medium	25	42	60																				
High	25	42	60																				
D/K	28.6	15.8	0																				
Robertson and Rossiter (1974)	Open-ended individual interviews at home. No ads shown. Asked "What is a TV commercial?", "Why are commercials shown on TV?", "What do commercials try to get you to do?"	289 Catholic boys: 85 from Grade 1 95 from Grade 3 94 from Grade 5	-Two types of attribution of intent found; ASSISTIVE (eg. "commercials tell you about things"), PERSUASIVE (eg. "commercials try to make you buy things") -Both attributions can co-exist but persuasive intent tends to increase with age (52.7 % in 1st Graders - 99% of 5th Graders) By age 10-11 almost all attribute persuasive intent -Children of parents with higher educational levels tend to attribute persuasive intent at earlier age -No significant correlation between amount of TV viewing/ exposure to ads and understanding of concept of ads																				
Ward, Wackman and Wartella (1977)	Individual interviews at home. No ads shown. Asked "What is a TV commercial?", "Why are commercials shown on TV?", "What do commercials try to do?"	613 children: 204 - Grade K 202 - Grade 3 207 - Grade 5	-Responses assigned to 3 levels of awareness; low (no recognition of selling motive and/or sponsorship), medium (some recognition), high (recognition) -Awareness increased positively with age -Awareness of what commercials try to do (%): <table border="1" style="margin-left: 20px;"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>5-6yrs</th> <th>8-9yrs</th> <th>11-12yrs</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>-Low</td> <td>50</td> <td>7</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>-Medium</td> <td>46</td> <td>67</td> <td>58</td> </tr> <tr> <td>-High</td> <td>4</td> <td>26</td> <td>41</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		5-6yrs	8-9yrs	11-12yrs	-Low	50	7	1	-Medium	46	67	58	-High	4	26	41				
	5-6yrs	8-9yrs	11-12yrs																				
-Low	50	7	1																				
-Medium	46	67	58																				
-High	4	26	41																				
Atkin (1979)	Shown pictures from 3 cereal commercials. Asked open eg. "Why do you think they show these cereals on TV?" and closed questions eg. "Do they show these cereals so kids will ask for the cereal?"	480 children of 3 to 7 years old from range of social backgrounds	-Direct closed-end question- very high persuasive intent recognition (80% on average) even among youngest preschool children -Open-end question - much lower persuasive intent recognition (26% on average and only 5% for 3 year olds)																				

Table cont.

Donohue, Henke and Donohue (1980)	Non-verbal: Shown ad with Toucan Sam selling cereal. Child shown 2 pictures: 1) a mother with child putting cereal in trolley 2) child watching TV. Asked to indicate picture showing "what Toucan Sam wants you to do".	97 children of 2 to 6 years old	-Children chose correct picture (supermarket) 80% of the time -Even for 2-3 year olds, 75% chose supermarket, 25% TV
Zuckerman and Gianino (1981)	Verbal: questioned about what an ad is and difference between programme and ad. Non-verbal: shown pairs of animated characters (1 from programme, 1 from ad). Asked to select characters who "try to make you want to buy something"	64 children from middle-class background. Equal groups of 4, 7 and 10 year olds	-Verbal assessment: performance improved with age, similar results to Ward et al (1977) but with lower %s of intent to sell responses for all ages -Non-verbal assessment: performance improved with age but correct responses emerged earlier than with verbal assessment
Gaines and Esserman (1981)	Children shown 2 animated ads in Mighty Mouse cartoon. Ad stopped on freeze frame. Asked if part of show about mouse, and what ad for and why on TV.	104 children from 4 to 8 years old	-Almost two-thirds of 4-5 year olds demonstrate an understanding of commercial intent -Over half 4-5 yr olds gave a sceptical response
Stutts, Vance and Hudleson (1981)	Children viewed cartoon containing ad. Then asked 5 questions about what a commercial is, and why commercials are shown on TV.	108 children of 3, 5 and 7 years	-At 7 years of age 64% of children were able to define selling intent adequately -Under 7 years of age only small percentage of children able to explain selling intent adequately
Faber, Perloff and Hawkins (1982)	Asked questions from Ward et al (1977). Role taking: asked open-ended questions to judge understanding of characters feelings/ actions in short story.	67 children: 35 of 6 to 7 years old 32 of 8 to 9 years old	-Significant correlation between understanding of commercial intent and role-taking ability and cognitive development level -Authors suggest higher correlation between understanding of commercial intent and role-taking ability implies role taking is more important determinant of understanding of commercial intent.
Macklin (1985)	Extension of Donohue et al's (1980) study. Asked to choose between 3 pictures: 2 used by Donohue and 1 showing product being shared by a girl and her friend.	60 children of 3 to 5 years old	- 80% of all children were unable to select a single correct picture indicating understanding of intent
Macklin (1987)	Children shown 10 drawings, 1 showing product being bought in supermarket. Asked 'Why are commercials on TV?' and 'What do they want you to do after you watch them?'	120 children of 3, 4 and 5 years old	-3 and 4 yr olds - insignificant number chose correct drawing -5 yr olds - 20% picked correct drawing

These last two studies are illustrative of the verbal assessment research in this area (including Ward, Reale and Levinson, 1972; Ward, Wackman and Wartella, 1977; Gaines and Esserman, 1981; Stutts, Vance and Hudleson, 1981, in Table 3.3) in which the question of when understanding of intent emerges is dependent, not only on the type of questioning used, but also on the definition of intent. Overall, this branch of research indicates that while very young children tend to view advertising as merely entertainment, an understanding of informational and selling intent generally emerging by the age of eight. Further, an understanding of persuasive intent may take longer (until age 11 to 12 or more) to fully manifest itself.

Researchers have attempted to explain the time taken to acquire a full understanding of advertising intent. Robertson and Rossiter (1974) link the comprehension of intent with a number of antecedent skills. Firstly, an ability to discriminate between programming and commercials. Secondly, an ability to recognise that an external sponsor was the source of the advert. Thirdly, an understanding that there is an intended audience for the message. Fourthly, an awareness of the symbolic nature of commercials. Finally, an ability to discriminate by example between the advertised product and that experienced.

Ward and Wackman (1973) explain changes in understanding of intent through reference to children's perceptual boundedness in Piaget's pre-operational stage. Roedder John (1999) elaborates this argument with her model of consumer socialisation stages which integrates Piaget's theory, information processing theories of development and social development theories. She suggests that research findings parallel descriptions of children in the "perceptual" and "analytical" stages of consumer socialization. First graders, who are still in the perceptual stage, regard the purpose of advertising according to their own perspective, as something that is informative or entertaining. However, third and fifth graders, who are in the analytical stage, are able to view advertising from the advertiser's perspective as well as from their own perspective.

However, verbal assessment studies were largely the province of the 1970s and their results have been questioned by a number of researchers who claim that problems stem from the demands placed on very young children to clearly articulate their responses. Macklin (1987) typifies the arguments raised proposing that very young children possess limited language facilities and may not be able or willing to articulate a response. In addition she questions the conceptual appropriateness of Piaget's theory in applied settings. By utilising non-verbal studies it is sometimes possible to see an understanding of selling intent emerging earlier. Donohue, Henke and Donohue (1980) carried out an early, regularly quoted non-verbal study. Using a task of choosing between two pictures they found that children as young as 2 to 3 years old were able to associate a product in a TV ad with buying it in a supermarket. However, the relative simplicity of the task of choosing between two pictures led Macklin (1985; 1987) to carry out adapted and more refined versions of the Donohue et al study. She revealed that when pre-school children were given a wider selection of pictures to choose from the exact age of understanding of commercial intent was considerably higher with only 20% of 5 year olds picking the correct drawing (Macklin, 1987). Thus, even in this later non-verbal research, results differ greatly according to the precise choice of methodology.

In summary the results of the studies of intent are largely dependent on not only the definition of intent but also the methodology used. Practitioners (cf Clifton, 1994) have been keen to draw attention to non-verbal studies and the lower age at which they place understanding of intent not least due to the increasing pressure for a ban on children's advertising. Clearly there are methodological problems associated with such studies and it is still difficult to pinpoint the exact ages when changes occur. Thus, although non-verbal studies do suggest that children may be more advanced in their understanding than had previously been recognised, there is still no concrete evidence that children under the age of seven or eight are completely aware of advertising's persuasive intent.

5. Attitudes towards advertising

Traditionally researchers have assumed that once children understand the persuasive purpose of advertising they become more sceptical and, thus, are able to resist advertising's appeal (Moore and Lutz, 2000). Research focusing on attitudes has revealed that by the age of eight a child normally understands that advertising does not always tell the truth, in other words they recognise the existence of bias and deception in advertising (Roedder John, 1999).

There is considerable support for the view that children's beliefs about the truthfulness of advertising become more negative as they get older (Ward, Levinson and Wackman, 1972; Robertson and Rossiter, 1974; Bever et al, 1975; Young, 1990; Smith and Sweeney, 1991, Moore and Lutz, 2000) and by early teenage years their scepticism is high and stable (Boush et al, 1995). For example, in the classic early study by Bever et al (1975) in which 48 children from ages 5 to 12 were interviewed, they found that by the age of 11 most children hold cynical attitudes towards advertising. Using a Piagetian model they found that children's skill in acquiring impressions of reality from advertising exceeds their skill in understanding them logically. Young children are not uncomfortable with the disparity between these skills and not upset if advertising is misleading. However, by the age of 7 to 10 (middle childhood) the frustration caused by the conflict between the two skills leads children to resolve the situation by becoming absolutist and deciding all ads are "a sham". Larger scale studies support this perspective of increased scepticism with age. In a study of 553 five to 13 year olds Greenberg, Fazal and Wober (1986) found that older children were significantly more sceptical about advertising than younger children when questioned about the perceived truth of advertising. In addition when asked to identify their 'worst' ads younger children were significantly less able to do so than older children. Bringing the research up to the present day, Moore and Lutz (2000) assessed children's attitudes as part of their study of the relationship between second and fifth graders, advertising, and product usage experience. Using Rossiter's (1977) attitude toward advertising scale their results

mirrored past findings showing that older children reported less favourable attitudes toward advertising than younger children.

However, certain words of caution must be raised when talking about the development of negative attitudes towards advertising with age. Kinsey (1987) points out that increasing scepticism may also be explained by the fact that children's ability to give socially desirable responses has improved. Buckingham (1993) suggests that increasing scepticism reflects children's desire to appear as 'wise consumers'. Smith and Sweeney (1991) add that while a growing understanding of TV advertising may breed cynicism, negative attitudes towards TV adverts among older children may have other explanations. They propose that older children identify less with ads made for children and more with those made for adults and the quality of ads is important to the way children respond to them. Findings supporting this viewpoint are available in the research literature. For example, in their examination of 13 to 14 year olds' views on cigarette advertising, Phillips and Stavchansky (1999) found that a significant proportion (13%) of informants disliked an ad for a supposedly 'adult' product (Camel cigarettes) because it was perceived to be targeted towards "kids and teens".

In addition, the development of negative attitudes, and the ability to distinguish ads and understand persuasive intent, may be related to environmental, contextual and interpersonal factors. Roedder John (1999) highlights empirical evidence which shows that critical attitudes among young children can be enhanced by parental control over television viewing, and less television viewing in general. Mangleburg and Bristol (1999) have investigated the role of interpersonal and socialisation factors in adolescents scepticism towards advertising by collecting survey data from 353 lower middle class students at an American public high school. The results provided strong support for the socialisation model of adolescent scepticism. They suggested that scepticism towards advertising is an attitude learned through interaction with parents, peers, and television. In particular, concept-oriented family communication (i.e. focusing on critical thinking), susceptibility to informational peer influence, and higher levels of television viewing enhance scepticism, largely

because of their positive effects on teen's marketplace knowledge. Indeed marketplace knowledge, which is itself an outcome of the socialisation process, emerges as a particularly important factor in promoting the development of adolescent scepticism towards advertising.

Further, a more fundamental problem surrounds the setting of research and the means by which attitudes are assessed. For example the cultural context of past research has often been overlooked. Young and Hetherington (1996: 15), in their review of the literature on advertising and children's food choice, draw attention to the historical and cultural specificity of attitudes to advertising:

The body of work on children's attitudes toward commercials, most of which was done in the USA, has to be considered as relevant only to the stock of television commercials available at that time in that place. In other words, results are culturally specific and generalizations across time and place cannot be made.

Further studies have tended to overlook the cultural value and role of advertising. While children may be seen to become more sceptical about advertising claims with age this does not consider their attitude towards advertising on an entertainment and enjoyment level (Smith and Sweeney, 1991). Empirical work supports the fact that despite their scepticism, children often have very positive attitudes towards specific ads (Riecken and Yavas, 1990). The children in Buckingham's (1993: 258) study conveyed their enthusiasm for ads through "laughter, singing along, and miming or acting out what happened". Despite being sceptical about advertising, a number of the children expressed a general enthusiasm for the genre and some even presented themselves as 'fans' of advertising. Enjoyment of advertising is often related to humour (Gunter and Furnham, 1998; Goldstein, 1999). In an investigation of 9 and 10 year olds in Northern Ireland, Collins (1990) found that although the children had generally negative attitudes towards advertising they also admitted to enjoying them, particularly those incorporating humour, action and music. Thus, younger children may enjoy advertising for similar reasons to television because it is "bright, amusing, colourful, catchy, fun - and tailored to their age group" (Research International, 1993:33).

It is also possible to suggest, as in the case of studies of young adults and sixth formers (Nava and Nava, 1990; O' Donohoe's, 1994; Ritson and Elliott, 1999), that children may be consuming the ad independently of the product. Indeed as Buckingham (1993) discovered, the pleasure children took in advertisements, was often unconnected with the products themselves. Independent ad consumption suggests a degree of distancing from advertising effects. Certainly further research is necessary to address how children's practical use of advertising relates to their attitudes to the genre.

6. Development of cognitive defences

The above overview of the research on children's attitudes to advertising presents a picture of evolving scepticism as the child moves into middle childhood and high and stable scepticism once early adolescence is reached (Boush et al, 1995). Research has also proposed that growing scepticism of advertising emerges alongside the child's increasing understanding of the purpose of advertising, and children as a result are less inclined to purchase advertised products (Rossiter, 1977). As Roedder John (1999: 190) notes:

Armed with knowledge about advertising's persuasive intent and skepticism about the truthfulness of advertising claims, children of (8 years) and above are often viewed as having the abilities to respond to advertising in a mature and informed manner. Younger children (under 8 years) without these cognitive defenses are seen as an at-risk population for being easily misled by advertising.

An early survey study Robertson and Rossiter (1974) proposed that cognitive defences result from children's understanding of the nature of advertising and specifically their ability to conceive of persuasive intent. Further, when exposed to high levels of advertising these defences may be broken down (Rossiter and Robertson, 1974). However, later experimental research has questioned the ability of

cognitive defences to effect evaluations and choices of advertised items (Roedder John, 1999).

Drawing on earlier work Brucks et al (1988) propose that children must understand four concepts in order for their advertising knowledge to become a functional cognitive defence. Firstly, they must recognise that different perspectives are held by the advertiser and the viewer. Secondly, they must be aware that persuasion is the intention of the advertiser and thirdly, that all persuasive messages are by necessity biased. Finally, they must understand that biased messages require different interpretation strategies than informational, educational or entertainment oriented messages. However, is it possible to 'create' cognitive defences? Roberts et al (1980) concluded in their research that it was feasible. They first exposed children to either an instructional film about the persuasive methods used by advertisers, or an irrelevant film. A few days later all the children were shown a number of commercials and asked direct questions about each one to assess their effectiveness¹. The researchers revealed that the children who had viewed the instructional film were more sceptical in their responses than the control group. In particular the film was most effective in creating defences among young children and heavy viewers. Thus, in effect they had learnt to counter-argue the claims of the advertisements so diminishing the persuasive power of advertising.

However, results such as these must be interpreted cautiously. Brucks et al (1988) are critical of the methodology used by researchers such as Roberts et al (1980) proposing that the use of direct, self-report questions tends to lead to strong biases by making children more vigilant and critical. Goldberg and Gorn (1983) have closely considered the effect of different methodologies on the investigation of cognitive defences. They propose that survey researchers who focus on the generalised understanding that children acquire about the nature and purpose of advertisements have generally claimed that this understanding represents an adequate defence. On the other hand, researchers who utilise experimental methodologies have asserted

¹ For example, one commercial showed Bill Cosby promoting Jell-O and the children were asked: "Does Bill Cosby know more about Jell-O than most people?"

that children might not activate their defence mechanisms when actually confronted by television advertisements.

Other words of caution relate to the problem of knowledge retrieval which may act as a “bottleneck” preventing children from using what they know (Roedder John, 1999). In this light Brucks et al (1988) suggest that effective defence depends on children’s ability to retrieve general advertising and product specific knowledge. Their hypothesis was largely based on the information processing research which indicated that while children of approximately 13 years may be able to generate spontaneous critical responses, children of 8 to 12 years are ‘cued processors’ and may need prompting, and younger children may be entirely incapable of counter arguing. Their results were in accordance with this hypothesis demonstrating that 9 to 10 year olds did not spontaneously retrieve prior knowledge about advertising but could do so when cued and consequently attempted to resist advertising persuasion.

However, the research does suggest that children with knowledge of advertising intent may, to some degree, be able to resist the persuasive effects of advertising. Roedder (1981) and Brucks et al (1988) propose this may be dependent on the development of their information processing skills. However, there may be another dependent factor which relates to the fact described earlier that children may display positive enjoyment of ads. Young (1990:124) refers to this as “the feelings and emotions generated while watching as well as the emotional ‘after-taste’ when the ad is retrieved from memory”. Citing Wartella (1984) and research by Ross et al (1981) he notes that even when children have knowledge of advertising’s intent and methods, plus the necessary information processing skills to put up cognitive defences, the feelings and emotions evoked by the ad may still influence children’s preferences and choices. Roedder John (1999: 190) concurs with this viewpoint noting that “general knowledge and beliefs about advertising cannot be expected to dampen a child’s enthusiasm for an enticing snack or toy”.

7. Memory for advertising

Before children's understanding of advertising and attitudinal response can be transferred into a behavioural effect, ads must be held in memory. The focus of much research on children's memory for advertising has suggested that the effectiveness of advertising and children's vulnerability to the genre will depend on their capacity to remember ads. Thus, as Gunter and Furnham (1998) note, it is expected that ads which are remembered and memorized by children will have greater influence than those that are not remembered.

The measures most commonly used to assess children's memory for adverts are recall and recognition. Table 3.4 provides a summary of key recognition and recall studies. Generally they indicate surprisingly high levels of memory for adverts at an early age. Thus, children of primary school age have been shown to recall more than 90% of brand names after one ad viewing (Haefner et al, 1975) and over three quarters of 4 year olds have been able to identify characters from pairs of pictures and match them with the relevant product (Zuckerman and Gianino, 1981). The studies also provide indications of the development and nature of recall among children. Thus, the recall of younger children may be less proficient than older children (Zuckerman, Ziegler and Stevenson, 1978), although differences may be limited when children are provided with televised messages that are sensitive to their processing skills (Peracchio, 1993; Macklin, 1994).

Recall may also differ from that of older children on a content and qualitative level. Younger children have been found to remember single elements of an ad while older children recalled a broader range of information on the product, plus the narrative and purpose of the advertisement (Ward, Wackman and Wartella, 1977). In addition, certain products including those not directly advertised to children (Brumbaugh, 1954) and certain styles of presentation (Peracchio, 1993; Macklin, 1994) including video versions, elaborated audio formats, and overlapping audio and visual

presentations may be recalled more easily. Reviewing the research Gunter and Furnham (1998) note that other visual representations in ads, for example the use of action, famous cartoon characters, animals, and heroes have led to increased recall and recognition. In addition, auditory elements such as music and slogans have been found to increase children's memory for ads.

Finally, scheduling of advertising including the use of clustered and dispersed formats and repetition effects has been examined. For example, Duffy and Rossiter (1975) found no difference in brand name recall for clustered as opposed to distributed formats. Results also indicate that the repetition of ads may affect memory although only a limited number of repetitions has been found to improve recall (Gorn and Goldberg, 1980). Nevertheless, as Gunter and Furnham (1998) have emphasised, studies on scheduling effects have not provided "clear-cut" results concerning the influence of these factors.

Some further methodological comment about the nature of research in this area is required in light of the fact that studies based on recognition generally suggest higher memory levels than recall studies. Wartella, Wackman and Ward (1978) highlight the varying sensitivities of recognition and recall studies noting that they place different task demands on the subject for actively retrieving information from memory. Recognition research provides external memory cues for the child in that there is something present in immediate experience to aid the retrieval process. In recall studies, however, the onus is placed on the subject to carry out the retrieval process himself or herself in the absence of the stimulus. Drawing on the work of Piaget (1968) and Brown (1975) the authors highlight the developmental progression in the emergence of these retrieval activities with recognition memory developing earlier than recall memory. Thus, it is possible to suggest that some recall research may have underestimated what children are learning from television, and overlooked their existing recognition abilities.

Table 3.4: Memory for advertising

STUDY	METHOD	SAMPLE	RESULTS
Brumbaugh (1954)	15 mins to list as many TV advertised products as possible	400 children of 6 to 12 years old	-6 yr olds recalled an average of 20 products -Products not directly advertised to children were in top 3 of classes of products listed; detergents, beer, and cigarettes
Atkin (1975)	Shown 1 of 2 versions of cereal ad with 'good for you' claim placed in group of 9 ads	500 children of 3 to 10 years old	-Approximately one-third of children, under free recall, remembered 'good for you' claim
Duffy and Rossiter (1975)	Recall assessed using clustered and distributed ads.		-No difference in brand name recall for clustered versus distributed formats
Haefner, Leckenby and Goldman (1975)		Primary school children	-Over 90% recall of brand names after one viewing
Ward, Wackman and Wartella (1977)	Asked to recall favourite TV commercial and what happened in it	5 to 12 year olds	-Younger children recalled single elements of the ad -Older children recalled more information on narrative/ purpose of commercial eg. product information
Zuckerman, Ziegler and Stevenson (1978)	Method outlined under attention studies. Recognition and recall also tested.	7 to 10 year olds	-All subjects - high degree of variability -Most errors = commission: recall of material not presented -Young children - low recognition/recall but recall certain information (eg. slogans) better than other (eg brand names)
Gorn and Goldberg (1980)	Tested responses to repetitive TV ads. Exposed to varying numbers of ice-cream ads.	151 children of : 8 to 10 years old middle class boys	-Single exposure: almost half the children recognised the brand name, more than 3 out of 5 recognised number of flavours in ad -Brand name recall increased from 1 to 3 exposures but further exposure had little positive impact
Ross et al (1981)	Viewed ads with real fruit, non-fruit and artificial fruit products. Asked if contain fruit.	100 children of 5 to 12 years old	-All children - more accurate (in identifying presence of fruit) for 'real' and 'non-fruit' conditions than artificial
Zuckerman and Gianino (1981)	Children shown pictures of animated characters	64 children of 4, 7 and 10 years old	-4 yr olds - 17 out of 20 could recall identity of characters and match them with the product they advertised
Aitken (1985) and Aitken et al (1989)	2 studies on cigarette and alcohol advertising: Recall of liked/disliked ads.	Study 1: 227 6 to 16 year olds. Study 2: 150 10 to 16 year olds	-Study 1: TV ads for crisps/chocolates most often recalled favourably followed for secondary students by TV ads for beer/lager -Study 2: For 10 yr olds their favourites were humorous ads for sweets/ soft drinks/ cereals/ crisps/ toothpaste. For 12yrs +, alcoholic drink ads mentioned favourably first -Both studies: TV ads dominated
Peracchio (1993)	Two studies of methods for improving children's learning of audio televised messages	Both studies: 71 children of 5 to 6 and 7 to 8 years old	-Young children's deficit in learning information presented in audio form is connected to deficits in processing skills -When difficulty of processing tasks was matched to young children's abilities, age differences in learning disappeared eg. when audio information presented in elaborated format

Table cont.

Macklin (1994)	2 studies to assess when children's recall is best enhanced	Study 1: 45 preschoolers, 45 7 to 8 year olds. Study 2: 68 preschoolers, 68 7 to 8 year olds	-Improved recall is moderated by a significant interaction between age group and type of visual information -Recall highest from complete overlapping audio and visual presentations (rather than single modality presentations) -Older children performed better but younger ones almost matched older ones if complete, not partial, imagery used
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Young (1990) provides further detail on the variation and validity of results between recall and recognition studies based on the child's normal choice situation. If, for example, the child normally selects a particular brand out of a large range present on shelves, as in a supermarket, then the recognition method is suggested to be the most valid. However, if the child normally selects a brand by asking for the particular brand he or she wants, as when buying sweets at a corner shop, then the most valid method is recall.

Researchers have related memory differences between children of varying ages to Piaget's notion of perceptual boundedness which concerns younger children's tendency to focus on perceptual and surface characteristics of products and advertisements. In particular this characteristic helps to explain younger children's recall of single elements in ads, as opposed to the broader range of narrative information recalled by older children (Ward, Wackman and Wartella, 1977). Consideration of children's information processing skills has likewise been used to further understanding of the recall of children of different ages and between different formats of advertising (Macklin, 1994; Roedder John and Cole, 1986). Table 3.5 provides a summary by Roedder John and Cole (1986) of research findings on young children's deficits in processing information and the effect of different task factors on young children. These indicate that limitations in memory strategies such as encoding, retrieval and knowledge base are more influential than memory capacity in producing age differences in children's learning of adverts. In addition task factors such as information quantity and information format, including the mode of presentation, organisation, order, instruction sets and response format may all be influential factors in determining recall and recognition.

Table 3.5: Processing deficits and task factors affecting the young

Type of deficit	Major findings
Memory capacity:	No support for deficits in short term memory capacity in terms of “slots” in working memory.
Memory strategies:	
-Encoding	Young children often fail to encode semantically, fail to use visual imagery, fail to use rehearsal strategies, and fail to use organisational strategies.
-Retrieval	Young children fail to use retrieval cues efficiently to guide memory search.
-Knowledge base	Less developed knowledge bases in young children amplify difficulties with encoding and retrieving information.
Task factors	Major findings
Information quantity:	Young children are disrupted by relatively large amounts of information easily handled by older children.
Information format:	
-Mode of presentation	Young children remember information better when it is conveyed in a pictorial format or accompanied by pictures.
-Organisation	Young children recall information better when it is organised semantically or thematically
-Order	Young children have difficulty in remembering and using information presented earlier in task situations.
-Instruction sets	General instructions are beneficial for older children, whereas specific instructions regarding the use of memory strategies are needed to benefit younger children.
-Response format	Young children perform better in recognition tasks than in recall tasks.

Source: Roedder John, D. R. and Cole, C. A. (1986) ‘Age Differences in Information Processing: Understanding Deficits in Young and Elderly Consumers’, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13, December, 299 & 302

Despite deficits in information processing skills for younger children there is considerable support for the view that by teenage years memory for advertising is very high, and can be seen to vary as a function of age with younger people remembering advertising better than older people. Unfortunately while much research reflecting this phenomenon has taken place within practitioner circles, this has rarely been disseminated. However, Dubow (1995) registered the memory-by-age phenomenon for advertising in scholarly literature through an examination of day-after recall, brand recall and recognition data from three copy research companies. The results revealed that young adults remembered advertising better than older adults, and teens remembered advertising better than young adults suggesting that the age of maximum memory might be lower than had previously been thought.

Likewise in other research outside the academic domain Millward Brown has found that for similar Television Rating Levels (TVRs) children's ad recall is up to three times higher than adults. Over 100 studied cases, Millward Brown found that on average claimed ad recall increased by 12% per 100 TVRs for children compared to only 4% for housewives. In the longer term, their residual ad recall was over twice as high with long term recall for children at 17% compared to 7% for adults. In addition, these studies have found that children remember more detail about advertising than adults (Byfield, 1994).

It appears doubtful that a full explanation for children's advanced memory for advertising can be solely derived from cognitive development and information processing models. Research to date has paid little attention to the influence of broader contextual elements in explaining children's memory for ads. While advertisers may attempt to create executions which take advantage of children's information processing, there is also a need to consider the social and cultural context of advertising and its meaning in children's lives. Certainly much advertising to children is catchy, bite-sized and entertaining, in addition it is both heavily repeated and ubiquitous in children's lives. All these features make

advertising an inherently memorable genre not least because they may also make it valuable in cultural and social terms.

In addition, while memorable ads may have an effect on children, the level of influence derived will depend on a multitude of mediating variables in the child's social and cultural environment. Thus, high advertising recall by no means guarantees that the anticipated product purchase behaviours will follow (Kinsey, 1987).

8. Behavioural effects

Despite the problems mentioned above pressure groups such as the National Food Alliance have raised the results of ad recall tests as an illustration of children's greater responsiveness to advertising than adults (Dibb, 1993). The suggestion has been that high recall levels are directly indicative of the behavioural effect of advertising on product preferences and purchases. Although advertisers claim that the link between recall and choices is not so simple or direct (Clifton, 1994) it is necessary to examine the empirical evidence on effects in more detail.

The effect of an advertisement may be measured not only in terms of its impact on purchase behaviour. More specifically advertising may act to increase the child's product awareness, attitudes towards a product, desire to purchase, and purchase requests, as well as purchase behaviour. Effects can also be either intended or unintended (Gunter and Furnham, 1998).

8.1 Product preferences and purchases

Research in the area of preferences and purchases has used experimental methods as well as questionnaires and interviews in its aim to measure the effect of advertising on children. Reviewing the effects literature various authors have concluded that the evidence, especially through experimental methods, provides fairly strong support

for the influence of TV advertising on children's product preferences and choices (Young, 1990; Bjurstrom, 1994; Gunter and Furnham, 1998; Roedder John, 1999). The findings relating to the cumulative effects of advertising on children's consumption behaviour are less concrete. Nevertheless the data support at least some connection between advertising and children's perceptions and usage of adult and 'non-nutritious' products such as cigarettes, alcohol, and heavily sugared foods (Roedder John, 1999).

For example reviewing the evidence on tobacco advertising, Hastings and Aitken (1995: 6) conclude that despite the difficulties in untangling cause and effect relationships "it now has to be accepted that tobacco advertising does influence children's smoking behaviour". They note the effectiveness of cigarette advertising with awareness of advertising predicting the uptake of smoking and young smokers being more aware of, familiar with and appreciative of cigarette advertising than their non-smoking peers. In addition they draw attention to econometric studies which confirm that the overall amount of advertising correlates with smoking levels and studies of advertising bans which indicate that the removal of cigarette advertising leads to a reduction of tobacco consumption.

Food advertising, particularly for heavily sugared foods, can be discussed in more detail to supply an illustration of the research on advertising effects. The category provides a pertinent example due to the considerable concern and debate it has caused, particularly in Great Britain, in recent years (cf Dibb, 1993). Table 3.6 summarises research on the effect of food advertising on children's preferences and purchases.

Table 3.6: Effect of food ads on preferences/purchases

STUDY	METHOD	SAMPLE	RESULTS
Goldberg, Gorn and Gibson (1978)	Shown food ads or pro-nutrition announcements (PNAs). Asked to select a product from range.	80 children: 5-6 years old (upper-middle class)	-Children's food choices reflected TV exposure experience -Children who viewed ads for highly sugared foods opted for more sugared foods -Children who viewed PNAs chose more nutritious foods(eg. fruit and vegetables)
Gorn and Goldberg (1980)	Different groups exposed to varying number of repetitions of icecream ad. Asked for their 1st and 2nd choice for a snack. Also asked how thought advertised brand would compare with other familiar brands.	5 groups of middle class Canadian boys aged 8 to 10 years old	-Exposure to TV ad increased selection of brand -Exposure to increased repetitions of ad increased probability of selection of brand from alternatives -Increased repetition did not increase level of consumption of icecream -Behaviour influenced only by more and different exposures. Repetitious ads may have a negative rather than positive influence
Galst (1980)	Each day over 4 weeks: shown different selections of food ads and/or PNAs (some ads followed by comments from adult). Chose drink and food product from range.	65 children of 3.5-7 yrs old	-All children tended to choose sugared snacks -Selection of sugared snacks was best reduced by exposure to ads of no sugar products plus PNAs and positive comments from adults -Mere exposure to any TV presentation did not influence children to select sugared snacks more often
Cantor (1981)	Shown serious or humorous ad for oranges just before sweet dessert or toy ad. Recorded choice of fruit or sweet at lunch.	37 children of 3 to 9 years old	-Results not conclusive but suggested serious ad for good nutrition was more effective than humorous one (as long as sweet dessert ad not shown just after).
Stoneman and Brody (1981)	Shown 4 salty snack ads and asked to choose from slides each depicting 2 foods, 1 of which was a salty snack. Effect of peer pressure simulated by other children indicating their preference to subjects.	120 children in 4 th grade: 39 boys, 41 girls and 40 peer models	-Peer pressure and TV ads served as sources of influence -Greatest influence when brand in ad supported by peer preference -Black children may assign higher weighting to peer's preferences than white children
Gorn and Goldberg (1982)	Different groups shown video including ads for fruit or confectionery products, no ads, or health messages.	72 children in summer camp: 5 to 8 years old	-Children selected the most of the product whose ad they had been exposed to -Children who viewed candy ads picked significantly more candy than fruit -Cutting out candy ads was as effective in encouraging fruit selection as exposure to fruit ads or nutritional messages ads, or health messages.
Bolton (1983)	Questionnaires and 16 day diaries on TV viewing and 7 day food diaries. Plus multivariate statistical analysis.	262 children of 2 to 11 years old	-Exposure to TV food advertising significantly increased the number of children's snacks -Also small subsequent effect on child's dietary efficiency and calorific intake

Table cont.

Roedder, Sternthal and Calder (1983)	Shown one of two ads For fictitious candy bar. Attitudes to candy bar were measured. Each child asked to choose from 4 prizes including the candy bar	25 4th graders and 32 8th graders	-9 year olds - choice of product based on evaluation of advertised product not on comparison of alternatives given -13 year olds - choice of product based on comparison of all alternatives Thus, younger children demonstrated less attitude-behaviour consistency than older children when exposed to ad inducing favourable attitudes to advertised product
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Do these results clearly demonstrate that there is a straight line of effect between the advert and the child's behaviour? The results generally support Bjurstrom's (1994) and Gunter and Furnham's (1998) conclusion that, under experimental conditions at least, there may be an immediate and short term effect on children's choices, preferences and purchases as a result of viewing advertisements. Thus, various studies have found that food choices reflect advertising exposure (eg. Goldberg, Gorn and Gibson, 1978; Gorn and Goldberg, 1980; Gorn and Goldberg, 1982). Other studies suggest that the link is less certain. Galst (1980), for example, found that mere exposure to the TV presentation did not influence children to select sugared snacks more regularly but that exposure to ads for non-sugar products, pro-nutrition announcements and positive comments by adults could be used to reduce selection of sugared snacks.

The positive attributes of experimental research revolve around its ability to clearly assess causality (Gunter and Furnham, 1998). Thus, it can be claimed that the ad and not another factor is the cause for the child choosing a particular product (Bjurstrom, 1994). However, certain important caveats must be raised with regard to the experimental studies. Firstly, the majority of the studies, with exceptions such as Galst (1980), are concerned only with short term immediate effects and give little consideration to what may happen in the longer term (Bjurstrom, 1994). Clearly long term effects can be seen as particularly significant with regard to the food advertising debate, as well as for 'adult' and 'unhealthy' products, in which the focus is on children's longer term consumption. Secondly, experimental studies may attempt to simulate choice and purchase situations but they normally fail to mirror

the complexity of these situations in reality (Bjurstrom, 1994). Thus, they may be accused of having low external or ecological validity (Young, 1990). Indeed, where studies have attempted to replicate the influence of other variables aside from advertising, such as peers (Stoneman and Brody, 1981), parents or adults (Galst, 1980), they have shown that these variables are indeed important in influencing children's choices which is either contrary or additive to the ad involved. Thus, the effects of advertising exposure can not be seen to occur in a vacuum without the influence or interaction of other contextual elements (Roedder John, 1999). Thirdly, as in other children and advertising studies the findings are sometimes dated and may reflect the particular cultural context (i.e. American) in which they were carried out (Young and Hetherington, 1996).

Survey studies, however, often raise the issue that numerable factors besides advertising may explain why children demand or purchase certain products. For example, there is evidence that parents and peers may both strengthen and weaken the influence of advertising. Thus, purchase behaviour is seen to be determined by a number of important factors including how often they see the product on television, the child's age, socioeconomic and cultural background, and peer group influence (Bjurstrom, 1994). Through examining everyday behaviour, not simply behaviour under experimental conditions, such studies generally conclude that television advertisements only have a relatively minor role in influencing purchase behaviour (Gunter and Furnham, 1998).

However, the effect of other influences on product choices is a subject which has given rise to considerable disagreement in the public arena. It is possible to turn once again to the food debate as an example of the differing opinions of the role of external forces. In a National Food Alliance report Dibb (1993) recognises and briefly outlines other influences involved in determining children's food choices including taste preferences, exposure to and availability of food, parental and peer group influences, and knowledge, attitudes and beliefs. However, the report is criticised by Barwise (1994) for assuming that, relative to other factors, advertising is a major influence on children's food choices. Barwise (1994:15) claims that "there

is no evidence that advertising is a major influence on children's food choices; at the same time, there is substantial evidence that it is not a major influence, and that other factors - notably parents - are a much stronger influence". So how important are external influences in determining children's choices? Bjurstrom (1994:34) draws the general conclusion that "TV commercials are an important but hardly the most important factor in determining what makes children and young teenagers buy or ask for different goods or products". Individual food advertising studies such as those mentioned earlier by Stoneman and Brody (1981) and Galst (1980) have indicated that peers and adults play a significant role in determining children's food choices. In more recent research commissioned by the Advertising Commission and reported by Stratton (1994) 24 complete families and 59 mothers were interviewed in group discussions using an attributional analysis approach. Perhaps unsurprisingly the study found that mothers have a significant influence on their children's diets. However, while television advertising may be a more powerful influence on children's diets than on their parents', it still only accounts for seven per cent of influences on children. Indeed the effect of TV advertising was seen to be "absorbed into the wider and stronger patterns in which the family operates" (Stratton, 1994:22). While it is perhaps necessary for further research to address the indirect and unintended consequences of advertising, existing studies concerning food advertising and other product categories² support the considerable role played by external forces in determining preferences and purchases.

Despite numerous benefits, the weakness of survey studies is generally seen to lie in the difficulty of attributing causality. Quasi-experimental research, such as that carried out by Goldberg (1990) with children in Montreal, has attempted to minimise this problem of causality, and has also benefited from providing the real life context not available in the laboratory.

² For example in the tobacco debate independent research carried out in 15 countries by the CRU between 1984 and 1988 found that the initiation of smoking was insignificant in relation to the overwhelming pressures of personal and social (family and friends) influences.

8.2 Purchase Requests

Many of the studies based on questionnaires and interviews also take a different focus in determining the effects of advertising on children in their consideration of product requests. In a review of TV advertising and children, Smith and Sweeney (1991) place primary importance on request frequency as a measure of effect. Despite indications provided earlier that children are increasingly independent economically, not all children, and particularly not young children, have the monetary means or ability to buy a wide range of products. Therefore, they must ask their parents to buy things for them.

Adler et al (1980) review research including observational, interview and questionnaire based studies. These indicate that purchase influence attempts are positively related to the level of TV and advertising viewing. For example, in an early study on purchase requests by Ward and Wackman (1972) self administered questionnaires were given to 132 mothers of 5-12 year olds. The subjects were asked to indicate the frequency of purchase influence attempts for 22 different products. They found that children of different ages made purchase influence attempts for different types of products. It was noted that children frequently tried to influence the purchase of food products. However, overall purchase influence attempts decreased over 4 product categories, including food, as the child got older. Finally, over most product categories, mothers were more likely to yield to children's requests as they got older. Findings, such as the decrease in purchase requests and increase in parental yielding as the child gets older, have been supported in review studies (Young, 1990, Roedder John, 1999). Various explanations are given for these changes. Drawing on research by the Children's Research Unit (CRU) Smith and Sweeney (1991) suggest that as part of the maturation process the child learns to moderate requests to those items he or she believes the parent will agree to buy. In addition they propose that increased parental acquiescence to requests relates directly to the parent's perception of the child. Mothers in their research claimed that

children have more definite ideas about the things they like as they get older and so the parent is taking less of a risk in purchasing them.

Whilst analysing children's product requests was popularised in the 1970s, its relevance has resurfaced in recent years with growing concern about children's 'Pester Power'. Those concerned about the effects of advertising believe that children are using this power and are encouraged to pester parents into buying items (Marquis, 1994) a practice strictly outlawed in the advertising regulations (Bass, 1998). Not surprisingly, while recognising its existence, practitioners strongly disregard the term. Agencies suggest that concerns about 'Pester Power' and its link to advertising are out of proportion. At a conference entitled "Pester Power", Clifton (1994) remarked that a sense of realism was needed when talking about children's "wheedling" ability:

Children have natural pester power from the moment they are born.
Only when they become articulate does it become brand specific.

In summary, what does the 'requests' literature tell us about the effects of advertising on children? The most general conclusion that can be made is that studies indicate a link between TV advertising and request frequency. Purchase requests seem to lessen as the child gets older but this is accompanied by an increase in parental yielding. Product requests and children's 'Pester Power' have raised concerns among some groups but little is known about the precise nature of 'Pester Power' in this country. Indeed it may be partly a reflection of cultural developments and changes in power balances between children and parents (a subject which we will turn to in the next chapter) rather than being solely linked to advertising.

9. Limitations of the traditional approach

The current chapter has indicated the large volume of research carried out into children and advertising from the traditional perspective. While it would be

impossible to comprehensively discuss all the studies carried out, the distinctive focus and flavour of the main subject areas, plus some of the problems associated with the extant research have been considered. In particular the difficulty in drawing definite conclusions from methodologically eclectic research has been highlighted. As Buckingham (1993) and Goldstein (1999) have emphasised, the diversity of methods used means that the results are generally equivocal. However, other limitations are also apparent relating to the broader assumptions, objectives and approaches used in this body of work.

9.1 A question of methodology

The literature reviewed suggests that positivism has been the dominant paradigm in children and advertising research. This reflects the dominance of the paradigm in psychology and the broad field of consumer behaviour (Ozanne and Hudson, 1989; Sherry, 1991). However, whilst positivism has ruled supreme, alongside quantitative approaches employing methods based on objectivity, precise measurement and experimental conditions, there has been a notable lack of interpretive research using qualitative techniques. Consequently the field has gathered little understanding of the child/ advertising relationship from the perspective of children themselves. Yet, as Mick and Buhl (1992: 317) persuasively argue for advertising research more generally:

To advance theory and research we must look at advertising more thoroughly through the consumer's eyes.

9.2 Acontextual and asocial

The implicit employment of the S-O-R paradigm, alongside the specific application of cognitive development stage theories (particularly Jean Piaget's theory of development) and the information processing model has tended to provide a highly individualistic and largely acontextual view of children's experience of advertising.

McCracken (1987: 123) has noted that the wide employment of the information processing model “divorces the individual from his cultural context”. Similarly Buttle (1991: 97) has commented that advertising research has tended to present members of the audience as “islands of cognitive and affective responses, unconnected to a social world, detached from culture”. Although concerned with consumer and advertising research more generally, these comments would seem to be particularly salient for the child advertising audience. Examining teenage audiences, Ritson and Elliott (1999) consider that consumer research’s heavy borrowing from cognitive psychology has led to the adoption of its inherently individualistic model. This factor alongside the methodological individualism of the many experimental, laboratory based studies of advertising effect, which are characterised by high internal controls but low external validity (Goldberg and Gorn (1983) has meant that social and cultural contexts have tended to be overlooked. While it would be impossible for any one study to incorporate all the contextual elements existing within a child’s life, it seems that social and cultural resources, including other media, are rarely incorporated in research with children (Young and Hetherington, 1996: 16).

9.3 Assumed vulnerability

Many adults fear that children are defenceless in the face of sophisticated advertising techniques, and are made to want everything they view in advertisements (Friedstad and Wright, 1995). Thus, answers have tended to be sought to subdue immediate political and social concerns relating to the vulnerability of children, and research since the 1970s has been driven forward by the question of whether TV commercials aimed at children should be banned or regulated (Bjurstrom, 1994: 43). Equally, as Young (1990) notes, most researchers have assumed that there are problems when children watch TV advertising and that it is a case of advertiser as seducer, child as innocent. Despite little evidence to support the position that children are especially vulnerable to advertising (Goldstein, 1999), it is not only assumed that advertisements work but that the young are more gullible and likely than any other sector of the population to be taken in by the scheming of marketers (Nava and Nava,

1990). Buckingham (1993: 245) goes as far as to suggest the need for a corrective to dominant views of child vulnerability. He notes that in their discussions children emerge as 'streetwise' and highly cynical about advertising, and "more than capable of protecting themselves from its alleged effects".

9.4 Passive consumers

It is also possible to emphasise that because the traditional effects approach has dominated research, children are often seen as passive receivers of advertising. In this way research with children is just one part of the broader field of advertising research which has tended to assume that advertising acts on an 'inert audience' (Lannon, 1985). Research into children and advertising seems to have been no different in this respect by incorporating the underlying assumption that the child is a passive consumer of advertising. Thus, in practice research has concentrated on what advertising does to children. There has been little said about how children actively process, use and interpret the advertising messages (Bjurstrom, 1994: 44). For example most discussions omit advertising's appeal and use as entertainment, a way to manage mood, and a source of information on how to satisfy personal needs (Goldstein, 1999).

9.5 Short termist

Finally, most of the effects that have been studied are short-term rather than long-term (Bjurstrom, 1994). This focus on immediate responses leaves little scope for knowledge of advertising experience beyond the viewing context. Yet as television research carried out within the field of cultural studies has suggested, TV meanings are not generated in the moment of viewing but emerge out of and are modified by subsequent social processes where TV material is discussed and debated (Morley, 1986).

10. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the research on children in terms of their cognitive, affective and behavioural response to advertising. Turning first to attention to ads, various caveats were raised including the age, acontextual nature, and American focus of much of the research, and a diversity of results were reported. Overall attention tends to decrease among older children and attention levels differ according to internal and external factors. The results were explained in terms of the perceptual boundedness of younger children, and children's information processing skills.

Research relating to children's ability to distinguish between programmes and ads was seen to employ a broad range of methodologies and distinguishing ability was found to emerge at any time from the age of two years to over seven years. Understanding of advertising intent was seen to be a more useful measure of children's cognitive response. This understanding was related to age but also to the definition of 'intent'. The findings of verbal assessment measures suggested that an understanding of the informational and selling intent of advertising emerges by the age of eight, while a clear comprehension of the purpose of advertising may not emerge until up to the age of 11 to 12. However, later non-verbal assessment studies suggest that children as young as 2 to 3 years old have some understanding of intent. Although this suggests that children may be more advanced, methodological problems mean that there is no certainty that children under the age of about eight are fully aware of persuasive intent.

Research provided evidence that children's attitudes towards advertising become more negative with age. By the age of eight a child normally understands that advertising does not always tell the truth. However, negative attitudes may also emerge due to the social acceptance of answers, the desire to appear as wise consumers, reduced identification with children's ads as well as through learning from parents, peers and television. Despite their scepticism children often have positive attitudes to individual ads particularly those involving humour, action and music. There was some evidence that children over eight years old with a knowledge

of persuasive intent may be able to resist the effects of advertising. However cognitive defences may be restricted by children's ability to retrieve advertising related knowledge, for example 8 to 12 year olds have been found to be cued processors of such knowledge.

Recall was seen to differ as a function of age, the style/format of ad presentation and the scheduling of advertising. Memory limitations were related to the notion of perceptual boundedness as well as information processing skills and task factors affecting the young. Despite these factors children were found to demonstrate surprisingly high levels of ad recognition and recall, and teenagers remembered advertising better than both young and older adults.

Research into the effects of advertising on children's product preferences and purchases revealed that using experimental studies the immediate and short term effects of advertising may be quite significant. However, methodological problems were noted in the inability of experimental research to reflect the complexity of real life, the need to examine other external influences and the concentration on short term effects. Survey studies suggested that numerous factors, including age, background, parents, peers and advertising, may influence product preferences and purchases, with advertising often only playing a minor role. Product request frequency research was seen as important in assessing the effects of advertising on children who may be economically dependent on their parents. The results revealed that the role of advertising in determining requests may be significant. Purchase requests seem to lessen as the child gets older but this is accompanied by an increase in parental yielding.

Finally the chapter highlighted the main limitations of the traditional approach. It was noted that positivistic and quantitative approaches have predominated and there has been a notable lack of interpretive research in the field. In addition research has tended to overlook the role of social and cultural contexts and has assumed that children are defenceless and vulnerable to advertising. Further children have generally been seen as passive receivers of advertising and there has been a focus on

immediate short-term responses.

The following chapter aims to address some of these limitations by drawing on different perspectives and theories from which to view the relationship between children and advertising. It will take a contextual approach focusing on the holistic child, including the role of other people, possessions and the media, and consider the active role played by children in their consumption of advertising.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHILDREN AND ADVERTISING: BROADENING THE CONTEXT

Children relate to commercials in a manner that is as much poetic as cognitive, as much sociocultural as informational, as much dissonant as logical.... We can fully understand the human encounter with advertising only by acknowledging its complexity and multifaceted context (Clark, 1999: 89-90).

1. Introduction

As has been seen in the previous chapters, academic research on children and advertising has been founded on concerns of considerable practical, social and developmental importance. However, empirical work within the traditional perspective has largely concentrated on the negative effects of advertising, and conceived of children as passive consumers, divorced from their sociocultural context and naive in the ways of advertising. It has focused on cognitive, behavioural and logical processes and often relied on restrictive experimental and survey approaches far removed from children's lifeworld experiences. Theories of cognitive development and information processing have been relied on to produce an extensive body of work focusing on questions of children's perceived abilities with the advertising genre at particular age related stages. Despite its detailed analysis, the extant research has provided a restricted portrayal of children's relationship with advertising. In order to enhance the existing picture we need to explore the colour and complexity of children's lives and advertising experiences by taking an active, holistic, and sociocultural perspective. In particular this chapter will explore a variety of academic theories, approaches and empirical work examining the changing

meaning of childhood, the way children relate to the 'things' in their life, their relationship with the media and existing perspectives on the active child/ advertising relationship.

2. Meaning of childhood

It was mentioned in chapter two that childhood is not a static concept. However, increasing exposure to advertising and the creeping advances of commercialisation form just one dimension of change. The changing meaning of childhood, and its implications for the child/ advertising relationship, can also be considered from a broader sociocultural perspective. In this light we will firstly explore significant social and cultural changes in the environment, particularly the reconfiguration of family life. Secondly, we will reflect on developmental theories beyond Jean Piaget which allow a more inclusive view of the sociocultural context of childhood.

2.1 Social and cultural changes: the reconfiguration of family life

Enormous social and cultural changes have impacted upon children over recent decades (Haylo, 1999). One of the most important of these changes in terms of the developing meaning of childhood is the reconfiguration of family life. Drawing on data from the Children's Research Unit Juvenile Perspectives Study, Smith (1994) highlights specific social changes within the family unit including the increase in the divorce rate and the growth of single parent families.

In the light of recent demographic figures the 'Nuclear Family' seems to have become a misnomer. Only a minority of households are inhabited by two parents and dependent children, and the proportion of such households is declining. According to figures from the Office for National Statistics in 1996 'nuclear' households comprised only 23% of all British households and accounted for 40% of the total population (Jackson, 1999). Figures from 1997 show that divorce rates rose rapidly in the 1970s, and then more slowly, levelling at rates much higher than those

of the 1950s and 1960s. Whereas there were only 2 divorces per 1,000 of the married population in 1961, there were over 13 in 1995. Thus, on current trends as many as two in five marriages are likely to end in divorce, a move that has swelled the numbers of one parent families and stepfamilies. In addition an increasing number of children (over one-third in 1995) are now born to unmarried parents. Together these trends mean that 20% of children live with a lone parent and a further 7.9% live in stepfamilies (Jackson, 1999).

Further changes in the family unit can also be observed. Smith (1994) notes that more mothers are working outside the home, more fathers help out at home, mothers are becoming older, and people are living longer. Most married women now have paid work and total dependence on a male worker is now unusual, although there are ethnic differences. According to figures from the Central Statistical Office, 71.9% of 'white' women in Britain were defined as economically active in 1993, compared with 66% of women of African and African Caribbean descent, 61.4% of those of Indian descent and 24.8% of those of Pakistani or Bangladeshi descent (Jackson, 1999).

With the gradual decline of the nuclear unit and traditional family life children face a number of important implications on their lives including getting older younger, greater spending power, changes in time frames, and a move from parents to peers.

2.1.1 Getting older younger

“Getting old is a terrible thing. I remember when I realised I could beat my Dad at most things. Bart beat me at most things when he was four.”

Drawing on the words of animated icon, Homer Simpson, Haylo (1999: 229) illustrates the phenomenon of getting older younger as it is humorously presented in popular culture. Children at the beginning of the 21st century are seen to live in an accelerated culture in which they are growing up faster (Stoltman, 1999), and are

even seen, for the first time in history, to be teaching the adults (Philips, 2000). Adults are often bewildered at children's speed of growth and their ability to assimilate many aspects of older culture into their lives before entering their teenage years (Pillot de Chenecy, 1999).

This age compression has been linked to factors pertaining to the changing family environment including caregiver work habits and greater exposure to a broader portion of adult entertainment, advertising, and 'life experience bandwidth' (Stoltman, 1999: 295). In this way children are becoming more experienced and worldly wise, and face increasing responsibility at a younger age. Such moves impact upon children's perceived social status. Reed (1994) emphasises the role of declining stability in the family unit in forcing responsibility on younger children. This increasing responsibility is enhanced by what Giddens (1993) refers to as the increasing 'democratisation' of the family. As part of this democratisation, social changes have led to children (traditionally subordinated by society) being resituated as citizens within a democratic society, and as partners in the home environment. More specifically, Watts (1999) refers to the 1990s focus on increasing involvement of children in decision making, and the role of the social changes in providing greater leverage over parents and grandparents. In this way children often have a more influential role to play in family decisions and particularly in product choices (Reed, 1994).

The implications of getting older younger for brands and brand marketing are likely to be widespread and profound (Pillot de Chenecy, 1999). In particular it may be necessary to rethink the way we look at children's understanding of and relationship with advertising at particular ages. This aspect is gaining increasing attention within practitioner circles. Indeed a recent "Tweens" study by Publicis considered 12 to 23 year olds as a single group because they had more in common than would previously have been expected (Publicis, 1998).

2.1.2 Spending power

In the first chapter consideration was given the amount of money at children's disposal. The buoyant economic profile of children appears to be being driven, at least partly, by changes taking place within the family. In particular Smith (1994) has argued that the rise in divorce means that many children have two sets of parents and grandparents to indulge them, although often out of guilt. This, in conjunction with longer living grandparents, is further augmenting the amount lavished on children. In addition the level of spend per child is increasing due to the presence of older, more financially secure parents and the rising number of dual income households.

In a very real sense this increasing spending power has implications for children's relationship with advertising. The growing provision of funds implies a significant means of acquisition which may shape the way children perceive and approach advertising.

2.1.3 Changing time frames

Developments within the family have been at the centre of a move towards increased pressure on children's leisure time. The rising number of dual working parents has resulted in less time to spend as a family. Changes in maternal working hours may be exacerbating this temporal pressure within the family unit. Indeed further analysis of the figures shows that 51% of mothers with children under five are now in employment compared with just 12% 20 years ago. In addition, women in full and part time employment work on average 40.6 hours per week, more than any other country in the European Union. Pressure on leisure time is even venturing into the weekend, some 62% of women 'sometimes or usually' work on Saturdays and 41% 'sometimes or usually' work on Sundays (Watts, 1999).

Further, another aspect of the rising hours spent working by both parents, is the increasing timetabling of British children's lives with not only school activities but also organised after-school activities and clubs. This timetabling seems to stem from fears of children being left unsupervised alongside a focus on achievement and developing skills. Interestingly these organised activities are most common for children from higher social grade households, and for those in their pre-teenage years. Attendance at clubs tends to drop off after the age of 14 but is very high in pre-teen years. However, together the multiplication of organised activities suggests a parental concern about 'wasted' or ill-spent time (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999).

Taken as a whole these temporal pressures and increased structuring of children's leisure time may have implications on the way children perceive their lives and their experience of advertising.

2.1.4 The move from parents to peers

Reed (1994) has noted that one of the most important implications of changes within the family, particularly decreasing stability, is that peer groups become increasingly important. Reviewing developmental research Bernstein et al (1988) conclude that from as early as the age of two years, the nature of children's relationship with their parents changes as they start to seek increasing autonomy. Later during the early school years, the desire to socialise with peers rather than parents augments. Thus, by the third year of secondary education, adolescents say that their relationships with peers are closer than those with their parents. However, it would seem that decreasing familial stability may intensify this move. If, as seems to be the case, children have an increasingly negative experience of family life (Reed, 1994) then the gradual shift from parent to peer affiliation characterised by the growing importance of the norms and values of peers (Smith, Cowie and Blades, 1998) may be taking place with increasingly rapidity.

Such moves are likely to stress the importance of existing friendship frameworks as the preferred social venue for children's experience of advertising. There has been some examination of the nature of friendships in American psychological research. Lever's (1978) study of ten to 11 year olds in American playgrounds has highlighted the disparity between boys and girls friendships. Boys play in larger mixed-age groups, while the girls tend to play in smaller numbers or same-age pairs. Play activities and relationships also emerge as distinctive. Boys' playing activities generally centre on competitive team games with more complex rules and role structure. Their social relationships similarly stress 'political' skills of co-operation, competition and leadership. Girls, however, place more emphasis on exclusiveness and intimacy in their relationships (Berndt, 1982).

Collectively viewed the move from parent to peer suggests that the decisions children make as they move into middle childhood may be more strongly influenced by the peer group. While it may be too extreme to view children as moulded by peer pressure (Grimes, 1994) there is certainly a case for the view of the playground as an increasingly formative influence on children's decisions in general and advertising experiences in particular.

2.2 Rethinking development

If the social and cultural environment is changing, even in the family nucleus surrounding the child, it is logical to assume that the meaning of childhood is itself shifting. In this light we might question the salience of the developmental models used to explain children's relationship with advertising. Can the internal and individual focus highlighted by the Piagetian approach be extended to incorporate the socially and culturally contextualised child? In order to do we may profitably look beyond Jean Piaget.

2.2.1 Beyond Piaget

As was noted in chapter two and illustrated in chapter three, the ideas and theoretical approach of Jean Piaget have dominated past conceptions of children's relationship with advertising. In many ways this dominance is surprising given the existence of forceful critiques of his work (cf. Donaldson, 1978; Walkerdine, 1984, Bruner, 1990). Developmental psychologists have questioned Piaget's methods and interpretations believing that they led him to underestimate or misconstrue the nature of children's thinking (Woods, 1988). For example Donaldson (1978) argues that although children perform tasks as Piaget predicted his interpretations are less stable. In particular it has been suggested that different, and sometimes simpler, testing techniques which consider children's language abilities and their understanding of the questions and tasks might lead to different results and success in tests at younger ages (Donaldson, 1978; Wood, 1988).

Other concerns are also relevant in considering children's relationship with advertising in a changing social and cultural environment. Firstly, one of the central tenants of Piaget's theory is the notion that children's thinking is different *in kind* from that of mature individuals. Wartella et al (1981) have pointed out that essentially it is a theory of deficits. Children at a particular age-defined stage are seen as unable to perform cognitive processes that are characteristic of a later stage. In this way research applying this theory tends to explain findings in terms of children's inabilities. As Buckingham (1993) notes this preoccupation with identifying the inadequacies of children has led to a neglect of children's own perspectives. Secondly, although Piaget did not ignore social influences on development, his main emphasis was on children as individual 'scientists' who formulate and test increasingly complex hypotheses about their experiences and interactions (Smith, Cowie and Blades, 1998). Bruner (1986: 85) has critiqued the individualism and aculturalism that underlies Piaget's work and Western psychology in general and argued for the role of social and cultural elements in

development.

The work of other theorists may provide a different perspective to that provided by the 'theory of deficits' and may also provide further insight into cultural and social dimensions of development. While a comprehensive analysis of the developing child is not possible within the confines of this thesis three viewpoints seem particularly applicable to the study of children and advertising. Firstly, more recent theories which recognise the breadth of abilities in the young child have been proposed for effective teaching and are currently being implemented into the education system. Shaw and Hawes (1998) highlight Daniel Goleman's theory of 'emotional intelligence', and particularly Howard Gardner's theory of 'multiple intelligences', in providing a contextualised and abilities focused view of the child.

Gardner (1983) regards intelligence as "the ability to solve problems or fashion products that are of consequence in a particular cultural setting or community" (Shaw and Hawes, 1998: 71). His theory of 'multiple intelligences' delineates seven distinct kinds of intelligence which are present in each individual to a greater or lesser extent and capable of further development: linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, musical, body-kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal. The first three of these have conventionally been applied in existing thinking about intelligence. Linguistic intelligence relates to language and expression through written or spoken words. Logical-mathematical intelligence refers to abilities in terms of the manipulation of numbers and abstract symbols and a logical structured approach to problem solving. Visual-spatial intelligence relates to visualisation and manipulation of images, the construction of models and understanding of spatial relationships. However, the last four 'intelligences' represent more radical inclusions. Musical intelligence concerns an individual's sensitivity to and ability to comprehend, play, or compose music. Body-kinesthetic intelligence refers to ability in controlling the body as in activities like athletics, skating or dance. Interpersonal intelligence is connected to sensitivity towards other people, understanding and predicting their responses, and communicating well. Finally, intrapersonal

intelligence relates to a sense of self and awareness of one's own feelings, strengths and weaknesses. According to Gardner (1983) different intelligences may be independent of each other. In this way a person may be poor in one area of skill but excellent in another. Shaw and Hawes (1998) argue that while 70% of the National Curriculum in Britain is geared towards two intelligences, linguistic and logical-mathematical, the use of all seven intelligences allows children to develop the skills they need to interact successfully with their cultural and social environment.

Turning to the viewpoint of Lev Vygotsky, he has argued that psychology should involve the explanation of human intention by human activity. His views have led to a perspective of action that accounts for its contextualised nature. According to his 'activity theory' the researcher begins with a unit of analysis that includes the individual and his or her culturally defined environment (Wertsch, 1979). Vygotsky focused on social and cultural contexts in the learning process. According to Smith, Cowie and Blades (1998) Vygotsky's view of the child's intellectual growth highlights that learning is achieved through, and reflects, cultural and social experience. Thus, learning comes through the 'symbolic representatives' of the child's culture including art and language, play and songs, metaphors and explanations. Significant cultural experiences become internalised into the structure of the child's intellect. Further, learning occurs through cooperation with others in a range of social settings. In this way children are not isolated 'individual scientists'. Instead they build their knowledge in a community of others who share a common culture, using language as a key element in the process.

In a specific illustration of how children learn with the assistance of others, Vygotsky outlined the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), an idea that has been developed by Jerome Bruner. In contrast to Piaget who supported the notion of waiting for the child to be 'ready', Vygotsky argued for expert intervention whereby children learn from more knowledgeable others. The child, thus, learns by jointly constructing his or her understanding of issues and events. The ZPD then is the distance between the child's actual level of development and his potential level of development under the instruction of more

expert adults or in collaboration with more competent peers. In order to learn expert intervention should be beyond the current level of development, but not too advanced, and so within the ZPD.

Finally, the work of Erik Erikson (1987) may also provide a more socially and culturally inclusive approach to understanding the child's developing relationship with advertising. As opposed to Piaget's approach to development which deals primarily with cognition, Erikson's (1987) psychosocial model draws more heavily on the social and cultural context of development. As Peterson (1996) has explained the contrasting cultures to which Erikson's studies, travels and migration exposed him led him to place considerable emphasis on interactions between the individual and the current historical and cultural climate. In this way he concentrates more on social relationships and the growth of feelings than on the development of pure thought.

Like Freud before him, Erikson (1987) argues for dialectical conflict as the basic mechanism of development and he defined cumulative stages of personality growth in terms of the unique forms of that conflict. However, his main emphasis is on the development of human potentials and the expanding radius of interplay necessary for their fruition. This change in focus in Erikson's theory plays particularly well against the presumed inadequacies approach seen in Piaget's theory (Wartella et al, 1981; Buckingham, 1993).

Moving away from Freud's unifying theme of the concept of sex energy, or libido, Erikson (1987) applies the term epigenesis to describe the unifying link between the conflicts and developmental changes occurring during the life span. Epigenesis determines that anything that grows has a ground plan and that out of this ground plan the parts have arisen to form a functioning whole (Peterson, 1996). In terms of human psychological growth, Erikson suggests that this 'ground plan' presents eight potential conflicts. The resolution of each conflict requires unification of contradictions to create a newly emergent part of the total personality. According to Erikson each of the conflicts makes up a stage: basic

trust versus mistrust (birth to one year), autonomy versus shame and doubt (one to three years), initiative versus guilt (four to five years), industry versus inferiority (six to 11 years), identity versus identity confusion (12 to 18 years), intimacy versus isolation (early adulthood), generativity versus self-absorption (middle adulthood), and integrity versus despair (old age).

Table 4.1. Erikson's psychosocial stages of development

A: Psychosocial Crises	B: Radius of Significant Relations
1 Trust vs. Mistrust	Maternal Person
HOPE	
2 Autonomy vs. Shame, Doubt	Parental Persons
WILL	
3 Initiative vs. Guilt	Basic Family
PURPOSE	
4. Industry vs. Inferiority	Neighbourhood, School
COMPETENCE	
5. Identity and Repudiation vs. Identity Diffusion	Peer Groups and Outgroups; Model of Leadership
FIDELITY	
6. Intimacy and Solidarity vs. Isolation	Partners in friend- ship, sex, competi- tion, cooperation
LOVE	
7. Generativity vs. Self-Absorption	Divided Labour and Shared Household
CARE	
8. Integrity vs. Despair	"Mankind" "My Kind"
WISDOM	

Source: Erikson. E. (1987) 'The Human Life Cycle', in S. Schlein (ed) A Way of Looking at things, London: WW Norton and Co, 601

The stages outlined by Erikson (1987) and their associated conflicts, psychosocial strengths, and primary social influences are displayed in Table 4.1. Those relating to children can be briefly synthesised.

Firstly, in order to find a resolution to the unconscious conflict between **basic trust** and **mistrust** the infant must find a compromise between blind faith in the primary caregiver as the source of satisfaction and pleasure, and an acceptance of the unavoidable pain of delay and frustration. Through resolution of this conflict the infant achieves his or her first 'psychosocial strength', that of hope, which provides a foundation for instinctive certainty and faith in the child's social ecology.

Secondly, rapid changes in muscular maturation, locomotion, verbalisation and discrimination set the stage for children acquiring an increasing sense of **autonomy** as they explore their environments and interact with others. **Shame and doubt** also emerge as the child faces the estrangement of being exposed and looked at disapprovingly by caregivers who inevitably curtail early social and exploratory activities. While the propensity for compulsive overcompliance or impulsive defiance emerges from this stage, satisfactory resolution of the conflict leads to will power.

Thirdly, once able to move independently and vigorously the child begins to understand his expected role in the adult world and starts to play out roles worth imitating. The child develops a sense of **initiative** as he or she associates with other children. However, primary carers remain highly important as they encourage participation in play and constructive activities and restrain initiative through inculcating feelings of guilt. The estrangement of this stage is, therefore, a sense of **guilt** over goals contemplated and acts completed, initiated or fantasised. When the child finds a balance between unbounded initiative and guilt the result is a sense of purpose, that is:

The courage to envisage and pursue valued and tangible goals guided by conscience but not paralyzed by guilt and fear of punishment (Erikson, 1987: 604)

Fourthly, before the child can become a biological parent he or she has to learn to be a worker and provider. In school the child receives systematic instruction and develops a sense of **industry**. The conflict of this stage is between the joy of work with the power and mastery it provides, and the development of a sense of **inferiority** resulting from unfavourable comparisons with other children. Erikson refers to this stage as “socially decisive” in that it prepares the child for a range of learning experiences which he or she will undergo with the help of cooperative peers and instructive adults. Resolution of the conflict involves cooperative participation with others in order that a sense of competence and achievement can emerge in the successful completion of serious tasks.

Finally, probably the most developed and well-known stage of Erikson’s theory is that involving the identity crisis. The rapidly growing adolescent faces the inner revolution of puberty and a range of as yet intangible adult tasks. In this context the adolescent attempts to resolve the conflict between **identity and identity confusion** and to align his or her own gifts and skills to the occupational prototypes offered within the culture. In the attempt to reach self definition adolescents turn to one another to resolve much regressive insecurity by forming cliques and by stereotyping themselves, their ideals and their enemies.

Resolution of the conflict demands the development of a coherent sense of self that combines the essential elements of the individual’s past and forms a foundation for future growth and contribution to society. The adolescent seeks the particular strength of fidelity, that is the opportunity to fulfil personal potentialities in a context which permits the young person to be true to himself and true to significant others (Erikson, 1987: 605).

Erikson's work has not passed without criticism. The employment of 'stages' of development makes his work the focus of some of the same criticisms as Piaget. It has been argued that human cognitive development is not very stage-like, for example Fischer (1980: 510) has noted that "unevenness is the rule in development". Most theorists prefer an incremental or gradual approach to development and refer to 'phases' or 'transitions' as opposed to clearly defined stages. The specific idea of the 'identity crisis' has been questioned on a number of counts. For example Smith, Cowie and Blades (1998) note that identity crisis can occur throughout adult life and is often quite prominent in early adult years. Further their analysis of the research draws them to conclude that for most young people changes in identity and self-esteem are gradual.

Yet Erikson's stages do seem to provide a useful framework and means of thinking about development. Although he delineates stages, for Erikson unlike Piaget, development does not necessarily occur in a straight line and by a series of irreversible stages. The conflicts of each stage are resolved more or less successfully and the balance among them becomes the foundation on which the next stage is built. Thus, unresolved conflicts may have to be returned to later. Further the importance of social interaction is highlighted by the notion of a radius of significant relations from 'maternal person' to 'peer groups and outgroups' (Table 4.1). For these reasons, alongside its focus on human strengths and potential, Erikson's theory may provide a particularly flexible and inclusive view of development (Appleyard, 1991) which suits further understanding of the young advertising reader.

2.2.2 A practitioner perspective of development

This emphasis on social and cultural elements of development has not been ignored within advertising practitioner circles. As Clark (1999: 78) has stressed academic theory may garner invaluable knowledge from applied research's exploration of the role of imagination, affect, social context and culturally derived practices. In particular it is emphasised that in the practical world of applied research "young

consumers are generally considered within their everyday context of culture and meaning in order to account for their behaviour in holistic, inclusive terms". Although practitioner research is rarely made public in-depth qualitative research carried out by the advertising agency J Walter Thompson (Mathews, 1995; Eden, 2000) has shown how children within their "Kid Panel" move from "the magical, physical years to more rational and mental years". Specifically it is suggested that child development can be divided into three broad stages: the 'Explorers' (4 to 6 years), the 'Conquerors' (7 to 9 years) and the 'Groupies' (10 to 12 years). The Explorers are very curious, self-centred and ego-centric. Parental authority is unquestioned, and parental figures are closely imitated. Children at this stage are able to identify packs in store, they are very literal and love fantasy. Boys are seen as boisterous while girls' pervasive interests lead to them being described as 'cute and pink'. The Conquerors are at the peak of childhood, they have abundant confidence and energy, and are very eager to grow up. Their logic begins to develop, they have a passion for possessions and the most common words in their vocabulary are "I want". Gender differences tend to be pronounced.

Finally, supporting the growing importance of peer groups due to social changes mentioned earlier, Mathews (1995) highlights the social context of children moving from the final year of primary school and into secondary education. These Groupies are seen as both very acquisitive and focused on the importance of peer groups. They are sensitive to how others see them but at the same time they are developing independent judgement and looking for rational reasons 'why'. The divide between boys and girls remains pronounced, with boys being mechanical and interested in computers and sport, while girls are into fashion and communication related activities including "giggling and gossiping".

While Mathews' description of development is contextual, consumption oriented, gender sensitive and socially inclusive, certain problems in drawing on practitioner research should be emphasised. Firstly, agency research generally focuses on business objectives and more immediate decision making and therefore has a short term perspective. Secondly, the research is normally not released into the public

domain and the objectives of research are not necessarily apparent or even revealed. Finally, in relation to the above consideration of child development, it is conceivable that research provides stereotyped and generalised perspectives in its aim to improve advertising effectiveness rather than provide a definitive and in-depth description. Nevertheless the contextual focus of this work may allow further understanding of children's relationship with advertising.

Insights concerning the meaning of childhood have been explored in this section. Changes in the social and cultural environment, particularly in family life, were reviewed and the implications in terms of getting older younger, spending power, changing time frames, and the move from parents to peers were considered. In addition more socially and culturally inclusive theories of development, especially Erikson's psychosocial theory, have been outlined and positioned as applicable for the study of children and advertising. However, in order to cast more light on children's advertising experience we will now turn to the meaning of possessions in their lives.

3. Meaning of possessions

In order to balance the acontextual perspective of previous research it is intended to draw on theoretical developments within the field of consumer research by firstly considering the adoption of a meaning-based approach to children's general consumption. Taking this approach it is possible to view consumption and advertising as part of a wider cultural system (Sherry, 1987). Indeed McCracken (1987: 123) has proposed a meaning-based approach to consumption as an alternative to the widely applied information processing model which "divorces the individual from his cultural context".

Products and commercials take on symbolic meaning, often unintended by the manufacturer, from the actions and observations of everyday use (Clark, 1999). In this way the consumer actively creates his or her identity through the process of

consumption (Dittmar, 1992; Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998). Gabriel and Lang (1995: 87-88) note that at the simplest level of the argument individuals can buy identities off the peg. They highlight the increasing recognition of human agency, and a form of “creative bricolage, whereby identities are fashioned through an active engagement with product images”. In this way research has increasingly drawn attention to the way individuals actively derive ‘deep meaning’ from the goods they consume. As Czikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981: 91) note:

“things tell us who we are, not in words but by embodying our intentions. In our everyday traffic of existence, we can also learn about ourselves from objects, almost as much as from people”.

Research into the symbolic meaning of material possessions is not new. Within the field of consumer research it has long been recognised that products serve symbolic purposes in the lives of adults (Levy, 1959). However, whereas early work took a more biological and individual focus to the meaning of possessions (Dittmar, 1992) more recent consumer research has provided insights for the study of children’s contextualised advertising experiences. In particular it has relevance by providing foundations for the study of consumption in a wider social and cultural context (Solomon, 1983; Belk, 1988, 1991; McCracken, 1986, 1988; Dittmar, 1992; Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998). For example, in recent research into the relationship between consumption, identity and self, product symbolism has emerged as dynamic, context dependent and culturally bound (Hogg and Savolainen, 1998). Thus, from this perspective we can see material goods as ‘integral threads in the fabric of social life’ (Solomon, 1983).

3.1 Theoretical perspectives on the meaning of ‘things’

A variety of theoretical approaches to understanding the meaning of possessions have been highlighted by researchers within the social sciences in the last fifteen years. The work of Russell Belk and other members of the Consumer Behaviour

Odyssey¹ has explored the meaning of possessions in our lives (Belk 1988, 1991; Wallendorf, Belk and Heisley, 1988). Much of the work carried out within the Consumer Behaviour Odyssey highlighted how many informants spoke about their possessions as more than utilitarian items, thus drawing attention to the 'deep meaning' of possessions. Wallendorf, Belk and Heisley (1988) have usefully organised these expressions of deep meaning into four main themes: extensions of self, fetishism, anthropomorphism and totemism, and sacred and profane distinctions.

The authors argue that people relate to possessions as a part of their 'extended self'. Thus, people feel an intensification of their sense of self by what they have, or a diminishment by what they have lost. Thus, for example, cars, collections, and family photographs were all commonly found to provide an enlarged sense of self when they were selectively nurtured and preserved, and a lesser sense of self and grief when they were lost or damaged. Secondly they explain the deep meaning of possessions by reference to fetishism. Extreme attention and devotion to certain possessions, as well as addictive or compulsive consumption behaviour was seen as evidence of this theme. Thirdly, they note anthropomorphism and totemism as complementary themes in deep meaning. Anthropomorphism involved informants projecting human traits onto possessions including inanimate objects and pets. In this way such possessions served as replacements for other desired but unattained aspects of life. Totemism, however, involved deriving personal traits and abilities from possessions. Totemic possessions then reflected an extended sense of self, as well as drawing strengths from the possession.

The fourth and most dominant theme of deep consumption meaning was that of the distinction between the sacred and profane status of certain possessions. While profane commodities were accorded ordinary and mundane behaviour, sacred objects were seen as 'mystical, powerful, and deserving of reverential behaviour'. They

¹ The Consumer Behaviour Odyssey involved over twenty academic researchers who travelled for varying periods of time in a recreational vehicle from Los Angeles to Boston during the summer of 1986. Starting with a pilot study into buyer and seller behaviour at a swap meet, the project team observed consumers in naturalistic settings and conducted qualitative interviews using a variety of data collection techniques.

were treated in a similar way to sacred religious icons and considered priceless and distanced from the arena of commerce.

Starting from the viewpoint of social psychology, Dittmar (1992) has also examined the meaning people derive from, and attribute to, the possessions in their lives. She draws on a variety of social scientific disciplines and applies a social constructionist perspective to provide a symbolic communicational model of possessions and identity. In her model not all meanings of possessions are symbolic, some are purely instrumental, providing use-related functions. However, addressing Erich Fromm's question, "To have or to be?", she argues that in many important respects to have is to be. She proposes that possessions do serve to symbolise who we are, and makes the analytical distinction between self expressive and categorical signification of possessions. Self expressive functions concern an individual's uniqueness and their attitudes, values and personal qualities. From this perspective possessions collected over a lifetime become a symbolic collage of personal history and personal and social relationships. Categorical functions allow people to express their social standing, wealth or status. They signify the wide social categories individuals belong to, including class and gender, plus the smaller groups or subcultures individuals identify with.

As in the earlier work by Belk and his colleagues (Belk 1988, 1991; Wallendorf, Belk and Heisley, 1988), McCracken (1987; 1988) also considers the processes or 'rituals' whereby meaning is transferred. However, his model takes a broader view in attending to the structure and movement of the cultural meaning of consumer goods. His meaning-based model of consumption rests on the idea that the consumer is an individual in a cultural context. The model of consumption that follows from this perspective says that the world of goods is a wholly cultural construction and that culture is constantly being played out in goods.

According to McCracken (1988) the symbolic properties of consumer goods have three primary locations: the culturally constituted world, consumer goods and individual consumers. Two levels of meaning transfer exist. In the first meaning

moves between the culturally constituted world and consumer goods. The institutions of advertising and the fashion system are used as the instruments of this transfer. Within advertising agencies creative directors choose from the alternative meanings and beliefs existing in society and transfer them to goods through appropriate visual images and verbal material. In this way advertising acts as a 'conduit' through which meaning is constantly poured into consumer goods. The fashion system also serves as an instrument of meaning movement but unlike advertising, the process has more agents (i.e. designers of products, and fashion journalists and social observers) and sources (i.e. magazines and newspapers, opinion leaders and marginal groups) of meaning transfer.

In the second level of meaning transfer from good to individual meanings are appropriated by consumers through four types of ritual: exchange, possession grooming and divestment. Firstly, in exchange rituals gifts are chosen because they possess meaningful properties that the gift-giver wishes to see transferred to the gift-taker. For example the gifts given to children by their parents may contain symbolic properties that the parent would like the child to absorb. In the case of possession rituals consumers can be seen to spend considerable time "cleaning, discussing, comparing, reflecting, showing off, and even photographing many of their new possessions". This process, often involves personalization, and allows individuals to not only claim the possession as their own, but more importantly to draw from the object the meanings invested in it. Thirdly, grooming rituals may take place when some of the meaning drawn from goods is perishable in nature. The aim is to specially attend to goods, such as clothes and hairstyle, to coax out their meaningful properties for example for an important night out. Finally, in divestment rituals, individuals may seek to depersonalise or erase meanings in objects both when they are first bought, and before they are sold or passed on to others. For example, individuals often ritually clean and redecorate new homes. According to McCracken's model when meaning finally comes to rest in the consumer it has completed its journey through the social and cultural world.

Based on these theoretical models we will now turn to empirical work relating to adults and children and their possessions.

3.2 Empirical evidence relating to the meaning of 'things'

Empirical research into the meaning of possessions has highlighted the importance of the home, and household possessions, as "an indispensable symbolic environment" (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg Halton, 1981: 144). In addition the literature has specifically considered the selection and reasoning behind most treasured possessions, plus the differences associated with stages in the life span, gender, and social class/ cultural origin. While studies addressing life span differences will be considered in the following section it is possible to briefly highlight specific studies relating to gender and social/ cultural differences amongst adults.

There exists firm empirical evidence on gender differences associated with the symbolic meaning of possessions. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg Halton (1981), Kamptner (1991), and Dittmar (1991, 1992) have all revealed similar gender differences associated with treasured possessions. Wallendorf and Arnould (1988) even identified a cross cultural similarity in gender differences. Helga Dittmar's (1991, 1992) study of over 160 respondents including business commuters, unemployed people and students can usefully be highlighted to illustrate typical gendered differences. Respondents were asked to list five possessions they considered important and to describe in their own words why each possession was important to them. Discussing gender differences amongst the two student samples, Dittmar (1992: 129) revealed that identical possessions were sometimes treasured for very different reasons. Although gender differences in the types of possessions listed were not overtly pronounced² a more strongly gender-differentiated picture emerged in respondents' accounts of why possessions were considered special. Women gave many more relational than instrumental reasons, with relational reasons being the

² The main exceptions were that women listed more sentimental items (28.8% compared to 11.5%), whereas men showed a preference for action-oriented possessions, such as vehicles and leisure objects (40.6% compared to 21.1%)

ones used most often by women and least by men. Although women and men share concerns with functional and use-related features of possessions, men's responses referred strongly to instrumental and activity features, whereas women's reasons revolved equally around emotion-related features of possessions and their role as symbols for interpersonal relationships. Overall the author concluded that:

Women tend to construe their relation to their favoured objects in a relational and symbolic manner, compared to men's activity-related, functional and self-oriented concerns.... In short, the ways in which women and men relate to their personal possessions can be meaningfully interpreted as material reflections of gender identity. (Dittmar, 1992: 135)

Results relating to differences according to social or cultural group are less clear. For example, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg Halton (1981) found little differences between their different social groupings. However, this is perhaps not surprising considering the sampling of only upper-middle and lower-middle class families. Coleman (1983, in Dittmar, 1992) reflects on wider results from interview studies with over seventy thousand respondents and notes that social classes differ in self-concept, values and consumption goals. Working class people were seen to stress family and regional ties, they displayed a short-termist, instant gratification based outlook on consumption, and they showed a preference for instrumental and recreational possessions to fill their leisure time. Middle and upper class people were found to focus on possessions which served prestige, status and self-expressive needs, and stressed individualism. In general they had a long term, delayed gratification perspective, centred on self development.

3.3 Meaning of 'things' in childhood

Turning in more detail to child informants it can be seen that the concept of goods as meaning receptacles in childhood has received little attention within consumer behaviour (Schau, 1998). However, work in this area has been carried out by Belk and his colleagues (Belk, Bahn and Mayer, 1982; Belk, Mayer and Driscoll, 1984). They used pictures of products to reveal the ability of children in the concrete

operational and older stages to make stereotypical inferences about the owner of the depicted products. Their work provides evidence that children recognise the symbolic dimensions of products when they are only 5 to 6 years old. By the time children reach 10 to 11 years old these symbolic dimensions are comprehended completely. More recent studies into children's brand recognition and preferences (Hite and Hite, 1995; Hogg, Bruce and Hill, 1999) have furthered knowledge of the early emergence and extent of children's understanding of product symbolism.

Despite the limited evidence in youth consumer research, empirical evidence drawn from other disciplines within the social sciences would suggest that possessions and other artefacts of everyday life are actively used in meaning-making and identity development during childhood. The role of consumption can be seen as a continuous process with human-object relationships changing and evolving throughout the life span (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg Halton, 1981; Kamptner; Livingstone and Lunt, 1991; Gentry et al, 1995; Schau, 1998). In this light attention can be drawn to research providing an insight into the meaning derived from possessions according to age.

Wallendorf and Arnould (1988) found that the meanings of possessions to Americans followed a developmental progression which reflected changing identity concerns. Similarly Gentry et al (1995) consider that the role of possessions in identity construction changes over the life course. They highlight the role of possessions during youth as individuals seek to "create", during the mainstream years to "maintain", and during elderly years to "preserve". In the creative youth years possessions may reflect the need to separate from parents and seek a distinct identity. They may also reflect differing time orientations and outlook for the future. Some youths think less about 'becoming' and focus more on immediate gratification. In addition possessions may be selected to reflect ability, control and power and the desire to be older and share in the perceived privileges of adulthood. As Belk (1988) has noted money may be particularly symbolic of power. In this light Gentry et al (1995) cite an adolescent informant interviewed by Ozanne, Hill and Wright (1994):

Money to me is power. That's how I think, money gives me power. Money gives me the okay to do anything I want to do, stand on my own two feet.

Children's focus on possessions reflecting ability, control and power has been noted in previous research (Furby, 1978; 1991). Furby (1978) used an open ended interview method and two overlapping samples³ in a study attempting to map out the various dimensions of the meaning of possession, and the motivation for possessive behaviour. She revealed that two dimensions were particularly important to all ages and cultural groups. Firstly, 'effectance' and control of possessions emerged as the most salient defining characteristic of possession. Secondly, informants focused on the positive affect for possessions by attending to emotions or feelings experienced with respect to the object. Perhaps most notable in the research are two findings relevant to fifth graders (mean age 10.7 years). Firstly, the findings revealed that control over the use of the object was most salient for fifth graders as both a definition of and motivation for possession. Interpreting the results Furby (1978: 60) suggested that "rights to control the use of possessions are of particular significance to early adolescents. This may be related to the increased concern at that age with establishing one's independence and identity". Secondly, Furby found that positive affect for the object was an increasingly frequent dimension for the fifth grade and older subjects. This increased frequency was related to the fact that active means of acquisition become more common at this age.

The importance of control and power dimensions of possessions is also evident in Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg Halton's (1981) investigation of the meaning attributed to household possessions or 'things' by the occupants of upper-middle, and lower-middle class families in Chicago. Through an examination of their favourite possessions, the results highlighted important generational differences between informants. It emerged that children and young people placed more importance on possessions that reflected ability and control. In particular they found that 8 to 30

³ Furby's 'American developmental sample' consisted of 150 subjects, 30 at each of the following life stages and mean ages: kindergarten (6.1 years), second grade (7.6 years), fifth grade (10.7 years), eleventh grade (16.4 years) and adults (48.3 years). The 'Comparative cross-cultural sample' comprised approximately 60 subjects in each of three cultural groups (American, Israeli kibbutz, and

year old Chicago residents were much more likely than their grandparents' generation to cite favourite possessions that reflected active functions and skills (such as sports equipment) or that they could manipulate or control (such as stereo systems and musical instruments).

Looking beyond dimensions of control further study has provided a comparison of narrower age groups and can be used to illustrate the broad range of favourite possessions selected by informants and the varying meanings attached to them (Kamptner, 1991). Using an open-ended questionnaire study of almost 600 South Californian respondents Kamptner studied five age groups including children aged 10-11 years, teenagers aged 14-18 years, young adults (18-29), older adults (30-59) years, and senior citizens over 60 years of age. Respondents were asked to identify their most treasured possessions, and the reasons for their attachments. The children in middle childhood named stuffed animals, sports equipment, childhood toys, dolls, and small appliances most often. Their reasons for these attachments were, in order: enjoyment, intrinsic qualities, activity, social ties and personal history. For the next age group (adolescents of 14 to 18 years) music, motor vehicles, jewellery, sports equipment, and small appliances were the most treasured possessions. The reasons given for treasuring these items focused on enjoyment, then social ties and utility value.

Young adults highlighted social ties and enjoyment for their favourite possessions of motor vehicles, jewellery and photographs. Older adults in middle age and retirement years focused increasingly on photographs, jewellery, dishes/ silverware, and artwork, still citing enjoyment but placing increasing emphasis on social ties. In this way, as in the earlier study by Csikszentimihalyi and Rochberg Halton (1981), the research indicated that while older groups stress symbolic features, and particularly social ties, children and youth groups tend to have an activity-centred, pragmatic and self-concerned focus (Gunter and Furnham, 1998).

Israeli non-kibbutz), with 30 subjects at each of two age levels (kindergarteners and fifth graders).

In attempting to explain the changing symbolic role of possessions researchers have drawn on different theories of development. Of particular interest, in terms of the expressed desire to expand the analysis of children and advertising beyond the work of Jean Piaget, is the use of psychoanalytic models, particularly Erikson's psychosocial theory of development. Formanek (1991) describes the move from Freudian based psychoanalytic theories of sexual desire in early attempts to understand the motivations of collectors, towards the application of more relational models. Most notably Kamptner (1991) draws on Erikson's (1987) psychosocial model of development.

Firstly, referring to the literature on object attachments in early life, Kamptner notes that special possessions are thought to provide comfort and security at this stage. These aspects of possessions coincide with Erikson's (1987) description of infant and toddler years with their major psychosocial tasks focusing on the development of a sense of trust and security in infancy, and growing autonomy in toddlerhood. The selection of favourite possessions in middle childhood is seen by Kamptner to reflect the central task at this stage of building a sense of industry, especially feelings of mastery and competence, from successful experiences in making, doing, or building things. Those selected in adolescence could be linked to the task of building an autonomous self identity. During adolescence, Erikson's task of developing a sense of self identity may reflect the activity-related, and egocentric references of favourite possessions.

Moving forward into the adult years, Kamptner suggests that Erikson's tasks of establishing intimacy during early adulthood, involvement with future generations in middle adulthood, and assessing one's life and feeling part of future generations in late adulthood all involve tasks embedded within a social network. This salience of social meanings is reflected in a high percentage of adults' treasured possessions.

Turning back to the literature more broadly several studies indicate differences between boys and girls' consumption experiences. It was mentioned earlier that a significant body of work has highlighted gender differences associated with treasured

possessions (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg Halton, 1981; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988; Dittmar, 1991, 1992). Specifically addressing children Kamptner (1991) has shown that amongst children in middle childhood girls highlighted favourite treasured possessions such as stuffed animals, dolls and music, compared to boys' emphasis on sports equipment, stuffed animals and toys. In older age groups, males displayed increasing interest in possessions related to activity such as sports equipment and motor vehicles, while females formed increasing attachments to items such as jewellery and photographs. These findings, and their associated reasons for attachment, indicated males' preference for objects that emphasised activity and instrumental qualities, and females' preference for objects that were less physically interactive and more symbolic and expressive in nature.

3.4 Bedroom culture

Taken as a whole the empirical work has provided evidence of the deep meaning of possessions in identity work related to both age and gender. Research, for example Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg Halton's (1981) focus on homes in Chicago, has also suggested the importance of the space or room within which treasured items are stored, collected and nurtured. Dittmar (1992: 113-114) notes that houses, flats or rooms are much more than places of shelter and security. In addition they provide autonomy and a space to develop identity with the objects within them providing an illustrated history of the self, plus an expression of social standing, interests, religious and political beliefs, personal tastes and qualities.

Of particular interest is the work relating to the phenomenon of 'bedroom culture'. McRobbie and Garber (1975) drew attention to the importance of bedroom cultures in their exploration of the subcultures of teenage girls in the 1950s. Willis (1990) has discussed bedroom decoration and contents, including the media, in his broader exploration of the common culture of the young. More recently Livingstone and Bovill (1999, chapter 4: 28) have noted the role of new 'media rich' bedrooms as "a private and individualised space vital for the construction of identities and social relations".

Brown et al (1994) have more fully examined and developed the concept of “bedroom culture” as both a theoretical perspective and valuable research strategy. Through an exploration of the meaning of bedroom items and images, they consider the interplay of material culture, personal space and identity in teenagers lives. In particular they draw attention to the role of the media as important sources of information about adolescents’ identities. Theoretically ‘bedroom culture’ assumes that “individuals actively and creatively sample available cultural symbols, myths and rituals as they produce their identities” (Brown, 1994: 813). In essence the research into bedroom culture has shown that these private spaces, and their contents from stuffed toys to the burgeoning assortment of media (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999), act as “mediating devices” (Vygotsky, 1978) which help to demonstrate the things in children’s lives that remind them who they are or want to be.

Thus, the exploration of the meaning of material possessions has highlighted the role of children as active identity builders using possessions to satisfy both functional and symbolic needs. The importance of the media in this context, particularly in the bedroom (Brown et al, 1994), has been touched upon. It is to the subject of the media in children’s lives that we now turn, focusing first on changes in the media landscape and their implications, and then addressing empirical evidence on the active audience within media research.

4. Meaning of the media

Having considered the meaning of childhood and the meaning of possessions we will reflect now on the role of the media in children’s lives. Concentrating first on developments in the media landscape, this section will draw attention to the integral role of certain media in children’s everyday existence, and the implications of changes that are taking place around them.

4.1 Changes in the media landscape

Developments in the media, and technological advances more broadly, have transformed the social and cultural landscape. Media expansion, fragmentation and segmentation are all playing their role in a significant reconfiguration of children's lives. Until recently terrestrial television was the ubiquitous force in adults' and children's media consumption. However, the explosion of media since 1975 is changing the status quo. While in 1980 there was one commercial channel in the UK, in 1995 there were 46. In this way segmentation and fragmentation of the media have enabled special interests to be catered for more regularly (O'Donoghue, 1997).

Changes in the media environment seem to be having significant impact in the children's market where there is an increasing array of media targeted directly at children (Fry, 1993). Despite increased availability of media vehicles in areas such as magazines, comics and the cinema, nowhere is the expansion and fragmentation of the media more apparent than in television. As Table 4.2 indicates some 42% of British children can receive satellite or cable at home (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999), although many more children are guest viewers in other homes (James, 1994). Bowley (1999) notes that since 1992 the number of children's channels on satellite and cable has risen from one to seven. During the same time period, terrestrial television alone has seen an increase of 13 hours of children's TV a day. Certainly children's television is 'well developed' with channels such as the Cartoon Network at the lower end of the age range, Nickelodeon for 8 to 12 year olds and more recently Fox Kids (Marshall, 1997).

Television plays a significant role in children's lives. On average children watch television for two and a half hours per day (i.e. 147 minutes). Older children and those from lower social grade households watch for longer. While children vary considerably in how much time is spent viewing, there are very few 'occasional' viewers at any age: at 6 to 8 the majority of children (85%) are 'steady' viewers. Thereafter there is an increase in 'heavy' viewing, and by the age of 15 to 17, 34% are 'heavy' viewers and only 61% 'steady' viewers (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999).

Table 4.2: Percentage of children with media in the home (N=1287)

	ALL	BOY	GIRL	AGE 6-8	AGE 9-11	AGE 12-14	AGE 15-17	ABC1	C2DE
TV Set	100	99	100	100	99	100	100	100	100
Hi-fi	96	95	96	93	93	98	98	96	96
Video Recorder	96	96	96	95	96	97	95	98	94
Radio	95	94	95	94	95	95	95	97	93
Telephone	93	92	94	96	92	92	91	98	89
Shelf of books	87	86	89	92	88	87	83	94	82
Personal stereo	83	81	84	66	80	90	92	86	80
Teletext	71	73	69	65	71	72	75	76	67
TV game machine	67	78	56	65	70	72	61	61	72
PC	53	50	56	53	51	53	54	68	40
With CD-ROM	31	29	33	35	30	31	28	46	19
Gameboy	42	44	40	35	45	48	38	47	39
Cable/Satellite	42	44	39	45	40	40	42	39	44
Mobile phone	30	30	30	26	31	31	33	44	20
Camcorder	25	24	27	34	28	21	21	32	21
Internet link	7	8	7	7	7	8	7	14	2

Source: Livingstone, S. and Bovill, M. (1999) *Young People New Media*. London: London School of Economics, Ch 4, 13

Despite the continued significance of television, changes in the media landscape have started to threaten its dominant position. Although television remains a highly popular medium amongst children an influx of new media has impacted upon their relationship with the media generally. This changing relationship has already been highlighted in an historical level analysis of children's media consumption. It is argued that children of the 1960s can be characterised as the TV generation, those of the 1970s as the video generation, those of the 1980s as the Nintendo generation, and those of the 1990s as the Internet generation (LaFrance, 1996). This development is reflected in the fact that average weekly viewing of television by children has declined significantly (by almost two hours) since 1993 and children are spending

more time on personal computers and electronic games machines (Marshall, 1997).

An examination of Table 4.2 indicates the emerging presence of new media in children's homes. For example, 67% of children have a TV linked games machine at home, 42% have a Gameboy, and 30% have a mobile phone. Over half the child population (53%) have a personal computer at home and 7% use the internet, although there is a significant level of difference between the presence of computers and internet access in middle-class homes (68% and 14% respectively) and in working class home (40% and 2%). While the still dominant role of television raises questions as to the appropriateness of conceiving of children today as the 'internet' generation, it is clear that the growth of computer and internet access at home, accompanied by the growth of new media in schools, is altering children's media experience.

A key feature of the new media environment is the multiplication of personally owned goods, so that children increasingly have their own television, video, computer, radio and other media in their bedroom (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999). As these goods increasingly move into children's private space, what used to be termed a bedroom is now a 'new media centre' (Pillot de Chenecey, 1999). This move has played an important role in the growing importance of 'bedroom culture' (Brown et al, 1994).

As Table 4.3 indicates children's bedrooms are a media rich environment. Over 50% of all children have a personal stereo, books, TV set, hi-fi and radio in their bedroom. Other technologies such as TV-linked game machines, Gameboys, video recorders and personal computers receive a lower but significant percentage. Further Teletext, cable/ satellite, telephones, internet links, mobile phones and camcorders have a relatively small but, especially in the case of mobile phones, growing presence.

Table 4.3: Percentage of children with media in bedroom (N=1303)

	ALL	BOY	GIRL	AGE 6-8	AGE 9-11	AGE 12-14	AGE 15-17	ABC1	C2DE
Personal stereo	68	65	71	44	62	80	85	71	65
Shelf of books	64	62	66	69	66	64	59	73	58
TV set	63	69	57	46	60	71	77	54	71
Hi-fi	61	59	62	31	50	73	87	57	63
Radio	59	59	60	47	57	66	66	64	56
TV game machine	34	48	19	23	35	43	34	27	39
Gameboy	27	31	22	17	32	34	23	27	26
Video recorder	21	23	19	11	18	22	32	14	26
PC	12	16	8	9	11	14	16	12	13
With CD-ROM	4	5	2	3	2	6	3	4	3
Teletext	8	9	7	3	5	8	14	8	8
Cable/Satellite	5	5	5	4	4	5	7	4	5
Telephone	5	5	6	4	2	6	10	5	6
Internet link	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Mobile phone	1	2	1	0	0	1	4	1	2
Camcorder	1	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	1

Source: Livingstone, S. and Bovill, M. (1999) *Young People New Media*. London: London School of Economics, Ch 4, 14

It appears that older children are more likely to own everything, except books, than younger children. Perhaps the most notable differences come in the increased presence of TV-linked games machines and Gameboys in boys' rooms as compared to girls. Although 63% of children have a television set in their bedroom, the percentage in working class homes is significantly greater than that in middle class homes. In addition it can be noted that twice as many boys as girls have a PC in their bedroom.

In sum, the media landscape has seen many notable changes in recent years. These developments may have profound implications for children's lives in terms of individualisation/ socialisation, increasing choice and immediacy, age compression,

and interactivity. These implications will now be considered.

4.1.1 Individualisation/ socialisation

Changes in the context of childhood, particularly in the media arena, can be seen to elicit opposing trends towards individualisation and socialisation. The historical trend towards 'individualisation' has been discussed by Livingstone and Bovill (1999) who highlight the role of the multiplication of personally owned media such as televisions, telephones and radios in shifting the boundary between public and private spaces. Certainly it would seem that children are increasingly encouraged to consume the media in isolation from the rest of the family. The rise in media rich children's bedrooms (Brown et al, 1994) mentioned earlier itself implies a move away from public media use to more individualised media consumption within the bedroom.

Alongside this increasing individualisation of media consumption can be seen an opposing trend of media socialisation. Hodge and Tripp (1986: 143) have suggested that discourse about television is itself a considerable social force:

It is a major site of the mediation of television meanings, a site where television meanings fuse with other meanings into a new text to form a major interface with the world of action and belief.

Buckingham (1993) also discusses the social functions of television talk amongst children noting that it can not only serve as a form of 'phatic speech' in providing safe ground for establishing and maintaining communication, but also to establish and negotiate social relationships in ways that are far from neutral. He argues that children's everyday social talk about television provides a means of defining friendships, and social hierarchies.

Recent research with children comprising both traditional and new media (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999) suggests that the media as a whole are becoming

increasingly important in peer culture, social relationships and the construction of social identity. New media such as the PC have seen domestic practices that suggest more social uses. Even television, although often watched alone, generates the same desire to 'socialise the media':

Children and young people today conduct their social relations in a media-saturated environment: it is about soap operas that children gossip on the phone, they are excited by the Internet as a way of meeting others in far off places, they visit each other to share a new computer game, they hire videos to watch in a group.

(Livingstone and Bovill, 1999, Ch 12, 12)

4.1.2 Increasing choice and immediacy

Watts (1999) argues that changes in the media landscape have been at the centre of increased pressure on children's leisure time. Today's so called 'Net Generation' are spoilt for choice as to how to spend their leisure time and money (Carter, 1999). With the competition for these resources more intense than a generation ago there is increased participation and diversification.

To illustrate this point it can be noted that not only do children have increasing access to a variety of new and traditional media at home (as described earlier), but also the choice available has resulted in increasing diversity of actual media use. Overall children aged six to 17 years spend around five hours per day with the media. On average they spend 147 minutes watching television, 76 minutes on music media, 45 minutes on computer games, 39 minutes on videos, 29 minutes on the computer (not games), 26 minutes on non-school books, and seven minutes on comics. In addition, those over the age of nine spend 13 minutes reading magazines, 13 minutes reading newspapers, and on average 8 minutes using the Internet (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999).

Further the development of new media, communications and technology has meant that the nature of children's day-to-day lives is now characterised by immediacy,

convenience, and an increasing focus on speed. For example, Haylo (1999) notes that in the new media era the news is out faster than ever before, making knowledge instantly accessible. In addition areas such as communication have seen the growth of 'immediate' forms of interaction in the form of e-mail, and finance has seen the emergence of 'convenient' resources like children's credit cards, instant credit schemes, and 24 hour telephone and on-line banking (Watts, 1999). Together the impact on children emerges in terms of a different 'time' reference from past generations and an emphasis on immediate gratification. As many aspects of their lives are immediate and convenient their perspective of time and the gratification of needs may be transforming. In essence, with information being provided more quickly and easily, children may be acquiring a limited 'attention span' (Stoltman, 1999).

4.1.3 Age compression: power and literacy

The changes taking place on the media landscape may also be enhancing the status of childhood. Livingstone and Bovill (1999) argue that emerging screen technologies, in particular cable television and the personal computer, alongside the multiplication and diversification of the media, have facilitated the convergence of information, education, entertainment and work. Through this convergence there has been considerable "blurring of key social boundaries", for example between home and work, entertainment and information, public and commerce, education and leisure, masculine and feminine. In addition they suggest that convergence may be contributing to the blurring of child and adult roles

Some commentators have gone as far as to implicate the media in the 'disappearance of childhood' (Postman, 1983). Merrowitz (1985) and Postman (1983) attribute a determining role to technology, and refer to the blurring of childhood and adulthood due to new patterns of information flow. Television brings adults and children together in social situations that were previously distinct. It also enables them to see parts of the social world previously secret, hidden or inaccessible to them. In Meyrowitz's (1985: 242) opinion:

(television) allows the young child to be 'present' at adult interactions.... at wars and funerals, courtships and seductions, criminal plots and cocktail parties.

As a result it is argued that an important barrier between adults and children, which was formally reinforced by varying levels of reading skill, has been dismantled. According to Croteau and Hoynes (2000) television goes further in giving children a much clearer view of the world of adult secrets, and seeing more closely the "backstage" behaviours of adults. Children may be seen to grow up faster as the adult world is much less mysterious to television-age children. Further, the ability to understand television is not only connected to age, a dramatic change from print-oriented cultures in which information was connected to largely age-specific reading skills.

This move towards the concept of children getting older younger as a result of changes on the media landscape has been highlighted in the children's magazine market. The recent launch of "Mad About Boys", the first glossy magazine to target pre-teenage girls with pin-ups of boys, make-up tips and articles about dating, has been condemned for sexualising young girls. However, the publishers of the magazine claim that the target market of British nine to 12 year olds are advanced in their outlook on life and are already aware of and interested in boys (McCann, 2001).

Media developments, particularly media fragmentation, heavy media use and the emergence of interactive technologies, may be contributing to what has been termed as the increasing media literacy of children. In this light children are becoming more sophisticated in their ability to 'read' and understand television and other media (Buckingham, 1993). This literacy in dealing with the media is a skill that advertisers are keen to publicise. For example, practitioner studies have proclaimed that children and teenagers are sophisticated media consumers, having grown up with a wide selection of TV channels, satellite TV and videos (Dickenson, 1995). Likewise Ratcliff (1994) suggests that that the current generation are more media literate than their 70s and 80s counterparts. He considers that this literacy extends to

advertising due to the increased access to disparate types of media such as TV, satellite, video and computer games and the speed with which children absorb information.

4.1.4 Interactivity

Interactive media is a term that only adults need, because children think that is how the world works anyway.... (Grimes, 1994:28)

Closely related to the discussion of children's increasing power and media literacy is their acceptance of interactivity as the norm. Interactive technologies and an expanding media environment seem to be impacting on children's relationship with the media leading to consumer empowerment amongst our youth generation (Ratcliff, 1994). Livingstone and Bovill (1999) discuss the consequences for communication and social relations of the shift towards more interactive communication between medium and user. Drawing on the work of Williams et al (1988) they suggest that interactivity incorporates several dimensions which characterise the changing modes of involvement with media, including the mutuality and exchange of roles involved in a two-way interaction; the degree of user control and management of content and timing of the interaction; and finally, individual and asynchronous rather than shared mass experience. According to their analysis interactivity draws attention to the relationship between the user and the medium, with the introduction of new media allowing people to choose and control media contents.

Woods and Walker (1994) suggest that increasing use of computers is leading to a view of this interactive connection with the screen as the most appropriate model for screen related usage. In particular they suggest that interactive video games have encouraged this attitude amongst younger consumers, with children emerging at the forefront of changing perceptions away from passive and towards active forms of entertainment in which power rests with the viewer. In terms of the Internet, with its dominantly flexible, impermanent, non-linear, and hypertextual data structure

(Livingstone and Bovill, 1999), control seems to be resting increasingly with the child rather than the producer.

However, we can see interactivity not only in physical and sociocultural terms but also in psychological terms to apply to the activity of audiences. Indeed given the rich and changing offerings on the media landscape and children's almost unlimited access to its produce, we might pertinently develop the analysis by focusing on what children do with the media. It is the subject of the active audience in media research which will now be addressed.

4.2 The active audience in media research

Many have argued for the need to go beyond the input/ output model of effects research (Roscoe et al, 1995) and proposed a change of focus towards the way in which viewers 'use' television (Fiske, 1987). Starting with uses and gratifications work and extending into more recent studies within Cultural Studies the broad expanse of media research has provided considerable understanding of people's active consumption of varying media forms and genres. The insights, although often focused on adult consumers, may provide valuable understanding of the activity of the child audience in terms of psychological motivations.

Uses and gratifications theory and later approaches in Cultural Studies will be considered together under the broad uses and gratifications paradigm due to their joint emphasis on activity and provision of insight into child audiences. However, although research has drawn heavily on both theoretical approaches (cf. Lull, 1990), it must be emphasised that these bodies of work differ in several areas. Specifically Ang (1995) has highlighted differences between uses and gratifications and New Audience Research carried out within Cultural Studies. With her feet firmly in New Audience Research camp, Ang has criticised uses and gratifications according to three main arguments. Firstly, the approach is viewed as highly individualistic in its focus on individual psychological gratifications gained from individual media use. In this way it often overlooks the social context of media practices. Secondly, it

tends to sideline media content with researchers focusing more on why people use the media, and less on what meanings they derive from their media use. Thirdly, the approach takes the perspective that the media are always functional to individuals. It may therefore implicitly offer a justification for the way the media are currently organised.

Despite these limitations the uses and gratifications paradigm allows us to consider children as essentially active media consumers. This active approach provides a means of countering the traditional viewpoint of the passive, vulnerable, effects-based child depicted in chapter three. The approach may therefore provide an appropriate framework to draw on for research into children's experience of advertising.

The central question posed by theorists within the uses and gratifications paradigm is 'Why do people use media and what do they use them for?' (McQuail, 1997). More recently new audience theory has extended this focus on what people do with the media by proposing that the meaning derived from media content is dependent on the perceptions, experiences, and social location of audience members (Jensen, 1991; McQuail, 1997).

The uses and gratifications paradigm attempts to link motivations for media use with the effects of media exposure (O'Guinn and Faber, 1991). The origins of the approach lie in the search for explanations of the great appeal of certain staple media contents in the first half of the 20th century (McQuail, 1997). However, the 1970s revival broadened the range of empirical investigations by focusing on the social and psychological origins of needs (Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974: 20). The approach rests on a body of assumptions. Firstly, the audience is conceived of as active, and so an important part of mass media use is assumed to be goal directed. Secondly, much initiative in linking need gratification and media choice lies with the audience member. Thirdly, the media compete with other sources of need satisfaction. Fourthly, many of the goals of mass media use can be derived from data supplied by individual audience members (who are conceived as sufficiently self

aware to report or recognise their interests and motives). Finally, value judgements about the cultural significance of mass communication should be suspended while audience orientations are explored on their own terms (Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974).

4.2.1 Media uses and gratifications of adults

In terms of research with adults a taste of more recent work within Cultural Studies, particularly that touching upon children through the focus on families and their television use, can be briefly provided. Innumerable studies have emphasised the notion of audiences as active constructors of meaning and users of media texts (Morley, 1980, 1986; Katz and Liebes, 1984; Fiske, 1987; Radway, 1987; Lull, 1990; Brown, 1994). In addition they have often employed ethnographic approaches to explore how audiences derive meaning from texts according to their sociocultural position and personally derived experience. In this light De Certeau (1992) views ordinary people as 'poachers', stealing their required meanings from the cultural commodities they are offered. Similarly, Fiske (1987) rejects the notion that any text conveys the same message to all people. As in Morley's (1980; 1986) work he highlighted the importance of television related talk and phatic functions of the media in altering dominant meanings encoded in media texts according to the needs of individuals and communities.

Morley's (1986) "Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure", explored the role of sociocultural differences in determining the use of television in family life. Using interviews with working class families in London, the study highlighted the importance of gender relations and particularly the dominant role played by fathers and sons in their use of the media. This focus on the use of television in everyday life within the family is reflected in research carried out by James Lull (1990). Using the specific language of uses and gratifications, Lull applied an "ethnography of reading" (Moore, 1993:27) primarily based on participant observation. His typology of social uses of television draws on a broad distinction between structural and relational uses of television. Structural uses

comprised environmental and regulative functions in framing and punctuating daily activities. Relational uses covered four areas. Firstly, television facilitated communication through generating discussion and easing social contacts. Secondly, television was used for affiliation or avoidance by providing opportunities to be socially close or separate from others. For example, proximity to others was demonstrated by watching and participating in the same programmes. Thirdly, television content was also used for social learning, as in the imitation of television role models. Finally, competence or dominance was seen as a function of television. Thus, for example, certain TV content including quiz shows allowed family members to demonstrate their competence, whilst the manipulation of television programming through the use of the remote control (which was dominated by males) reflected power structures within the family.

4.2.2 Media uses and gratifications of children

Brown et al (1974) characterise early research into the functional orientations of children to the mass media in terms of two broad categories. Firstly, one body of research focused on relationships between child characteristics and mass media behaviour, and interpreted associations in terms of media gratifications provided for the individuals concerned. For example, Brown et al (1974) cite the work of Wolfe and Fiske (1949) who related clearly demarcated and age-dependent preferences for different comic books to certain needs and behaviour characteristics of growing children. A second body of research concentrated on television as a new force on the mass media scene, competing with other interests for the attention of children. Researchers sought to explain the displacement of other activities partly by reference to the principle of functional similarity and the idea that television better satisfied certain needs. For example, Schramm, Lyle and Parker (1961) proposed that television provided children with escape from conflicts, or entertainment and escape from boredom. They argued that other media were functionally similar in that they too provided 'fantasy' materials.

While the early studies relied on inference from other data and observable medium characteristics (e.g. fantasy and reality material) when attributing gratifications to children, later studies in the revival period of the 1970s used more child oriented approaches such as direct questioning to determine media uses and gratifications. For example, in a study of the gratifications of television viewing (Greenberg, 1974) 9, 12 and 15 year olds were asked to write an essay on the subject "Why I like to watch television". Eight reasons for watching television were derived from an analysis of the essays: 'to pass time', 'to forget, as a means of diversion', 'to learn about things', 'to learn about myself', 'for arousal', 'for relaxation', 'for companionship', and 'as a habit'. Similarly, von Feilitzen (1976) provided a number of central themes in summing up Swedish children's main reasons for using the media. Interestingly a distinction was made between social (identity, talking with others) and non social needs (especially related to 'escape', being alone, and mood management). Other reasons included entertainment and emotional satisfactions, informational and cognitive needs, and needs related to the mode of consumption and the medium itself that hold certain intrinsic satisfactions for the user.

David Buckingham (1987; 1990; 1996) has been at the forefront of youth research in his examination of children's television literacy generally, and children's relationship with particular genres such as soap operas and horror films. For example, his work in the late 1980s (Buckingham, 1987) explored children's decodings of the BBC soap *Eastenders* which had been accused by the moral welfare campaigner, Mary Whitehouse, of having damaging effects on young viewers. Through interviews with 7 to 18 year olds he found that his informants were clearly not 'dupes' of television, rather they were actively engaged in negotiating meanings. Some meanings were refused and others were seized upon for reasons quite different from the intentions of producers. In addition the children displayed a considerable degree of critical distance, questioning the programme's representation of reality, and criticising its partiality and implausibility. They also indicated general enjoyment and passionate interest in the programme. Thus, revealing a complex combination of responses being by turns "moved, deeply involved, amused, bored, mocking and irreverent" (Buckingham, 1987: 200). Children as young as 10 were moved by the drama and

yet still displayed a critical distance which enabled some to ridicule what they watched. On the basis on his findings Buckingham concluded that the most appropriate metaphor for young people's experience of soap opera is as a "collective game":

The programme itself provides a basis for the game, but viewers are constantly extending and redefining it. Far from being simply manipulated, they know they are playing a game, and derive considerable pleasure from crossing the boundaries between fiction and reality. Yet although the rules of the game are flexible, they are ultimately determined by the programme-makers: while viewers may seek to play by their own rules, they must inevitably acknowledge those which are set for them (Buckingham, 1987: 204).

Extending the collective game metaphor seen in Buckingham's work, Palmer (1986; 1988) noted the real life use of programmes as resources for game playing both in the home and at school. For example she described how two 8 year olds read imaginary news bulletins on to a cassette recorder in their bedroom (1988:148) and a group of 11 year olds acted out scenes from a soap opera in the playground and cast their teacher in the role of a baddie (1988: 111). Play related uses of the television have also been revealed by Reid and Frazer (1980a, b) but Palmer highlights the diversity of activities, both play related or otherwise, which were performed while the set was switched on. Following survey questioning their replies included "jump and dance", "do homework", "play with toys" and "eat a snack" (Palmer, 1986: 63). Working class children in particular had developed ways of incorporating TV into other tasks. In keeping with the earlier discussion on increased time tabling of children's lives, middle class children took part in various leisure and recreational activities outside the home. Working class children, whose parents could perhaps less afford the cost of extra activities, watched television for longer hours than their middleclass counterparts. However, they generally found more things to do in the presence of television.

Palmer's (1986; 1988) work is particularly interesting in its application of varied child-centred methodologies which demonstrate that children are active consumers of television in their everyday life. In particular by asking children to define the

situation for themselves, she has made a valuable contribution beyond the effects perspective (Moore, 1993). In a three stage broadly ethnographic project of the TV viewing of 8 to 9, and 11 to 12 year old boys and girls from diverse class locations around Sydney, Australia a different sample of children was used for each stage of the study. The first stage of the research used individual interviews with 64 children in primary schools and aimed “to gain a systematic understanding of children’s ways of defining television.... their own experience of television viewing” (Palmer, 1986:28). The discussions began with open ended questions and the direction of the conversations was primarily guided by the interviewees. In addition the child was encouraged to draw a picture of him/herself watching TV. In the second stage, the focus was placed on children’s manipulation of the space around the TV screen. In order to do this a team of researchers carried out participant observation studies in 23 homes. The observers spent several hours of viewing time with the children and returned to the homes on 3 separate visits. The third section of the research comprised a questionnaire-based survey of nearly 500 school pupils. The material for this phase was derived from and shaped by the earlier stages.

As in Buckingham’s work (1987; 1990; 1996) Palmer showed that talking with the children about TV evoked positive feelings of enjoyment and pleasure. When asked what they watched, the immediate response was to list a string of favourite programmes. None of the original replies contained any comments on content that was disliked or experiences that were unpleasant. The sketches showed the children with smiles on their faces and occasionally pictured scenes from a particular television show. The participant observation section of the study demonstrated how children actively manipulated the space around the TV to create a viewing situation which suited their purposes. Thus, part of the pleasure involved in watching preferred programmes was the creation of a “cosy intimacy” sitting close to the screen, accompanied by familiar objects like cushions, blankets, beanbags or household pets (Palmer, 1986:51-7). This seemed to be tied up with the child’s intimate involvement in and enjoyment of a favourite fiction. The survey section of the study provided evidence of a discrepancy between children’s definitions and the perceptions that adults have of their TV consumption. Almost 60% of the children

involved agreed with the statement that “TV is great”. However, only 14% of those thought that was their mother’s opinion and still less believed it was a feeling shared by teachers (Palmer, 1988:143).

Perhaps the most culturally contextualised study of young people and their media uses is seen in the work of Paul Willis (1990). Although examining the broader subject of the common culture of young adults, his focus on a youth audience and the culture of everyday life make this an important contribution to knowledge for understanding young people’s experience of the media. In particular Willis argues for the centrality of forms of symbolic creativity in everyday ‘ordinary’ culture and aims to understand these symbolic elements by focusing on popular cultural forms such as music, fashion, the cultural media and their use and meaning for young people. Thus, applying a ‘loose’ form of ethnography utilising recorded group discussions, he examines:

....the extraordinary symbolic creativity of the multitude of ways in which young people use, humanize, decorate and invest with meanings their common and immediate life spaces and social practices - personal styles and choice of clothes; selective and active use of music, TV, magazines; decoration of bedrooms; the rituals of romance and subcultural styles; the style, banter and drama of friendship groups; music-making and dance (Willis, 1990: 2).

Willis concludes that his informants are all ‘cultural producers’. Signs as signifiers no longer simply connect with what is signified in intentioned messages. Thus, messages are now not so much ‘sent’ and ‘received’ as ‘made in reception’.

Taking a similarly holistic and cultural approach, Livingstone and Bovill (1999) have examined the impact of the changing media environment and the rise of new technologies. Originating in early work by Himmelweit and colleagues, who investigated the place of television in the lives of young people during the 1950s, an extensive report by the London School of Economics (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999) provides a detailed account of the diffusion, uses, experiences and significance of media and information technologies amongst children and young people. Where

their research differs from early uses and gratifications work and builds on that of Willis, Palmer and Buckingham, is in its focus on the broad context of childhood including leisure pursuits, home, school and family life. As the authors note “we set out to contextualise children and young people’s meanings and uses of new media in relation to their ‘environment’ or ‘lifeworld’...” (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999: chapter 1: 3).

Using qualitative techniques and a sample survey of 1303 6-17 year olds across the UK, the study analysed their uses and experiences of traditional and new media. The authors highlighted the dominance of ‘screen entertainment culture’ within the UK. Of particular relevance in a consideration of the uses and gratifications approach, it can be noted that the continued dominance of the television was found to rest on the breadth of gratification it offers: excitement, overcoming boredom, relaxation and overcoming the threat of being left out.

In sum the empirical work into children’s uses and gratifications of the media has provided an active perspective of the child viewer. This will be continued in the next section where we will address a variety of new theoretical frameworks and empirical research relating to the meaning of advertising in children’s lives.

5. Meaning of advertising

Turning towards the genre of advertising specifically, it is possible to continue the focus on the active, contextually based child. Recent theoretical developments including meaning based, reader response and advertising literacy approaches have focused on the sophistication of consumers in their active construction of meaning and varied uses of advertising.

5.1 A meaning based model of advertising

Grafton-Small and Linstead (1989) see the relationship between advertising and meaning as a creative process whereby the meaning given to an advert will vary according to the context of the individual reader. Drawing on the meaning based approaches to material goods analysed earlier, Mick and Buhl (1992) formally developed a model of advertising designed to understand how the “consumer constructs a variety of meanings as outcomes of a personally interest driven, culturally situated act of advertising interpretation”. The model (Figure 4.1) takes an active and holistic perspective highlighting the consumer’s experience, sociocultural context and the cyclical flow of meaning. Ads are seen to originate and disperse through the same sociocultural context as the consumer with higher order or connotative meanings motivated and shaped by important factors in the individual’s life world.

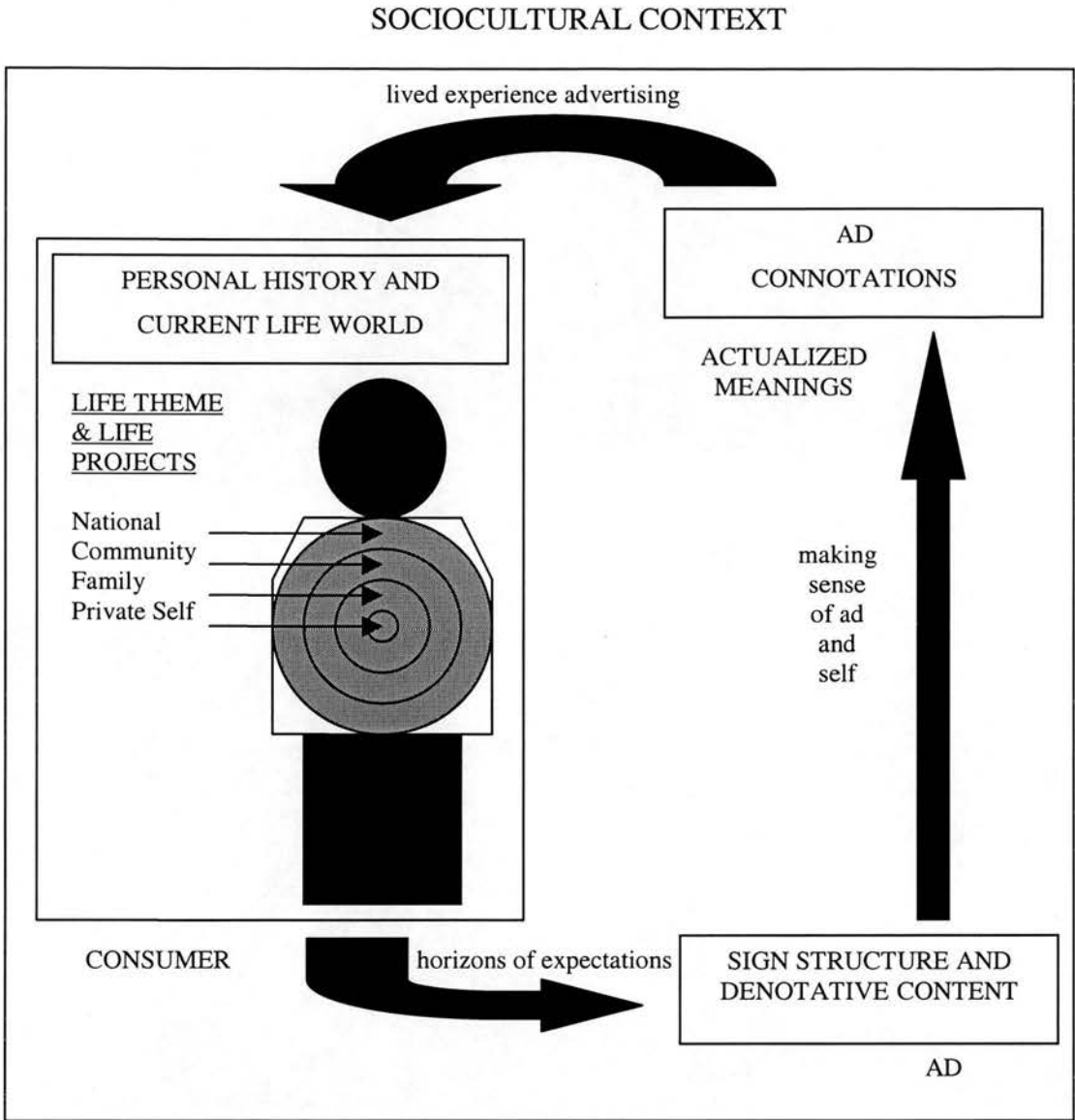
Applying the perspective of the consumer through his or her personal history and current life world, the model focuses on life themes and life projects. Life themes are often derived from sociocultural background and transformational experiences. They represent the deeply held existential concerns or values that individuals address in their everyday lives, for example ‘having status versus not having status’. Through them, human experience and behaviour are considered anticipatory and motivated rather than reactive. Life themes both enable and delimit reading experiences “with text meanings being neither inherent to nor about a text, but of and about readers”. Life projects, unlike life themes, are constantly changing depending on an individual’s circumstances and stage in the life cycle. They may be conceived in terms of roles and concern meanings related to the self and extended self (including private self, home and family, community and career, and nationality). When viewed as a whole, the development and management of life projects reveal the particular orientations of individuals, or their life themes.

Mick and Buhl (1992) assessed their meaning based model through a phenomenological inquiry into the life stories of three Danish brothers and their respective experiences of contemporary magazine advertisements. In the first stage of the fieldwork each brother was interviewed separately and asked to discuss their experience of five magazine ads. In the second stage a life story interview was carried out with each brother in order to determine their life themes and life projects. The insights gained from these life story interviews were used to interpret the brothers' ad experiences.


The life themes evinced for the brothers indicated a shared focus on "having versus not having high status", although each brother was found to possess a personal and distinctive life theme, namely "being free versus not being free", "being true versus being false", and "defining self versus not defining self". These were found to determine and delimit the meanings derived from ads. Based on their research Mick and Buhl argue that:

The motivations and meanings of life are mirrored in the motivations and meanings of advertising experiences (Mick and Buhl, 1992: 336)

FIGURE 4.1: A Meaning Based Model of Advertising



National Life Projects involve meanings associated with nationalities and internationality.
Community Life Projects involve meanings associated with residential areas, peer groups and careers.
Family Life Projects involve meanings associated with family members, including parents, siblings, spouse and children.
Private Self Project involves meanings associated with being an individuated human being, including personal activities and interests.

 A pervasive Life Theme such as being active versus being passive

Adapted from: Mick, D. and Buhl, C. (1992) A meaning based model of advertising experiences, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19, December, 319

Meaning based approaches provide useful theoretical insight into the active consumer but they are not alone in assuming that people actively consume the media. Mick and Buhl (1992) specifically draw on reader response theory in developing their model of advertising experiences. As Clark (1999) argues meaning based approaches to advertising borrow the assumption of reader response theory that research should examine communication as an active process with many feasible outcomes. This further contribution to theory based on the notion of the active viewer will be discussed next.

5.2 Reader response theory

Before the revolution in literary criticism in the 1960s and 1970s the practice of 'reading' was largely equated with a correct audience response to a stable text (Stern, 2000). The emergence of reader response criticism challenged the concept of correct readings, positing that meaning is not static or predetermined but constructed as the viewer interacts with the text. In this way the text communicates in a manner open to personal as well as shared cultural meanings, with viewers often imputing varied meanings to a single text (Clark, 1999: 86). Conceived from this perspective the agency and contextual focus attributed to the consumer by reader response theories is closely connected to meaning based models and seems especially relevant to an examination of children's experience of advertising from an active perspective.

The nature and development of the reader response model from its literary theory roots to consumer research has been outlined by Linda Scott (1994). She distinguishes between three main dimensions of literary theory referring to text-centred structuralist and formalist research, and reading-centred reader response approaches. Structuralism is the best known branch of semiotic theory which postulates a "metagrammar", or a system of language that resides underneath actual speech (Scott, 1994). This semiotic approach based on an analogy to linguistics has been applied to a variety of areas of consumer research since Mick's (1986) seminal

investigation of consumer research and semiotics (Mick and Politti, 1989; McQuarrie, 1989; McQuarrie and Mick, 1992). A second text based approach called formalism was introduced into consumer research by Barbara Stern (1988). This formalist method was drawn from the New Critical school of literary criticism and requires a “close reading” of a text’s formal features including images, metaphors, irony, allusions and personae (Hirschman, 1999).

Whereas structuralist and formalist approaches have relied on a theory of signs that is detached from the circumstances of use, reader response approaches focus on the active role of the reader and his or her context. A number of literary critics have been involved in the development of this approach including Jonathon Culler, Norman Holland, Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish and David Bleich. Fish (1980) argues for the fundamental importance of readers' interpretations of texts noting that a text is not a text without a reader and a context. He considers meaning-making as a process and not simply the 'extraction' of 'content'. However, he limits the possible range of readers' meanings by stressing the importance of 'interpretive communities'. In this way reader response theory moves from textual analysis to the practice of reading, and “tries to show how a text works with the probable knowledge, expectations, or motives of the reader” (Scott, 1994: 463). Whilst there is no one correct reading in reader response theory, reading is based on collective conventions, with groups of readers sharing reading strategies and applying learned textual conventions.

Gender groups may be highlighted in this regard. Studies that have suggested that patterns of male and female psychological development are substantially different have led literary critics to propose that there are significant differences in how males and females read stories. Applying this notion to consumer research, Stern (2000) argues that literary theories and research have profound implications for understanding gendered consumption of advertising based on reading style and interaction with the text. Turning first to male and female reading styles she draws on Rosenblatt’s (1978) differentiation between aesthetic (feminine) versus efferent (masculine) reading styles and proposes that women tend to read for the experience while men read for information. More specifically aesthetic reading is characteristic

of female readers. It is an affect-based style in which a reader experiences the text fully by living through described events. This process demands an emotional willingness to participate vicariously in the characters' lives rather than an insistence on a goal-oriented ending. On the other side, efferent reading is characteristic of male readers. It is a cognitive style in which a reader engages with the text with the aim of taking something useful from the reading. The ending is seen as necessary to reassure readers that they have attained a goal worthy of the time and effort expended on the text.

In terms of interaction with the literary text men and women have been broadly differentiated in terms of Bleich (1988) and Flynn's (1988) delineation between male 'detachment' and female 'participation'. Moving to readers' relationships with advertisements Stern proposes three possible gender related differences based on literary research which emphasise authorial intent, information, relationships and inference, and evaluation and comprehension. Firstly, she argues that men appear distant from the text and focus on the intent of the teller. For women participation in the story and its relationships is seen to take precedence over the storyteller. Secondly, she suggests that men are more literal and information based in their interpretations of text, thus tending to avoid inferencing or 'putting' things into a story. Women, however, tend to retell a story as if it were an experience. They fill in gaps and draw on inferences with regard for their affective sense of human relationships rather than the text's literality. Finally, Stern attests that men are more likely to evaluate what they read and be more frustrated by a failure to understand a text. Women, however, are less likely to insist on understanding a story and to pass evaluative judgements. They tend to enter the experience of human relationships in the text rather than being detached and judgmental.

While there is little evidence of similar advertising research amongst children Appleyard (1991) has noted the importance of gender in his examination of child book readers. He contends that gender has been the most frequently cited cultural factor in claiming a distinctive development for different groups of readers. In this light we may perceive in Stern's work a potential framework to apply to children.

The delineation between male and female readers suggests that men and women may respond quite differently to advertising. However, we may argue that individuals of either sex may oppose such predetermined styles and modes of reading if only because other motivations and group reading conventions are more powerful. Nevertheless the distinctions provided, supported by Appleyard's (1991) recognition of gendered story consumption by children, may form a useful means of understanding children's gendered advertising experiences.

Beyond the consideration of gender issues Appleyard (1991) employs a reader response approach to explore developmental issues, and specifically how children become book readers. He proposes that people as they mature move through different reading roles from 'Player', to 'Hero or Heroine', to 'Thinker', to 'Interpreter', and finally to the role of the 'Pragmatic reader'. These roles are viewed as clusters of distinctive responses, attitudes and intentions that readers bring to reading as well as the uses they make of it. Of particular relevance in terms of children and advertising are those roles relating to childhood years. Firstly, in preschool years the child, as a listener to stories, becomes a confident player in a fantasy world which he gradually learns to order and control. Secondly, the school age child becomes the central figure of a romance. This romance is constantly being rewritten as the child's picture of the world and how people behave in it is filled in and clarified. Stories in this context seem to be an alternate, more organised, and less ambiguous world than the world of pragmatic experiences. Thus, the reader easily escapes into and becomes involved with this world. Finally, in the role of the thinker, the adolescent reader looks to stories to discover insights into the meaning of life, values and beliefs worthy of commitment, ideal images, and authentic role models for imitation. The truth of these ideas and ways of living becomes a central criterion for judging them.

In sum, Appleyard's developmental framework may provide insight, not only into children as readers of literary texts, but also as readers of advertisements.

5.3 Advertising literacy

Building on meaning based models and reader response theory, Clark (1999: 85) supports "an active construction of meaning, based on everyday practices" in which the child has "agency and impact". She endorses a model of "interactive meaning exchange" rather than unidirectional meaning transfer in which a mutual feedback or dynamic exchange takes place between child and advertising. Drawing on the theoretical approaches already outlined, interactivity lies at the heart of recent conceptualisations of advertising literacy (O'Donohoe, 1994; Ritson and Elliott, 1995; O'Donohoe and Tynan, 1998; Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998). This approach seems especially pertinent given the increasing interactivity and growth of media literacy in childhood noted earlier in the chapter.

However, looking back over the past two decades the development of advertising literacy can be tracked from an initial focus on literacy skills to a more complete perspective in which people are seen to bring to advertising their own experiences and expectations relevant to the narrative genre, characters, and other symbolic elements of the commercial.

Advertising literacy was seen by Meadows (1983) to comprise a range of skills including increased familiarity and recognition of the vocabulary, elements and 'styles' of advertising, an ability to comment on production values, communication techniques and 'good' advertising, as well as an increasing awareness of advertising's various roles. Following his work Lannon (1985) concluded that people generally are sophisticated in their dealings with advertising, having increasing skills in decoding visual imagery, an ability to classify according to fairly minimal cues, an understanding of the purpose of advertising and a higher level of expectation that advertising should provide rewards.

Referring to advertising literacy in broad terms as 'advertising sophistication', Goodyear (1991) sees a country's advertising literacy progressing in five defined stages, from the immature level where there is an emphasis on the manufacturer's description of the product, towards the most sophisticated level, where the focus has moved from the brand and the consumer to the advertising itself. She suggests that levels of sophistication or advertising literacy in a country develop in a predictable fashion depending on the presence of certain influences. Firstly, the level of exposure to television and film and the consequent ability to learn to see through the camera's eye. Secondly, exposure to advertising and the resulting appreciation of advertising's distinctive conventions. Thirdly, the country's level of industrialisation and consumerisation which specifically comprises the attention given by people to goods in terms of brand values and associated imagery. Finally, the presence of certain national cultural factors including trading and the manufacture of consumer goods.

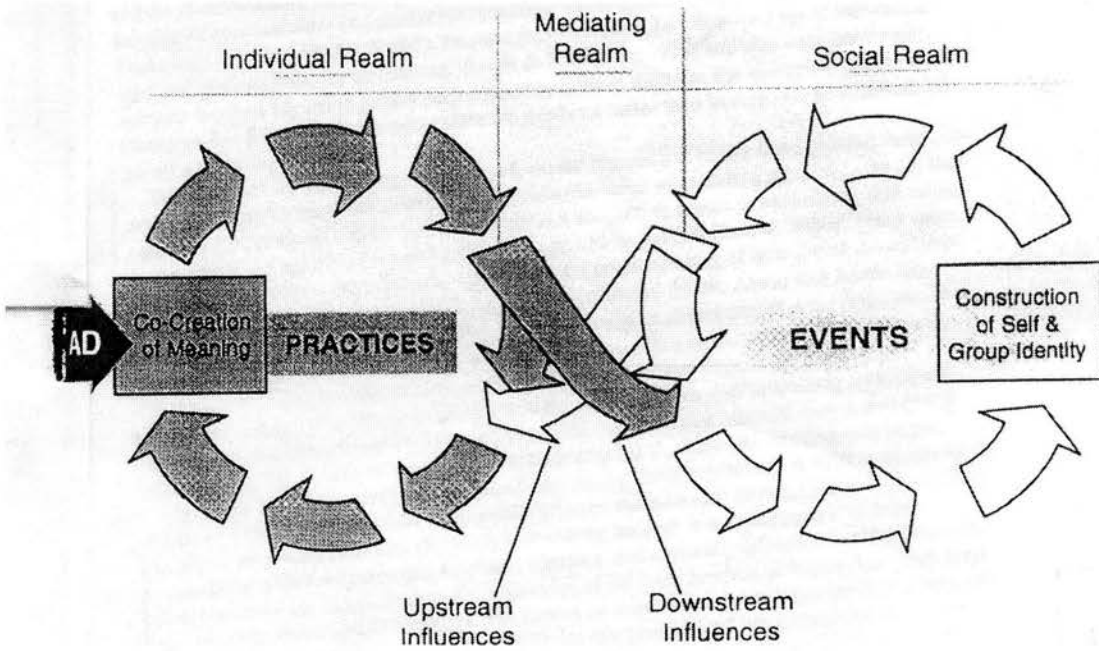
Lannon (1992) presents the development of advertising literacy in terms of the evolution of advertising conventions over time. She suggests that advertising has evolved as the consumer has become more visually literate, adept at decoding and willing to decode. This evolution follows the following stages. Firstly the manufacturer speaks with the assumption that the receiver believes that the manufacturer knows best and tells the truth and that manufacturer claims will be accepted. Secondly, the target group consumes with pleasure. The assumption is that the receiver identifies literally or aspirationally with the people portrayed and so believes in the value of the product. Thirdly, hyperbole and exaggeration dramatise product benefits. Commercials of this type flatter the viewer by assuming that he or she will understand, recognise and enjoy hyperbole as an advertising convention. Rewards are assumed to arise from the fantasy created by the commercial and the ability to provide input in working out the fit between exaggeration and reality. Fourthly, the brand appropriates symbols and metaphors to express its personality. This involves commercials such as those for long established brands with an evolved and complex language. The assumption is that the viewer gains rewards from identifying commercials as a communication for a specific brand and is aware of and

flattered by the manufacturer's recognition of his or her complicity. Finally, the brand creates its own language code. This is the most developed form of communication providing the most extreme form of flattery and assumed knowledge as the advertiser is in effect saying "You now know me well so I do not have to explain myself; I can concentrate on stretching and engaging your imagination." Thus, at this level the complicity and involvement are complete.

Following on from these practitioner perspectives the concept of advertising literacy has recently been defined and concretised in academic circles (O'Donohoe, 1994a; Ritson and Elliott, 1995; O'Donohoe and Tynan, 1998; Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998). Buckingham (1993) notes that the notion of television literacy rests on the assumption that television can be regarded as a language. This assumption has been addressed and largely supported by proponents of the concept of advertising literacy (cf. O'Donohoe, 1994a; Ritson and Elliott, 1995, O'Donohoe and Tynan, 1998). In this way recent research has drawn on literary theory and meaning based models to impart further understanding of the active use of advertising, particularly in social applications and identity construction.

According to O'Donohoe (1994, 1998) and Ritson and Elliott (1995) consumers can be viewed not only in terms of the literacy skills that they possess, but also in the way that those skills are used in the real world. They highlight the interactivity of the consumer and the post-exposure social and cultural environment. Specifically the model (see Figure 4.2) outlined by Ritson and Elliott (1995) presents an interactive relationship between advertising and the consumer in which advertising assists in the consumer's construction of meaning while also representing cultural meanings derived from the consumer's life world and invested into the advertised product. Advertising is seen as part of a cultural system being both a means to transfer or create meanings into culture and a cultural product in its own right. The model highlights social aspects of advertising experience by concentrating not only on the individual's ability to understand and create meanings from ads, but also on the individual's ability to use those meanings within the broader context of existence through literacy practices and events.

Figure 4.2: A model of advertising literacy



Source: Ritson, M. and Elliott, R. (1995) 'A Model of Advertising Literacy: The Praxiology and Co-Creation of Advertising Meaning', in Proceedings of the 24th Conference of the European Marketing Academy, Paris, ESSEC, May, 1039

In keeping with Mick and Buhl (1992), the advertising literacy model emphasises the role of “life” and experience in determining ad meaning. From a practice account of advertising literacy, Ritson and Elliott (1995) refer to the predetermined uses to which a reading will be put. An events account represents the social consumption of ad meaning, that is the interactions and talk surrounding an ad after reception.

Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) have focused on the search for identity through consumption in their reconceptualisation of advertising literacy. They outline a model describing the dialectical relationship between self-identity and social identity, the domains of self-symbolism and social-symbolism, and the process of the mediated experience of advertising and the lived experience of products and services. Initial meanings are created through a negotiation process between lived brand

experiences, mediated advertising experiences and the consumer at the time of ad exposure. These symbolic meanings are not stable, and meanings can also be seen to emerge through interpersonal communication among consumers which may proceed to become socially shared meanings. Following this discursive elaboration symbolic meanings become stable or “concretised”.

Thus, whereas McCracken (1988) describes a linear, one-way flow of meaning from the consumer good to the individual consumer through various ritual processes, advertising literacy models envisage a cyclical and interactive flow of meaning (Ritson and Elliott, 1995; Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998). The social practices of consumer culture extend beyond ritualistic processes and entail “a reciprocal, dialectical relationship between the individual and her/ his cultural milieu” (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998: 134). Such a dialectic approach is one that has long been supported in practitioner work with children (Clark, 1999) and it seems particularly fitting as a means of contextualising children within their broader social and cultural world, whilst also recognising their active relationship with products and advertisements.

In order to highlight what is known about advertising literacy in terms of both skills and more interactive advertising uses, the following section will address the relevant empirical evidence relating, firstly, to adults and, secondly, to children.

5.3.1 Adults’ active advertising experiences

Turning first to evidence of active advertising experiences amongst adults, Gordon (1982) outlined a qualitative study by the Research Business in which group discussions were held amongst 18 to 55 year old women. In comparing younger women (18-24 years) with older women (35-55 years) she found that younger women responded to and assessed advertising very differently from older women. Younger women were seen as part of the ‘television generation’ and as such regarded and accepted advertising as part of their life. They were more confident in their discrimination and judgement of advertising, had a sophisticated understanding of

how advertising works on them, were aware of their own receptiveness to advertising and informed about the advertising industry generally. They accepted advertising as part of life and as an art form in its own right and were therefore more able to evaluate advertising and its different styles. They were more knowledgeable about the idea of advertising styles than older women and were readily able to identify a variety of categories⁴. In addition, they willingly admitted to enjoying advertising and reacted favourably when advertisers treated them as intelligent beings, creating advertising that involved input from them. However, they recognised that entertainment did not always equate with effective branding or communication. Finally, they saw themselves as 'critics' of advertising as much as the programmes.

Willis's (1990) research into the symbolic creativity of young adults also provided limited evidence relating to the advertising literacy of young adults. Research by O'Donohoe (1994a) has provided a comprehensive account of the advertising literacy skills of this age group. Focusing on 18 to 24 year olds O'Donohoe (1994a) confirmed that young people were advertising literate. She identified three dimensions of advertising literacy; "competent consumers", "surrogate strategists" and "casual cognoscenti". Firstly the young people demonstrated that they were competent consumers of advertising. They were able to decode and interpret complex imagery and messages and draw on a wide range of advertising conventions styles and trends. Secondly, they emerged as surrogate strategists in that their understanding extended to the planning process. Thus, using a specialist vocabulary, they were proficient in discussing advertising objectives, target audiences, market conditions, brand positions, campaigns, media planning, and advertising effectiveness. Finally, the young adults sometimes presented themselves as casual cognoscenti, appreciating technical details and production values, showing some awareness of costs and offering to exchange stories and speculation about the making of advertisements.

⁴ Categories include; nostalgia, comparisons, 'pop/video', futuristic, 'follow-up'/thematic, patriotic, 'personalities'/testimonials, 'sexy ladies', ads using humour, ads establishing symbol to link with product, cartoon ads and jingles/music.

Despite Lannon's (1992) call for a new perspective focusing on what people use advertising for there has been only limited application of a uses based approach to advertising literacy (O'Donohoe (1994b). Crosier (1983) proposed seven uses of advertisements arguing that people can cope with advertising because they actively select and use advertising for their own purposes. He highlighted product information, entertainment, implied warranty, value-addition, vicarious experience, involvement and reassurance.

Using an ethnographic approach, involving observation and self reflective reports, Alperstein (1990) described and interpreted the way adults play with the verbal content of television advertising in their everyday lives. He observed the way in which adults transform the literal meaning of advertising content to suit their own needs and experience. Informants used advertising content in social relationships to provide 'mutual socialisation', to promote social distancing or closeness, and as a means of dealing with awkward situations, particularly through generating laughter. Advertising was also found to play an important part in social roles in conveying status or qualification, allowing individuals to assert their roles, and as a means of self-identification. Finally, as well as serving the emotional needs of everyday life, advertising served as a social integrator in its provision of common referents, and conversely allowed individuals to disassociate themselves from particular cultural or social values.

Buttle (1991) reviewed various studies relating to the use of advertising in everyday life and described the diverse activities which take place during commercial breaks and the role of advertising in initiating interpersonal conversation. A later study by O'Donohoe (1994b) concentrated on young adults' uses and gratifications of advertising. Using semi-structured focus group discussions, the 18 to 24 year olds informants were encouraged to describe their experience of advertising in their own words. The analysis revealed a range of marketing and non-marketing uses on the behalf of the informants, a summary of which can be seen in Table 4.4.

O'Donohoe's (1994b) focus on non-marketing uses is particularly illuminating. It reflects many of the findings of Lull's earlier study of the social uses of television within families by drawing attention to the complex, contextual and often intensely social role of advertising in everyday life. These non-marketing uses will be discussed in more detail. Firstly, ads were used to structure time and formed a framework and background to everyday activities. Secondly, O'Donohoe distinguishes the broad use of enjoyment and describes how the young adults in her study often derived a great deal of entertainment from ads, reworking them into their everyday lives as a creative resource for play and diversion.

Thirdly, ads were used to scan the environment. Informants talked about using ads to scan their environment generally, including for example the cars, clothes or jewellery worn by actors in ads. They scanned ads for reflections of familiar, everyday aspects of their own lives, as well as to assess the attractiveness of actors. In addition advertising played a limited educational role, for example in terms of giving access to historical facts or environmental awareness.

Fourthly ads served interpersonal and social functions. Informants talked about the way in which advertising featured in their dealings with other family members, sometimes as a source of tension, embarrassment, or gender and age division. Other ads helped establish solidarity, for example when a group of male informants bonded over a 'World Cup' ad. Advertising served as a topic of conversation at three levels. Firstly, it was seen as **instrumental** in its ability to allow easy conversation on a subject matter everyone could draw upon. Secondly, it was regarded as an **interesting subject matter**, worthy of talk in its own right, and providing legitimate topics of conversation, not simply conversation facilitators. Thirdly, advertising was viewed as **discourse**. In this light talk about advertising was presented as a distinct and serious social skill, surrounded by conventions and expectations regarding its practice, and requiring careful investment to ensure dividends in terms of social status and self-esteem.

Finally, O'Donohoe (1994b) describes how some advertising uses seemed to be bound up with informants' sense of self. Advertising provided some informants with aspirations or role models. In other cases they used it to reinforce, work through, or express particular attitudes and values. In addition, advertising emerged as a potential tool for ego enhancement, for example some informants demonstrated their competence and sophistication by enjoying 'bad' ads. As O'Donohoe (1994a: 342) notes: "in what amounts to knowing subversiveness, informants seem to be like film buffs in their enjoyment of B movies"

Table 4.4: Categorisation of Advertising Uses and Gratifications

Category	Comprising
Marketing uses	Information Choice, competition and convenience Quality assurance/reassurance Consumption stimulation Vicarious consumption Added value
Structuring time Enjoyment	Structuring time Entertainment Diversion Escapism Play
Scanning the environment	Surveillance Familiarity Checking out the opposite sex Education
Social interaction	Family relationships Peer relationships
Self-affirmation/transformation	Reinforcement of attitudes and values Ego enhancement Aspirations and role models

Source: O'Donohoe, S. (1994b) 'Advertising Uses and Gratifications', *European Journal of Marketing*, 28, 8/9, 72

Elliott and Ritson (1995) took an existential approach in their study of the 'lived meaning' of advertising to young women. They described the formation of a group of young women united by their advertising experiences and living out their socially endorsed meanings derived from the sexually explicit ads for Haagen-Dazs Ice Cream. The women were deeply involved with the ads and their interpreted

meanings, sometimes even employing the advertising message as an 'added extra' to sex. Shared meanings were reaffirmed through group members collecting and discussing examples of the ice cream ads and associated free gifts. Further, meanings were concretised through the women gathering in a cafe where they engaged in discussion, music and food that supported their shared interpretations of the ads.

Moving from empirical evidence into adult informants we turn now to extant work relating to children's active advertising experiences.

5.3.2 Children's active advertising experiences

Specifically addressing child and teenage audiences, Buckingham (1993), Young (1990; 1996; 1998), Roedder John and Peracchio (1993), Stockdale (1995), and Ritson and Elliott (1995; 1999) have all highlighted the increasing marketing and advertising literacy of the young consumer.

Research into advertising literacy by Young (1990) highlights the development of "metacommunicative" abilities and suggests that literacy develops as specific skills are acquired. In particular he suggests that as children move into middle childhood they learn to stand back and consider the workings of language and communication generally. These abilities can be associated with Piaget's decentring in that they involve children being able to recognise and reflect upon other's people's perspective and motivations. They can also be linked with the growing importance of 'industry' and the drive for competence in using the tools of the culture emphasised by Erikson's psychosocial theory. Further these abilities may be associated with children's capacity to understand language use and the intentions behind it. Consequently, children learn that a literal interpretation of language is not always intended. They also gain some comprehension of the use of metaphor, hyperbole and understatement, and become more aware of the nuances provided by humour, irony and sarcasm. Young (1990) reflects on the importance of this developing

understanding by the individual child proposing that the types of language use outlined above are those which most commonly prevail in advertising.

Focusing on seven to 12 year olds Buckingham (1993) found evidence of this age group's advertising literacy as part of his broader examination of the ways in which children talk about television. Qualitative data was taken from semi-structured small group discussions with children of 7, 9 and 11 years old from different ethnic and social class backgrounds. Far from being "powerless victims of ideological manipulation" Buckingham revealed an active and cynical youth audience. All the groups except one of the youngest offered statements which defined advertising as a means of selling products, and their explanations generally emphasised the persuasive functions of advertising. Although "other people" were often seen as being influenced by advertising, the children hardly ever described themselves in this way. Overall the children displayed a wide range of technical knowledge and were able to speculate about and criticise the intentions of producers' in relation to executional quality, techniques, strategic aims, representation of reality and target audiences. The children's discussions were characterised by a considerable degree of scepticism, even cynicism, and they displayed heavy irony and mockery in many of their comments and interactions. Many of the discussions acted as "a kind of competitive display of cynical wit at the expense of products and advertisements" (Buckingham, 1993: 252). Interestingly middle-class children were particularly adept at presenting themselves as "wise consumers" while working class children appeared to place less emphasis on demonstrating their scepticism. However, as Buckingham notes this may be related to the middle-class informants greater ability to recognise the implicit educational agenda of the exercise. Aligning his results with Young's (1990) conception of advertising literacy he noted that the children's judgements about advertising could, in different ways, be seen as "manifestations of metalinguistic competencies".

Turning to research focusing on the 'effects' of advertising on children it is possible to find evidence supporting the existence of advertising literacy skills. Research into tobacco advertising demonstrates the sophistication of the child audience. For

example, using quantitative and qualitative techniques, Hastings et al (1994) examined the appeal of the Embassy Regal “Reg” campaign using subjects of 5 to 65 years of age. Focusing on children they found that age was a significant factor in determining children’s understanding of the campaign. Whilst younger children struggled to understand the creative content of adverts, older children, particularly those who smoked, were able to understand and appreciate the humour and this contributed to their enjoyment of the campaign. In general children were highly involved with brand imagery and had considerable skill in interpreting it, as seen in their ability to describe and differentiate the typical smoker of different brands. In addition in research examining perceptions of cigarette advertising generally, Aitken et al (1985) used groups of 6 to 16 year olds to discuss a series of advertisements, including those for cigarettes. They found consistent age related trends in the children’s responses to the symbols in the advertisements, with younger children making more literal interpretations of the symbolism portrayed while older children tended to perceive more complex imagery. Of particular interest in terms of the sophistication of the child audience was their conclusion that some 12 year olds and most 14 and 16 year olds were well attuned in their reading of imagery and were able to perceive cigarette advertising in much the same way as adults. These two studies focus on cigarette advertising and therefore only allow assessment of advertising literacy in a narrow product range. However, they seem to suggest children’s possession of advertising literacy skills and their status as competent consumers (O’Donohoe and Tynan, 1998) in terms of their ability to decode the imagery and symbolism in ads. They also provide a developmental focus demonstrating the growth of these skills as children get older.

Studies examining skills in understanding and decoding advertising provide an important insight into the sophistication and activity of youth audiences, plus an initial framework for future study of children’s advertising experiences. However, on their own they provide an incomplete view of experience in that they tell us little about the cultural context of the child. This cultural aspect is integral to the meaning-based models of consumption which will now be considered.

Although research has begun to expand in recent years there remains a paucity of research focusing on children's uses of literacy skills, particularly for those in their mid teenage years and below. However, some valuable insights have been provided. Existing studies have demonstrated that children use TV advertising in their play (Reid and Frazer, 1980b) and as a means of initiating and controlling interaction in the family (Reid and Frazer, 1980a). The authors collected observations supported the view that the meaning taken from the advertisement is dependent on the viewer's actions toward that advertisement. In particular children knowingly interpreted and used commercials to change the character of viewing situations by involving others in planned social interaction. They observed three specific forms of interaction. Firstly commercials were used to draw others into conversations and activities related or unrelated to message content. Secondly, attempts were made to gain information from parents or siblings in order to resolve ambiguous or complex message presentations. Finally, commercials were used to avoid the demands and requests of others, especially those made by parents. The authors concluded that the view of the passive receiver is an underestimation of the abilities of the child to understand and shape experiences.

Buckingham (1993) revealed that in explaining the purpose of advertising in the domestic viewing context children saw advertising serving the purpose of "amusing people" while they were waiting for their programme to come back on, providing time to carry out a specific activity, such as getting something to eat or drink, looking after children and getting "your eyes back to normal". In addition it served "to show you things", to inform people about what is in the shops and the prices. In keeping with the adult uses and gratifications outlined in Table 4.4 it is possible to see children distinguishing both marketing, and specifically informational, uses of advertising as well as non-marketing uses such as structuring time and entertainment. Elaborating on children's advertising uses Buckingham (1993) notes that children may attend to ads to serve a specific purpose such as providing ideas for Christmas presents. Thus, he explains, the causality may be reversed, so that it is not TV advertising that leads to requests rather it is the need to generate product requests that leads to more in-depth viewing of advertising.

Although studies carried out by advertising practitioners are largely out of the public domain there does seem to be evidence of research specifically relating to children's uses of literacy skills. For example qualitative research carried out by Jane Mathews (1995) at the advertising agency J Walter Thompson indicates that children use advertising to impress their friends, to buy things for themselves, as a topic of conversation with friends and family, for information, to stimulate play as they copy words⁵ and actions from the adverts, for pure entertainment and as ammunition to persuade parents to buy products or services.

Research into children's active use of advertising literacy skills has recently been expanded and enhanced by the work of Ritson and Elliott (1999) who explored teenagers, and specifically sixth formers' social uses of advertising. They employed an ethnographic approach to reveal five social uses of advertising comprising "experiencing", "interpreting", "evaluating", "ritualizing" and "applying" the text.

Firstly, in terms of "experiencing" the text, the authors highlighted the phatic role of advertising meaning whereby advertising interaction was described as a "ticket of entry" and precursor to other, more important social interactions. Discussion of advertising acted to strengthen group structures and interpersonal relations, and, thus, the authors referred to incidences of individuals being "left out", talked around", or "blanked" when they had not experienced an ad. The teenagers were motivated to view ads for the pleasure of the text but also to ensure participation in future ad-based interaction that maintained their position within their chosen social group.

Secondly, Ritson and Elliott (1999) highlighted the power of advertising meaning. They referred to the shift in conversation to meaning of the ad. Power was derived through the ability to possess a meaningful interpretation of an ad with peers and family, and power balances were reflected in the need to seek out interpretive

⁵ Mathews (1995) referred to a number of then current ads which children loved to copy including a Wotsits crisps ad with the following script: "Is he catching a bus or what?....Is he picking his nose or what?....Is that bath running or what?....Is that a whoosh or what?...You only get a whoosh with a Wotsit"

assistance from others. Thirdly, Ritson and Elliott argued that the ubiquitous presence of advertising within any culture makes it an ideal point of reference for eisegesis evaluations. The sixth formers in their study evaluated advertising text and used advertising meaning as an eisegesis token, that is to reveal their individual viewpoint and identity to others. They achieved this through critical evaluation of advertising and by discussing liked and disliked executions. Many informants were found to possess personal portfolios of favourite executions that had been socially evaluated and endorsed within a larger group.

Fourthly, advertising text served as the basis for ritualistic interactions in the sixth formers' life worlds. Ritual, in the form of personal re-enactments and mass endorsements, was used to express, articulate and transfer meaning, and highlight disparities in 'cultural capital' of different members of the group. Finally, the authors demonstrated how teenagers applied the text through the use of advertising metaphor. As in the case of advertising ritual, advertising metaphor (involving the "juxtaposition of two normally unaffiliated referents") results in the transfer of meaning. However, unlike scripted, repeated ritualistic interactions, it is a spontaneous, one-time transfer of meaning by one individual. The teenagers used advertising metaphor for an informative function, to "transform their perception" of existing phenomenon, for example teachers, in new ways, and to garner humour. The technique was also applied in 'the construction of an adolescent pecking order', for example to position fellow members of the group in more disparaging or insulting ways due to their "Tango colouration".

In summary the existing research into children and advertising from meaning based, reader response and advertising literacy perspectives provides a tantalising insight into children's active, socioculturally derived advertising experiences. However, the empirical evidence is sparse and largely focused on older teenagers, alongside young children developing initial literacy skills.

6. Conclusion

This chapter has explored a wide variety of literature in order to provide a contextualised view of children's lives. Focus has been given to the changing meaning of childhood, the meaning of possessions and the media, and finally to the meaning of advertising. Firstly in terms of the meaning of childhood attention was drawn to the dramatic social and cultural changes, particularly the decline of the nuclear family and traditional family life, which have characterised children's worlds. Implications of these changes were seen to involve 'getting older younger', increasing spending power, increasing time pressures and structuring of leisure time, and a greater focus on peer groups rather than parental figures. Developmental models were explored to provide a more contextually relevant approach to the subject of children and advertising. Gardner's (1983) theory of children's 'multiple intelligences', Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development, Erikson's (1987) psychosocial stages of development, and practitioner perspectives were highlighted.

Secondly, turning to the meaning of possessions, consideration was given to consumption and advertising as part of a wider cultural system, and particularly to the meaning based and symbolic role of possessions. Empirical evidence relating to adults suggested the significance of differences in terms of gender and some variation according to social grouping. Within childhood the role of possessions as individuals seek to create was noted, as well as their role in reflecting ability, control and power. Different age and gender groups demonstrated different attachments to possessions, for example children in middle childhood focused on possessions providing enjoyment, intrinsic qualities, activity and social ties. Reflecting the importance of the room within which treasured possessions are stored consideration was given to the importance of bedroom culture.

Thirdly, the media were found to play an integral role in children's lives. Recent

changes in the media landscape focused on media fragmentation, the growth of media targeted at children, the continuing dominance of the television, the growing importance of new media and the growth of media rich children's bedrooms. Implications of these changes comprised opposing trends towards individualisation and socialisation, increasing choice and immediacy, age compression and the growing acceptance of interactivity as the norm. Attention was then given to the active audience perspective and particularly uses and gratifications research. Studies suggested that children use the media to satisfy a range of personally derived motivations and needs. They were actively engaged in negotiating meanings and utilised media resources for both serious and playful interactions. Some of these approaches appeared to be particularly useful due to their ethnographic approaches and focus on the context of children's lives.

Finally the chapter turned to new theoretical approaches in advertising research. Particular attention was drawn to meaning based models of advertising and Mick and Buhl's (1992) notion that advertising meanings are derived from the consumer's experience and sociocultural context. Reader response theory provided further illumination and emphasis on the importance of context. Gender and age related aspects were seen to be particularly important in shaping the way people approach texts. Advertising literacy approaches focused on the existence of literacy skills and the use of those skills in the real world. More recent work has highlighted the interactivity of the consumer and the post-exposure social and cultural environment. Empirical studies into adults' active advertising experiences suggested that they were knowledgeable and competent consumers displaying various dimensions of advertising literacy. Further they were found to actively select and use advertising for their own purposes which were often unrelated to marketing. Among children the empirical evidence was sparse and provided incomplete coverage over different age groups. However, the material supported children's access to literacy skills and a range of social uses.

The literature covered in this chapter has provided an insight into contextualised approaches and represents a springboard for understanding children's experiences of

advertising within the broader life world. The next chapter will consider the methodology applied in order to enter children's lives.

Part Two: Methodology

CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Introduction

This chapter presents the details of a research programme designed to explore children's experience of advertising. Firstly, it lays out the study's objectives and explains the focus on children in the last year of primary and the first year of secondary school. It then considers the philosophical basis of the research within the interpretive paradigm, the employment of a broadly ethnographic approach, and issues relating to research with children. The chapter turns to the data collection methods, the changes made as a result of the pilot study, sampling procedures and the precise process of the emerging fieldwork. Finally, evaluative criteria for the study will be presented and applied.

2. Objectives

Following the broad aim of exploring children's experience of advertising, the review of the literature provided in chapters two to four suggested the benefit of a more contextualised, child-centred study of children's relationship with advertising focusing on the extent to which children might be active consumers of the genre.

Firstly, in a move away from the quantitative approach used in cognitive and effects studies, and in keeping with recent moves in consumer research amongst adults (Mick and Buhl, 1992), the goal was to gain 'understanding' by looking through the eyes of the child. In this way the focus was on putting consumer experience back

into consumer research (Thompson, 1989), and more specifically on placing the child, and his or her experiences, at the very centre of the research process.

Secondly, recent studies have demonstrated the increasing sophistication and literacy of advertising audiences (O' Donohoe and Tynan, 1998; Ritson and Elliott, 1995; Buckingham, 1993). In the light of this work, the researcher recognised a need to examine the basis for the claims of vulnerability (Young, 1990), as well as the underlying assumption of past studies in their consideration of children as passive and inert consumers of advertising. Thus, adapting the perspective of Lannon (1985; 1992), the study aimed to move from a question of "what does advertising do to children?" to "what, if anything, do children do with advertising?".

Thirdly, the study aimed to explore how sociocultural context was bound up with advertising experience. Given the positivist and psychological framework of past research, and the pervasive use of the Piagetian perspective, a consideration of such matters has been largely excluded. Broader social research has highlighted the particular need to focus on the context in which the child lives:

The lens of research must zoom in to a shot of the situated child. Her life is more than an interchangeable backdrop - it is part of the picture, lending life to the image portrayed by the researcher.

(Graue and Walsh, 1998: 7)

It is argued that advertising experiences, like wider media experiences, are integrated into the child's life world and, thus, consideration of social and cultural context was a vital element in the study. As Moores (1993: 10) argues:

The embedded nature of media reception means that, in the end, we have to widen the scope of our inquiries to take in the whole gamut of texts, objects and daily activities - asking about the ongoing and intricate processes through which social subjects articulate their lived cultures.

In order to provide a richer canvas from which to examine contextual matters it was thought necessary to study children from varying sociocultural backgrounds as this might allow the exploration of a wider range of life experiences.

Finally from the review of the literature it was decided to focus the study on children in middle childhood, specifically those in the transitional period subsuming the last year of primary school and the first year of secondary school. While children as a whole have been recognised as increasingly powerful and influential in the consumption arena (McNeal, 1987; 1992), ten to 12 year olds have gained the attention of the advertising industry in recent years being recognised as a 'burgeoning' market variously referred to as the 'Betweenagers', the 'Tweenies' and the 'Tweenagers' (Gray, 2000). Perhaps related to the notion of theory lagging behind practice (Myers, 1994, O'Driscoll and Murray, 1998) this growing attention amongst advertising practitioners has not been followed up by academic research leaving an empirical hole in terms of the specific understanding of the 'Tweenager'.

In addition existing studies, while not specifically addressing the 'Tweenager', suggest that children in late middle childhood and in their early teenage years may be a sophisticated and literate audience. Buckingham (1993), Young (1990), John and Peracchio (1993), Ritson and Elliott (1995) Stockdale (1995) have all discussed the advertising and media literacy of the child and adolescent consumer. For example, Aitken et al (1985) found that some 12 year olds, and most 14 and 16 years olds, were highly attuned in their reading of advertising imagery and were able to perceive cigarette advertising in much the same way as adults. In this light an exploration of advertising experiences in 'tweenage' years emerges as fertile territory.

Further, this period of a child's life tracks an interesting transitional period in educational, cultural and social terms. As Appleyard (1991) notes, school is the chief arena in which the child systematically encounters the adult world and its rules. The child leaves the known world of the home and family and enters a broader social milieu of peers and non-familial adults. Peer culture develops, and as the child grows older, close friends become the alternative to family, and the milieu in which a

child can learn the collective informal wisdom of the culture and the rules of social relationships. At the age of 11 to 12 children face a significant shift in their social and cultural environment when they move from primary school to senior school. They are likely to encounter a new set of friends and an older reference group, as they share a stage with teenagers up to the age of 18. Practitioners have highlighted the relevance of transitions during this stage. For example Mathews (1995) has noted that peer influence becomes increasingly important as children of 10 to 12 move into the 'groupie' stage. Similarly Hobson (1999: 7) expands on the issues of status and influence, noting:

At 10 or 11 at primary school you are the king of the castle. You know your role in the school. You are the influencer of toys, games, lunchbox contents and attitudes. Just one year on at secondary and you are one of the babies again. The people in the year above seem so much older and more sophisticated, and the sixth formers are unspeakably grown-up. It is your turn to be influenced by others older than yourself.

The volatility of this transitional period has also been recognised by educational authorities. A recent report investigating the apparent lack of progress in the first two years of Scottish secondary education over the last ten years drew attention to the difficulties of this life stage:

...the apparent lack of progress in performance during later primary and early secondary might be influenced by maturational factors as pupils reach puberty. For most pupils, these physical and emotional changes coincide with the transition years from primary to secondary school. The changes undoubtedly influence pupils' adjustment to a new school and their attitudes and motivation. (HM Inspectors of Schools, 1997:7).

Thus, the objectives of the study were, firstly, to examine the relationship between children's advertising experiences and their broader life world experiences and, secondly, to explore children's experience of advertising during an important transitional phase as they move from primary to secondary school.

3. Research approach

In order to fulfil the research objectives with the selected child audience the researcher based the study within the interpretive paradigm and adopted a broadly ethnographic approach. This section will discuss the research approach taken highlighting the differences between interpretive and positivistic paradigms and the particular selection of constructionism. Following this analysis consideration will be given to the use of ethnography and the specific problems of researching children.

3.1 Paradigm selection

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) define a paradigm as a basic set of beliefs that guide action. The situated researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (ontology, theory) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology) that are then examined (methodology, analysis) in specific ways.

Interpretivism began as a countermovement to the positivist paradigm (otherwise known as “quantitative”, “traditional”, “experimental” or “empiricist”) towards the end of the nineteenth century through writers such as Weber, Dilthey, and Kant (Smith, 1983). Against the background of the dominance of the positivistic paradigm in consumer research, Sherry (1991) has described the ‘interpretive turn’ within the subject area in recent years as an element of the broader move to interpretive inquiry in the social sciences. The paradigm has been variously labelled, for example as the qualitative paradigm (Creswell, 1994), the naturalistic or constructivist approach (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Guba and Lincoln, 1998) and the postpositivistic or postmodern perspective (Quantz, 1992). In general it is possible to distinguish these alternative perspectives from positivist perspectives in four ways. Firstly, through the attempt to understand meaning of texts through interpretive procedures. Secondly, by the focus on context. Thirdly, by the use of qualitative data and qualitative analysis. Fourthly, through the frequent use of emergent research designs and inference processes (Spiggle, 1994).

A number of consumer researchers have compared the philosophical frameworks of these broadly interpretivist approaches versus positivist approaches (Calder and Tybout, 1989; Hudson and Ozanne, 1988; Thompson et al, 1989). Table 5.1 lays out a summary of the basic assumptions of alternative inquiry paradigms.

Table 5.1: Basic beliefs of alternative inquiry paradigms

ITEM	POSITIVISM	POST-POSITIVISM	CRITICAL THEORY et al	CONSTRUCTIVISM
Ontology	naïve realism - "real" reality but apprehendable	critical realism - "real" reality but only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehendable	historical realism - virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values; crystallized over time	relativism - local and specific constructed realities
Epistemology	dualist/objectivist; findings true	modified dualist/objectivist; critical tradition/community; findings probably true	transactional/subjectivist; value-mediated findings	transactional/subjectivist; created findings
Methodology	experimental/manipulative; verification of hypotheses; chiefly quantitative methods	modified experimental/manipulative; critical multiplism; falsification of hypotheses; may include qualitative methods	dialogic/dialectical	hermeneutical/dialectical

Source: Guba, E. and Lincoln, Y. (1998) 'Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research', in N. K. Denzin, and Y. S. Lincoln (eds) *The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues*, London: Sage, 203

As Table 5.1 suggests, considerable diversity exists within the interpretive paradigm. While it is rare for studies to exemplify all of the ideal characteristics of a paradigm, writers who have contrasted the paradigms on several dimensions have formed useful heuristic devices which provide direction for designing all the phases of a study (Creswell, 1994).

This study is framed within the interpretive approach of constructivism (Guba and Lincoln, 1998) which focuses on the production of reconstructed understandings and adopts a relativist ontology, a transactional epistemology, and a hermeneutic, dialectical methodology (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). In order to elucidate these positions it is possible to draw attention to the different perspectives taken by the positivist and constructivist approaches. Firstly, in terms of ontology, positivism takes the position of naive realism which assumes an apprehendable, objective, external reality driven by immutable natural laws and mechanisms. Knowledge of the 'way things are' is conventionally summarised in the form of time- and context-free generalisations, and some of them take the form of cause-effect laws. Research is able to converge on the "true" state of affairs, and the basic position of the paradigm is argued to be both reductionist and deterministic. However, while positivism has predominated in marketing research, Sheth and Sisodia (1999) observe that the discipline is context driven, and 'discontinuous' change in the environment renders certain "law like generalisations" in marketing obsolete. In this way more contextually based non-positivist approaches may have an important role to play. Constructivism is based on relativism which assumes multiple, apprehendable, and sometimes conflicting social realities. These realities are socially, contextually and experientially based and local and specific in nature (although elements are often shared among many individuals and even across cultures). Realities are dependent for their form and content on the individuals or groups holding the constructions. Thus, constructions are not more or less "true", but simply more or less informed and sophisticated.

Secondly, focusing on epistemology, positivism is founded on dualist and objectivist assumptions that enable the investigator to determine "how things really are". The investigator and the investigated "object" are assumed to be independent entities. The investigator is seen as being able to study the object without influencing it or being influenced by it. Values and biases are prevented from influencing outcomes, as long as the prescribed procedures are held to rigorously. Finally, replicable

findings are seen as “true”. Within constructivism the epistemology is transactional and subjectivist. The investigator and respondents are assumed to be interactively linked. Thus, the researcher takes the role of “passionate participant” during the fieldwork (Healy and Perry, 2000) and the findings are co-created as the investigation proceeds.

Finally, in relation to methodology, positivism tends to employ experimental and manipulative approaches. Questions and hypotheses are proposed and verified through the application of empirical testing and chiefly quantitative methods. In the case of constructivism the methodology, or technique used to investigate reality, is hermeneutical and dialectic. Hermeneutics is widely applied as a theory of interpretation which places the voice of the consumer centre stage (Thompson et al, 1994) and recognises that individual parts of the text must be interpreted in the context of the whole (Arnold and Fischer, 1994). The personal and variable nature of reality suggests that individual constructions can only be elicited through interaction between and among the investigator and respondents. These constructions are interpreted with hermeneutical techniques, and compared and contrasted through a dialectical interchange. The aim is to form a more informed consensus construction.

Central to the selection of a paradigm is the nature of the problem and the audience the research is aimed at (Creswell, 1994). Based on the broad philosophical differences described above it is possible to highlight the main strengths of the interpretive paradigm, and specifically constructivism, in terms of an examination of children’s experience of advertising. Firstly, at the heart of interpretivism lies a focus on understanding, rather than measurement or prediction. As Jankowski and Wester (1991: 52) have noted, the essence of interpretive inquiry is “the analysis and interpretation, through *verstehen* or empathetic understanding, of the meaning that people give to their actions”. Likewise this study aimed, not to measure the effects of advertising, but to understand and describe children’s advertising experiences.

Secondly, within interpretivist research, the existence of multiple realities means that reality is dependent on context and the informant's view of the world. Thus, the researcher needs to rely on the voices and interpretations of informants (Creswell, 1994). This focus on context and the child's view of the world is consistent with the central objectives of the study. The research assumed that children's advertising experiences were bound up with their social and cultural context and their individual life world. In addition the study attempted to see the world, as far as possible, through children's eyes.

Thirdly, interpretivism considers that knowledge is co-constituted with the emphasis placed on interaction between the researcher and the researched (Guba and Lincoln, 1998), and minimisation of the distance between the two parties. In this light the researcher would argue that the need to enter children's life worlds, interact with informants, and provide empowerment lies at the heart of the child-centred approach of the study.

Given the emphasis on understanding, interaction and child-centredness, and the need to examine the social and cultural contexts of children's everyday lives, a qualitative, broadly ethnographic approach was selected. It is to the application of ethnography that we now turn.

3.2 An ethnographic approach

Researchers have often used the term 'ethnography' in different ways (Berg, 1995). This study draws on Geertz's (1973) suggestion that the aim should be to provide 'thick' description. Further, it considers ethnography as the description and understanding of cultures (Wolcott, 1973; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Ethnographic approaches are generally equated with anthropological methods including participant observation:

In its most characteristic form it (ethnography) involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 1)

However, the specific form of ethnography used in this study was drawn from its recent use in fields of research related to the study of children and advertising. Consideration of the nature of ethnography within the bounds of consumer research, cultural studies, children's studies and advertising research will be provided.

Ethnographic approaches are not new to consumer research. The last fifteen years have seen the emergence and growth of ethnographic studies across an array of consumers, products and settings. For example, ethnographic studies have explored swap meets (Belk, Sherry and Wallendorf, 1988), flea markets (Sherry, 1990), Thanksgiving Day gatherings (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991), meetings of "new bikers" (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995), and baseball games (Holt, 1995).

Cultural and media studies have also explored ethnographic approaches providing a particularly cogent and relevant framework for the study of children's advertising experiences. Indeed a number of authors have referred to this growth since the late 1970s as the "ethnographic turn" (Drotner, 1994; Moores, 1993). Such studies emerge as more relevant due to their focus on the consumption of the media, alongside a more specific concentration on context and the role of the media in people's everyday lives. Drawing on the work of Michel de Certeau (1984), Silverstone (1989:77) has argued that:

television is everyday life. To study the one is at the same time to study the other. There are TV sets in almost every household in the western world...Their texts and their images, their stories and their stars provide much of the conversational currency of our daily lives.

However, as Silverstone's words suggest, such studies have also had to consider the fragmentation of media experiences away from the site of initial consumption or viewing into the broader arena of social interaction and conversation. Thus,

Grossberg (1987) and Bausinger (1984) have also discussed the ways in which the media are embedded in everyday communication practices. Bausinger (1984) notes that the media are an integral part of the everyday, and the process of viewing or reading is extended beyond the initial instant of consumption into an extended process of social interaction and conversation by which the contents of the media are “digested”.

A brief review of the approaches used in some of the more notable cultural and media studies research provides further clarification on the nature of ‘ethnography’ in this field. Firstly, Morley’s (1980) landmark ‘ethnographic’ research into the audience of the BBC programme *Nationwide* aimed to move away from the theory of decoding towards a genre-based, contextual model of everyday media consumption. In his study 29 groups of people from different occupational groups viewed two episodes of the early evening programme *Nationwide*, and were then asked for their views and responses. This research generated a variety of reflections and criticisms relating to its ethnographic integrity. Morley (1981) himself later considered that the study was artificial not only in terms of showing people a text that they might not otherwise have watched, but also in terms of the untypical context in which they were invited to interpret the programme. As Moores (1993) has commented people rarely view TV at college or at work in a ‘classroom’ atmosphere with fellow students or employees.

Nevertheless Morley’s study acted as an important turning point at which attention moved from the narrow examination of textual forms towards a broader exploration of audience engagement with texts. Numerous studies termed as ‘ethnographic’ have followed, both into adult and child audiences. For example Hobson’s (1982) work has stressed the gender specific meanings of the media in household contexts. Her study involved recorded conversations with consumers in the household setting. She sat with her female informants as they watched and used the episode as a discussion facilitator. Radway (1987) investigated the consumption of romantic fiction amongst a community of 42 female readers. Research material was compiled through individual questionnaires, open-ended group discussions, face-to-face interviews,

informal discussions, and by observing the interactions between a worker at the local book shop and her regular customers.

Lull (1990) in an examination of American families' social uses of television, carried out in-depth interviews with each resident. In addition his work included extended periods of participant observation. He describes how the researchers "ate with the families, performed chores with them, played with the children, and took part in group entertainment, particularly television watching" (Lull, 1980: 201). Jenkins's (1992: 9) ethnographic investigation of fans of the TV series *Star Trek* aimed "to encourage a greater awareness of the richness of fan culture" and was carried out through an extended period of time covering interviews, conversations, and the examination of a variety of cultural artefacts. Hermes (1995) undertook an ethnographic study to 'understand how women's magazines are read' incorporating 80 in-depth interviews with both men and women. Shaun Moores's (1996) 'ethnographic' study of satellite television focused on the context of consumption of new media technologies and involved interviews with members of 18 urban households in South Wales.

In terms of research with children, ethnographic approaches have also been drawn upon, most obviously in exploring children's active engagements with television. David Buckingham (1987) attempted to explain the popularity of the BBC soap opera *Eastenders* through an investigation of the relationship between the programme and its audience. Focusing on 60 children between the age of 7 and 18 he used small friendship groups with an average of 5 members. Taking an Australian perspective, Hodge and Tripp (1986) and Palmer (1986, 1988) have also focused on children's cultural consumption of television. Hodge and Tripp (1986) carried out discussions with children aged 8 to 9 and 11 to 12 years in groups of five to six. The children were shown the first five minutes of the American cartoon *Fangface* and the following discussions were recorded on video as well as tape in order to enable deeper analysis of the dynamics of social exchanges. Palmer (1986, 1988) employed more extended contact with informants in the same age group. Specifically she carried out a three stage project including individual conversational interviews,

questionnaires and, periods of participant observation in which researchers entered the domestic setting and observed the children's manipulation of the space around the television.

In terms of advertising research, Scott (1994) has proposed the use of ethnographic methods alongside reader response theory. O'Donohoe (1994b) framed her study of young adults' experiences of advertising within the ethnographic tradition through the use of small group discussions and individual interviews. Ritson and Elliott (1999) reported the use of a "participant as observer" approach in their study of sixth formers' social uses of advertising which was supplemented by open interviews and examinations of "embedded talk".

However, while these studies are described as ethnographies it is notable that most of them diverge from the ethnographic focus on participant observation methods highlighted by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995). Although some researchers, most notably Lull (1990), Palmer (1986, 1988) and to a certain extent Ritson and Elliott (1999), have used periods of participant observation, some writers have questioned whether a real commonality exists between many of the studies and the ethnographic research tradition or its methodology (Jankowski and Wester, 1991). Indeed Lull (1988: 242) has complained that "ethnography has become an abused buzzword in our field". Likewise, in an examination of Hobson's (1982) analysis of the soap opera *Crossroads*, Radway's (1984) examination of female readers of romantic fiction, and Seiter et al's (1989) study of soap opera viewers, Braber (1989, cited in Jankowski and Wester, 1991: 55) concluded the studies were limited with respect to certain features of anthropological ethnography. These features were the centrality of the concept of culture, the use of participant observation, and the smallness of the research setting.

Gray (1992) and Moores (1993) have considered the debates concerning the use of 'ethnography' in cultural and media studies. Awareness of the sensitivity surrounding the term 'ethnography' led Gray to apply the term 'audience led research' to refer to her use of open ended conversational interviews in women's

homes. Moores notes that the majority of the studies he reviewed relied mainly on audio-taped conversations with viewers, listeners and readers which may not last much more than an hour each. Nevertheless, in defence of 'the new audience ethnography', he believes that these reception studies can still properly be called ethnographies as:

they do share some of the same general intentions as anthropological research. There may be a similar concern, for instance, with questions of meaning and social context - and with charting the 'situational embeddedness' of cultural practices. If the means of investigation are not always identical, then the aims of the inquiry can be (Moores, 1993: 4)

Although this study did not employ extensive participant observation the intentions of anthropological research were maintained. In particular the centrality of sociocultural context, the focus on providing 'thick' description, and the extensive time spent getting to know the children, suggested the applicability of considering the research in 'ethnographic' terms.

Before turning to the selection of ethnographic techniques including individual interviews and focus groups consideration will be given to issues relating to research with children.

3.3 Researching children

It was noted earlier that paradigm selection depends on the nature of the problem and the audience the research is aimed at (Creswell, 1994). Similarly in selecting appropriate data collection methods, the researcher was faced not only with the problems of eliciting data on informants life worlds and ad experiences, but also with the particular research problems presented by children of 10 to 12 years old. As Graue and Walsh (1998: xiv) have noted:

Finding out about children is exceptionally difficult - intellectually, physically and emotionally. Physical, social, cognitive, and political distances between the adult and the child make their relationship very different from the relationships among adults. In doing research with children, one never becomes a child. One remains a very definite and readily identifiable 'other'.

The cognitive, physical, emotional and political distance between adult and child informant can be highlighted with respect to cognitive issues, power relations and reflexivity.

3.3.1 Cognitive Issues

Firstly, children's ability to concentrate and maintain attention is important in decisions on the design and length of the research proceedings. Children's attention and concentration span is related to intellectual development and, thus, tends to increase with age (Wood, 1988: 56). According to Piagetian theory adherence to the concepts of 'perceptual boundness' and 'centration' amongst young children in the preoperational stage (Smith, Cowie and Blades, 1998) may have implications for the nature of attention. Even for older children in the preteen audience Krueger (1994) has noted that qualitative methods may need to be limited to 60 minutes or less. Young people repeatedly find themselves in environments where change or relocation takes place every 45 to 60 minutes. Further, researchers need to consider limiting the questions, and, if possible, incorporate things to touch, do or respond to.

A further problem comprises children's ability to use and understand language. Young children (below the age of eight) are less able to rely on verbal skills to explain what they mean and may require a research method which uses basic vocabulary and short sentences and avoids complex constructions and tenses (Sweeney, 1994). In addition, problems may extend to children's suggestibility and possible motivation to distort their answers (Smith and Sweeney, 1991; Baxter, 1994). However, given the age of the children, and Young's (1990) findings concerning the metalinguistic abilities of children at this stage, linguistic issues seemed less of a matter for concern. Nevertheless Parker (1984) has noted that

projective techniques and visual aids may be appropriate in order to provide access to data which children would otherwise be unlikely to articulate.

Projective techniques used in consumer research include word association, sentence completion, object personification, picture drawing, autodriving and collage construction (Rook 2001). These techniques derive from psychological strategies developed by clinical psychologists to obtain personality data (Hastings, 1990). The techniques assume that one can form a valid picture of a person by assessing the way the individual projects his or her personality onto some standard, ambiguous stimuli (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). Projective techniques also seem to provide a “comfortable” medium which helps to overcome potential problems of shyness, reluctance to tell and social desirability influences on consumers’ responses (Rook, 2001). Thus, they may serve to establish a deeper rapport with, and knowledge of, the child. In addition such techniques can help overcome difficulties in articulating ideas and may provide a better measure of children’s understanding, plus a useful means of drawing out children’s feelings and perceptions (Gordon and Langmaid, 1988). Hastings (1990) has described the particular value of projective techniques in exploring emotional as well as rational responses to advertising. Research which aimed to examine the appeal of the Embassy Regal “Reg” advertising campaign to young people (Hastings et al, 1994), employed a “game-playing” technique to appeal to younger respondents and encourage open responses. Ranking exercises, grid positioning and other games and techniques were used in which children matched products and slogans, described advertisements and products as people, and designed their own cigarette advertisements. While extensive projective techniques should be employed with a degree of reflection and caution (Sweeney, 1994) carefully selected projective techniques can be seen as an attempt to render a child’s self report a richer source of reliable and valid data which provides a presumed reflection of “subjective truth” (Parker, 1984).

3.3.2 Power relations and reflexivity

Attention was drawn earlier to Graue and Walsh's (1998) consideration of the various "distances" between adult researcher and child informant. Power and status 'distances' seem particularly pertinent in this respect. Maulthner (1997) suggests the implementation of certain techniques in order to help minimise power divides between researcher and child. She notes that past researchers, including Farquhar (1990), have emphasised the need for reflexivity, responsiveness, and open-ended research goals and methods which allow children to set their own agendas and talk about their daily lives and views. Considering reception ethnographies with children, Buckingham has raised methodological concerns about the way in which such studies are conducted and proposes further consideration of the social relations of research and the cultural conditions in which respondent talk is produced. In particular he argues for "a more cautious and self-reflexive approach to interpreting audience data" (Buckingham, 1991: 229).

A reflexive approach takes account of the fact that social researchers are part of the social world they study and implies that the orientations of researchers will be shaped by their socio-historical locations (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). The role of the researcher as research instrument was considered pertinent in the study of children. In particular the researcher was aware that her own experiences with young relatives, an 11 year old godson, and six to 12 year olds during time spent as a volunteer on a summer playscheme were all experiences that she could draw on and learn from. For example in the playscheme it took a little while to get onto the children's wavelength. However, time spent playing chase with the children, involvement in dinosaur model building, services as a model for drawing around and uncoordinated participation in line dancing were all activities which the researcher gradually tuned into. Problems of 'feeling silly' were soon replaced by the joy of getting back in touch with the inner child.

4. Data collection methods

In keeping with the broadly ethnographic approach and the issues relating to researching children, the study used a combination of qualitative methods including individual interviews and friendship group discussions in order to examine children's lifeworlds and their social experience of advertising. Qualitative methods and techniques were viewed as particularly suitable for fulfilling the objectives of the study and overcoming the potential problems of researching children. As Hastings (1990: 118) has argued, employing qualitative techniques:

...enables the researcher to approach a subject in a completely open-ended manner, starting from the perspective of the respondent, using their language and concepts to develop the discussion and relying on their experiences to illustrate it. Thus, in contrast to questionnaire based research, there is no need to make assumptions about what the important issues are, how to label these or the type of responses that might be expected.

4.1 Individual 'life world' interviews

Individual in-depth interviews using a phenomenological approach were selected in order to elicit 'rich' data on the child's cultural context and everyday life. Phenomenological interviewing is a specific type of in-depth interviewing grounded in the theoretical tradition of phenomenology, that is the study of experiences and the ways in which we put them together to develop a worldview (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). McCracken suggests that the 'long' interview may be particularly well adapted to this purpose as:

...the method can take us into the lifeworld of the individual, to see the content and pattern of daily experience (McCracken, 1988b: 1)

Likewise Kvale (1983) has noted that the phenomenological interview is perhaps the most powerful means for attaining an in-depth understanding of another person's experiences. In addition the strengths of the phenomenological interviewing

approach, as found in similar culturally based studies, in terms of its flexibility and humaneness (Mick and Buhl, 1992), seemed especially fitting for child informants.

The one-on-one format of these encounters was in keeping with the need to gain a comprehensive and in-depth picture of the child's life. In addition, congruent with Michell's (1999) findings, the absence of peers was considered suitable for an element of the study which might incorporate sensitive issues relating to the children's personal and family life. A further benefit of the selection of the individual interview was its flexibility. In particular it was possible to include child-centred methods such as projective techniques, and more specifically 'planned prompts' based on 'autodriving' (McCracken, 1988b) using culturally relevant material. It is to the specific research technique of autodriving, using children's own photographs, that we now turn.

4.1.1 Autodriving: The 'Photo Diary'

The use of projective techniques has already been raised as a relevant approach in researching children. Further it provides a particularly useful means of eliciting information on children's life worlds. Projective techniques are based on the notion that a person's behaviour is both meaningful and revealing in terms of an individual's personality and cultural values:

Thus, given a standard but relatively ambiguous task - such as telling a story about a picture - what a person does reflects how he structures and interprets life situations and reacts to them (Levy, 1963: 4).

For this research the author proposed the employment of the photoelicitation projective technique, entitled "autodriving", developed by Heisley and Levy (1991). As an approach 'autodriving' requires the informant to comment on a picture or some other stimulus, and to provide his or her own account of what they see there. (McCracken, 1988b: 36). The term "autodriving" indicates that informants' responses are 'driven' by stimuli (in this case photographs) drawn directly from the

informants own lives. As a technique it is designed to address the obtrusiveness and reactivity inherent in consumer-behaviour research by encouraging consumers to comment on their consumption behaviour as photographs represent it (Heisley and Levy, 1991).

Autodriving can be seen to provide a number of distinct advantages. Firstly, as with other predominantly visual research techniques, autodriving may assist in minimising the problems of verbo-centrism in advertising research which have been highlighted by Zaltman and Coulter (1995). They note that the mismatch between the multisensory language used by advertisers and the verbo-centric data collection used in most qualitative research may lead to incomplete communication from consumers. Secondly, it can be seen to “thicken” and enrich the body of qualitative data and may be particularly suitable for children in that it gives the informant increased voice and authority in interpreting consumption events (Sherry, 1990). To a certain degree, autodriving allows informants to interview themselves, to raise issues that are significant to themselves. As McCracken has noted:

Autodriving is a useful prompting strategy because it helps to both foreground and objectify aspects of the respondents’ experience that are otherwise difficult to bring into the interview. (McCracken, 1988b: 37)

Thirdly, autodriving may help children to “manufacture distance” from their cultural context. Informants may have difficulty in giving a full account of what they believe and what they do and, thus, the use of photographs and other stimuli allows them to “stand back” and “see familiar data in unfamiliar ways” (McCracken, 1988b: 23-24). Fourthly, Heisley and Levy (1991) assert that through the use of photographs of familiar circumstances, i.e. factual representation of critical areas of the informant’s life, it is possible to trigger emotional revelations otherwise withheld, and release powerful statements of values.

Given these benefits the autodriving technique emerged as particularly appropriate for use in interviews with children and an adapted form of the approach outlined by

Heisley and Levy (1991) was selected for this study based on photographs taken by the children. In order to derive the photographs from children's own cultural context and life worlds it was decided to ask the children to form a 'photo diary' including photographs of their bedrooms and a week in their lives. This approach echoed the one described by Rook (1991). He was observed 'in absentia' through an extensive photographic inventory of the contents of his home made by members of the consumer behaviour odyssey. At a later date an autodiving interview was conducted with him, using the photographic slides as stimuli for eliciting information about the origins and meanings of his possessions.

We saw in chapter four that possessions played an important symbolic role in children's lives. There was also evidence of the richness of children's bedrooms (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999). Further it was noted that the bedroom was particularly important in terms of youth culture and identity. In this light consideration was given to the theoretical perspective of 'bedroom culture' (McRobbie and Garber, 1975; Willis, 1990; Brown et al, 1994) which draws on the idea of individuals actively and creatively sampling available cultural symbols, myths, and rituals as they produce their identities.

Given these indications of 'riches' and identity materials it was decided to ask the children to take photographs of their bedrooms. This approach seemed particularly suitable for a child-centred study in terms of Brown et al's (1994) findings. They proposed that getting individuals to talk about their bedrooms is a productive research strategy which provides an effective means of establishing rapport and, most importantly, a means of understanding in context who each person is in relation to the larger culture. In this sense children's bedrooms can be seen as "mediating devices" in that they describe those things in our lives that help us remember who we are or want to be. Brown et al (1994) asked the teenagers in their study to take the interviewers on a "visual tour" of their rooms, describing everything they thought was important and/ or had special significance or meaning for them. However, the benefits of the autodiving technique using photographs, alongside the potential

problems of negotiating access with gatekeepers, made the use of bedroom photographs particularly attractive.

Evidence of similar techniques emerges from advertising practitioners. Tully (1994) reports that advertising agencies have taken photos of children's bedrooms around the world to identify the variation of cultural themes. Mathews (1995) has highlighted J Walter Thompson's recent use of children's bedroom photographs for the agency's Kid Panel. However, practitioners use of bedroom photographs in research has not included autodiving techniques. Instead the photographs have been seen as material evidence of child culture and used for content analysis by external observers. In keeping with the child-centred approach it was decided to ask the children to take their own photographs of their bedrooms, providing visual evidence of possessions important to them, and use these as projective stimuli for eliciting data about their life worlds.

In addition to the bedroom photographs it was decided to ask the children to take photographs of a week in their life including the people, activities and events involved. This strategy seemed relevant for a number of reasons. Firstly, it was seen to add a further ethnographic dimension to the study by placing an added emphasis on "everyday life" and the particular activities and people viewed as important in that context. Secondly, it was thought likely that some children would be more constrained than others in terms of their ability to actively mould and create their bedroom environment. For example children with more authoritarian, or even house proud, parents might be restricted, in their ability to fill their rooms with cultural materials. Thirdly, the photos of a week in their life were considered to allow more extended, creative and potentially enjoyable input by the children, an aspect which was in keeping with the child-centred aims of the study.

4.2 Friendship group discussions on advertising

The specific data collection method employed for studying the children's experience of advertising was an adaptation of the focus group method. According to Morgan

(1997) focus groups are basically group interviews in which the reliance is on interaction within the group, based on topics supplied by the researcher.

Focus groups have been criticised in the past (Tynan and Drayton, 1988) and often relegated to the confines of exploratory research. Fletcher (1980), for example, raises the central criticisms made toward the use of focus groups in advertising research including “minuscule samples, unquantifiable results, group leader bias, individual dominance, shy respondents and the little local difficulties”

The researcher maintained an awareness of these potential criticisms and problems, particularly to weaknesses relating to the way in which focus groups are conducted, in other words what Fahad (1986) refers to as the “practices of users”. Nevertheless there are numerous reasons why such groups were deemed fitting for this study of children’s experiences of advertising.

Firstly, and in keeping with the research aims, focus groups emerged as particularly appropriate in their ability to maintain child-centredness. The focus group allows the researcher to gain a distinctive depth and quality of data which is driven by the informant. Barbour and Kitzinger (1999: 5) have noted that:

focus groups are ideal for exploring people’s experiences, opinions, wishes and concerns. The method is particularly useful for allowing participants to generate their own questions, frames and concepts and to pursue their own priorities on their own terms, in their own vocabulary.

In this way the focus group was chosen to allow the researcher to place the onus upon the informants who are not curtailed by a rigid set of questions but, rather, able to select topics of interest to themselves and describe their feelings and ideas in their own language.

Secondly, the focus group provides greater control over the context in which questions are asked and answers given (Fahad, 1986). The presence of the moderator during the sessions may lead to greater validity and contextual depth since it enables

examination of the way in which children answer questions, such as their tone of voice and the use of verbal and non-verbal cues. This aspect was deemed particularly important in relation to a discussion of advertising experiences in which informants might choose to re-enact the physical and verbal elements of selected ads. Although a video recorder could have served this purpose the intrusiveness of the method made it less appealing.

Thirdly, Hastings (1990) notes that focus groups may provide a variety of forms of interaction. For example, they allow informants to question each others' claims and they also enable participants to seek information and guidance from other members of the group. An extension of this idea is the occurrence of 'snowballing' where a comment from one person triggers off a chain of responses from other participants (Fahad, 1986). It is partially due to this snowballing effect and the cueing phenomenon that focus groups emerge as a particularly useful tool for investigating complex behaviour and motivations (Morgan and Krueger, 1993). The ability to incorporate interaction is perhaps the greatest advantage of the focus group in the context of this research. Since the purpose of the study was to investigate children's experience of advertising, it was hoped that by allowing children to interact within the group that clearer and more natural data would emerge. In particular, it was considered a suitable means by which to explore how children experience advertising in a social context and how they discuss and use advertising with peers. Thus, the focus group seemed to provide access to what Hastings (1990) refers to as the dynamic situation where participants are in fact interviewing themselves, creating synergy and adding to the 'gestalt' of group discussions, where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

Fourthly, the applicability of the focus group when researching children, due to its friendly, non-condescending and respectful nature, has been noted by authors such as Morgan and Krueger (1993). They describe the focus group as a unique means of creating and sustaining an atmosphere that conveys a "humane sensitivity" and a "willingness to listen". It was intended, therefore, that the group environment would

also provide reassurance, security and group identity which might be vital for child participants who could be of shy or nervous dispositions.

Finally, an important reason for the selection of the focus group is its general flexibility (Morgan, 1997). Even given the relatively narrow age range encompassing informants in the last year of primary school and the first year of secondary school, the flexibility of the method was seen as vital for child informants. There were considerable advantages to be gained, due to the fact that focus groups allow the researcher to tailor the way in which the group is conducted and constructed to fit the characteristics of the research topic and the subjects involved. Two of the practical aspects of this flexibility were the ability to adjust the duration, size and composition of groups in accordance with the needs of informants and research aims. The need to tailor the duration of qualitative interviews has already been mentioned. In the case of the friendship group Gordon and Langmaid (1988) and Krueger (1994) suggest an upper time limit of an hour. This was used as a guideline which could be slightly adjusted in the research environment based on the interest and enthusiasm of the specific children.

Determining the size and composition of the groups was more problematic. Barbour and Kitzinger (1999) have argued that advice about group size and composition is often didactic. For example one orthodoxy emerging from the market research literature stipulates that the ideal number of focus group participants is between 8 and 12. However, many researchers in the sociological tradition elect to use groups of five or six participants, or even as few as three. Gordon and Langmaid (1988) have suggested that small group sizes are best suited to child informants, and on this basis groups of four and pairs were initially selected for the pilot study.

In terms of group composition, the researcher drew on the ethnographically derived requirement to examine children's experiences in context. A decision was made to use natural friendship groups. Although market research texts have tended to support the use of groups composed of strangers in order to avoid the 'polluting' and 'inhibiting' effect of existing relations between group members, Barbour and

Kitzinger (1999) highlight the fact that many social science researchers tend to prefer working with pre-existing groups. They argue that it is these existing networks in which people might normally discuss the type of issues to be raised in the research session and the 'naturally-occurring' group is one of the most important contexts in which ideas are formed and decisions made. Indeed mass media research with children (Buckingham, 1987; 1993) has already supported the employment of friendship groups with children.

Following the initial selection of the individual interview and the friendship groups/pairs pilot study work was carried out to assess, evaluate and develop the methodology.

4.3 Pilot study

Pilot study work was carried out in two main parts. The first took place during the summer term of 1995 and the second, following a period away from the research, during the autumn term of 1996. These studies were conceptually different but together formed a valuable means of testing and developing selected methods.

The first part of the pilot study focused on the group discussion format by examining children's socially based advertising experiences including their literacy skills and advertising knowledge. The interviews were carried in a local primary school and comprised two small focus groups (including two boys and two girls), and two friendship pairs (including one boy and one girl). They were semi-structured and required the children to discuss their liked and disliked advertisements and respond to questions designed to elicit their knowledge of advertising and the industry in general. The children were also shown a prepared video recording of ads and asked to reflect on their experience of the executions.

The second part of the study explored the use of the in-depth interview and the photoelicitation technique. Three sisters between the age of 10 and 13 years were interviewed in their homes about their life worlds. Although the girls were the

children of an acquaintance, the researcher had only met them briefly on two previous occasions. The study gave primary consideration to the usefulness of the children's photographs for eliciting information on their everyday life and sociocultural context.

The pilot study work suggested that individual interviews using photographs based on the children's lives, and groups and pairs exploring advertising experiences were a useful means of eliciting rich data. The approaches seemed generally well adapted to the objectives of the study and the distinctive problems of researching children. However, the insights provided by the pilot work highlighted some methodological adaptations and additions which will be discussed in the following sections.

4.3.1 Child selected advertising material

The first part of the pilot study provided the children with a range of ads for their perusal and comment. This approach drew on existing techniques in media research. For example, Morley (1980) showed informants an episode of the programme *Nationwide* before asking for their opinions and responses. Similarly Mick and Buhl (1992) used a range of ads from men's magazines when interviewing three brothers about their advertising experiences. In the pilot study the incorporation of selected ads seemed less suitable as a means of generating advertising talk. While some of the children used the viewing as a springboard for discussion, it was apparent that many of the ads were not personally meaningful to the children, in the sense that they were not necessarily ads that they particularly liked or disliked or had discussed with friends or family. Similar criticisms of artificiality have been highlighted in the case of Morley's work for showing interviewees a video recording which they might not normally have seen (Moore, 1993: 31).

However, the pilot study also revealed that some children found it difficult to remember a selection of ads "off the top of their heads". In addition some were quieter and shyer than others in interview and less willing to contribute. In this light, the need to remove the potential problems of sourcing ads and ensure equal

informant contribution, was dealt with through the use of more child-centred techniques. In particular it was considered more in keeping with the objectives of the study to use stimulus material sourced from the children themselves. It was decided to give each child in the main study an 'Ad List' at the end of the first interview. This simple form required the children to carry out two tasks. Firstly they were asked to fill in the blank portion of the Ad List by writing down at least eight advertisements from any media that they could remember. Secondly they were asked to collect a few examples (no more than five) of print advertisements from any magazines or newspapers they had at their disposal. The use of stimulus materials in focus groups has been supported by Barbour and Kitzinger (1999). Kitzinger (1993) has discussed the benefits of working with pictures because they engage people in discussion without the researcher providing any vocabulary or terminology.

4.3.2 Research setting

Insights provided by the pilot study work also led to a reconsideration of the research setting. Discussing the salience of the research setting for children's talk about television, Buckingham (1993: 43) has commented:

...any adult asking children questions about television within a school context is likely to invite what children themselves would perceive as 'adult' responses. Children know that most teachers disapprove of them watching television, and they are familiar with at least some arguments about the harmful effects the medium is supposed to exert upon them.

There was some evidence in the first stage of the pilot study, which was carried out in the staff common room of a local primary school, that the children's responses also reflected the educational context. For example at the start of the discussion they attempted to refer to the group moderator as "Miss", held up their hands when they wanted to speak, and tried to present their opinions in the expected school format, as if responding to classroom questions. Although a more relaxed environment was achieved relatively quickly, the benefits of an out of school location were noted.

Further justification for using a non-school setting emerged during the second stage of the pilot study when interviewing three sisters in their home environment. The children were visibly more relaxed, unburdened by the need to provide “correct” responses and willing to provide diverse information on their broader culture, interests and family life.

Having garnered these insights it was decided to draw children from non educational environments during the main phase of the study, and to interview them in the comfort and security of their own homes. An examination of out of school clubs highlighted the numerous holiday playschemes, providing a structured play environment, as an appropriate and convenient means of accessing children.

4.3.3 Group composition

Gordon and Langmaid (1988) have suggested that small group sizes are best suited to child informants, and groups of four and friendship pairs were assessed during the pilot study. Reflecting on this experience, and considering the desire to elicit both interaction and detailed individual discourse, the group composition was changed to friendship groups of three same sex children for the main study. In particular it was considered that single sex groups would facilitate the exploration of more natural interaction. Mixed groups seemed to provide a less natural, and sometimes one-sided, perspective of social interactions. As Opie’s (1993) extensive observations in children’s playgrounds have revealed older children in primary school generally play and interact in single sex groups. In terms of group discussions more specifically, Mauthner (1997) has argued that gender is an important consideration, while Krueger (1994) has stated that focus groups below high school age should be segregated by gender because of the rates at which boys and girls mature as well as the powerful role of cross-gender communications. More specifically Sweeney (1994) has advised against mixing males and females, arguing that boys are often louder, more loquacious and liable to determine the conversation topics and, thus, tend to overshadow girls.

Following the changes relating to the children's selection of advertising material, the research setting and group composition, attention turned to sampling for the main phase of the study.

4.4 Sample

Considering sampling in qualitative research McCracken (1988b :17) has noted:

The purpose of the qualitative interview is not to discover how many, and what kinds of, people share a certain characteristic. It is to gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions according to which one culture construes the world... In other words, qualitative research does not survey the terrain, it mines it. It is, in other words, much more intensive than extensive in its objectives.

Given the focus on understanding rather than precise measurement or prediction, the interpretive literature is not prescriptive about sample sizes. In some cases samples may be limited to very small numbers, as in Mick and Buhl's (1992) study of three Danish brothers and Thompson et al's (1994) recruitment of three female volunteers through the local church. According to McCracken (1988b: 17) the sample used by the qualitative social scientist "is not chosen to represent some part of the larger world. It offers, instead, an opportunity to glimpse the complicated character, organisation, and logic of culture." Likewise the interpretive principle of purposive sampling aims to 'maximise discovery of the heterogeneous patterns' and not to generalise to the broad population (Erlandson et al, 1993). Interpretivist approaches may also effect sampling through the use of an emergent design utilising simultaneous generation of data and analysis. The aim is to 'bottom out' and continue researching the subject until each following interview provides no new dimensions on the phenomenon.

In the case of the current study a purely emergent design was impractical due to the problems of gaining access to children. Consideration was however given to the number of interviews and friendship groups in terms of the nature of the sample and the research objectives (Gordon and Langmaid, 1988). With the aim of exploring and

understanding advertising experiences in relation to the broader life world and focusing on children during a transitional age across different sociocultural contexts it was decided to carry out 12 friendship groups and 36 individual interviews. This number included one friendship group of three boys and another of three girls, in both Primary 7 and Secondary 1, across three different sociocultural contexts. In practice, and in keeping with the emergent nature of interpretive research, an extra group of three boys expressing different lifeworld interests was included in the first stage of the fieldwork, providing an end sample of 13 groups and 39 individual interviews.

5. Process of the fieldwork

The main stage of the primary research was carried out in Edinburgh between August 1998 and June 1999. It focused on 39 children in the transitional phase of the last year of primary and the first year of secondary school. All of the qualitative data was taken from individual interviews and friendship discussions with small groups of three children. This section considers the procedures adopted during the main phase of the fieldwork. Explanation is provided of the recruitment process, starting with playschemes and later adapted to concentrate on schooling locations. The selection of friendship groups is described, followed by the means of gaining access and building rapport, the process of the photo projects, individual interviews, Ad Lists, and friendship group discussions.

5.1 Recruitment process

The central aim in sourcing children was to adhere to the selected “child-centred” approach so that the children should feel comfortable, relaxed and empowered in the process. Initially it was intended that all selection and interviewing of the children should take place outwith the school environment. However, the first stage of the project highlighted potential problems of child access which led to a reconsideration

of the selection process. Thus, two approaches were used to recruit children for the study.

5.1.1 The first approach: The playscheme

The researcher approached the first group of nine primary seven (P7) children through a playscheme during the summer of 1998. This was held within a secondary school which will be referred to as Corby High School. The scheme was one of the largest and longest running of the schemes taking place in Edinburgh and the organisers were actively seeking volunteers to assist in taking care of the children. The researcher was invited to help the parents and other organisers with the daily playscheme activities such as 'arts and crafts', 'sports and games', and helping to run the 'tuck' shop.

The role of participant as observer (Denzin, 1978) was adopted. In the first week the researcher interacted with the children during their activities, observed their behaviour and took photographs of them together. The aim was, firstly, to become familiar with the children and gain their acceptance. Secondly, to observe their interactions, including confirming the size and nature of children's friendship groups. Thirdly, to find groups of children for inclusion in the study. The children relaxed very quickly and soon a number of them approached the researcher to include her in a variety of creative and physical activities. From interaction and observation it was possible to confirm observations gained from the literature, for example that the children rarely played with other children outside their own age group. In instances when this did happen it seemed to be when an older girl adopted a motherly role with a younger child. In addition, cross age play did sometimes occur between siblings especially when the older sibling was female. In terms of friendship group sizes children tended to play in groups of two or three, although when larger groups did form they usually comprised boys. In general the boys were louder and more boisterous than the girls, taking part in more physical and aggressive play activities. The girls were comparatively calm and, like the children observed by Opie (1993), were more eager to approach the researcher with stories and news. Taken together

these observations supported the selection of single sex friendship groups with three participants.

In keeping with the broadly ethnographic approach, the first week served as a useful means of getting to know the children and allowing them to become accustomed to the researcher. In the second week, after discussing my intentions with the playscheme organiser, friendship groups of the correct age were identified. The children were told about the project and asked if they wished to take part. If they were eager to be involved then they were given a permission letter to pass on to their parents and, subject to the parents' response, the groups were confirmed.

The approach was successful but for a number of important reasons it was decided to source the remaining children through schools. Firstly, it became clear on entering the playscheme system that it would only be possible to source primary age children in this way. A few children in the lower years of S1 attended but this seemed to be more unwilling compliance with parental wishes than an actual desire to take part. In general the move to high school acted as a cut-off point for playscheme attendance, and the majority of older children entered more specialised clubs and activity groups. It would have been possible to source the older age group through these specialised clubs but the repercussions on the sample in terms of accessing only narrow interest groups seemed restrictive. Secondly, the children who took part in the first stage of the project attended one of two primary schools in the same area. Further they all selected school friends, specifically classmates, to take part with them. Obviously not all the children in the area attended the playscheme, and some children asked the researcher if school friends not attending the playscheme could take part. This meant that in all three groups in the first stage one child was drawn in from outside the playscheme. These practical insights suggested that schooling locations were more important denominators of friendship groups than the playscheme and would therefore provide a more appropriate means of accessing the remaining groups.

5.1.2 The second approach: Schooling locations

The second approach utilised schooling locations (for which pseudonyms will be used) as a means of sourcing children for the study. As noted above the P7 children from the playscheme had attended one of two neighbouring primary schools within the same schooling 'cluster'. In all cases the children had informed the researcher that their parents intended to send them to Corby High School at the end of P7. Therefore, 'Corby' became the first schooling location representing a broadly middle class suburban population in which most of the families lived in detached or semi-detached houses, and many of the parents were in professional occupations. Postcode analysis of the area, based on overcrowding, male unemployment, low social class and car ownership, produced a relatively low DEPCAT grouping of '2' (where 1 is the most affluent and 7 is the most deprived) indicating the relative affluence of the area (Mcloone, 1995).

The remaining respondents were drawn from two other schooling locations. These were purposefully selected for the potential access to a broader spectrum of sociocultural experience. Firstly, a less affluent working class area on the outskirts of Edinburgh called Wetheral was selected. Wetheral and the schools within it tended to support a high proportion of working class, single parent families, with many parents unemployed and on benefits. Figures from the schools supported this with Wetheral Primary providing free school meals (a benefit only for parents on income support) to 60 to 70% of the attending children. Further, postcode analysis of the area covered by the school provided a relatively high DEPCAT grouping of '5' (Mcloone, 1995) suggesting the relative deprivation of the area.

Secondly, a fee-paying independent school in the centre of Edinburgh was chosen. All the private schools within Edinburgh were considered for inclusion in the project. However, the combined need to match the state schools in terms of their co-educational status and the age at which the children moved to senior school, meant that single-sex and 'English' system schools were unsuitable. The final selection of school was based on the convenience and ease of access for the researcher. This

school, which will simply be referred to as ‘private’ school, generally attracted children from wealthy professional families from all over Edinburgh and nearby rural areas. A postcode analysis of the children selected supported their more affluent status with most children’s residences gaining a DEPCAT grouping of ‘1’ or ‘2’ (Mcloone, 1995). However, this grading was not appropriate for all children, some of whom attended through funded placements. Indeed one of the children in the sample was from a less affluent background but was able to attend the school under scholarship.

Within each site it was ensured that there was a strong link between the primary and secondary school, with the primary school acting as a major ‘feeder’ to the senior school. This was a straight forward process for the children at private school as they generally remained within the same school on moving into S1. In the case of Corby and Wetheral, the researcher gained access to the High Schools which most of the children aimed to attend. Although the three sites provided broadly different socio-economic groups the main emphasis was not on accessing different class groups, but rather on sourcing children from diverse sociocultural contexts with potentially different life experiences.

Table 5.2: Form of access in schooling locations

SCHOOL	FORM OF ACCESS
Corby Primary Schools	Playscheme
Wetheral Primary	P7 class teacher
Private Primary	P7 class teacher
Corby High	English teacher
Wetheral High	Learning support teacher
Private Senior School	Registration class teacher

Information on the project was sent to head teachers at the selected schools. In all cases the head teachers were willing for their pupils to participate provided that parental permission was obtained. In practice access to the children was gained through the teacher considered most suitable after discussion with the head teacher

(see Table 5.2). Due to the different structure of the schools, particularly in the senior divisions, some flexibility was required on the researcher's behalf. In Wetheral Primary and in the primary division of the private school, access was gained through a teacher responsible for a single P7 class. In Corby High an English teacher was asked to assist, as English classes were attended by whole registration classes rather than being 'streamed' according to ability. In the case of the senior division of the private school the 'streaming' of many of the classes meant that the most appropriate access was through a teacher responsible for a whole registration class. In Wetheral High access was gained through one of the learning support teachers responsible for the S1 classes. In this way it was possible to ensure that children of exceptional or below average ability were not singled out, and that children would be in a context where they were unlikely to have been separated from their friends.

5.2 Selecting friendship groups in schools

Various methods of identifying and selecting children's friendship groups were considered: observation, teacher nomination and child nomination (Smith, Cowie and Blades, 1998). Observation was seen to fit in with a child-centred approach and was used during the first phase in the playscheme. However, it emerged as a less practical approach within the schools largely due to the teachers' perception of intrusiveness, as well as interruption to class time.

The next technique considered was that of teacher nomination. Teachers have the opportunity to view children's interactions on a daily basis and are therefore in an informed position to describe and outline the main friendship groups as they see them. Although the teacher's opinion was considered useful, as a single method it was considered out of line with the child-centred approach chosen for the study.

Thus, the technique of child nomination was chosen in order to place the onus on the child. In each case the relevant teacher (see Table 5.2) informed the class that they were carrying out a "friendship survey". Each child was given a piece of paper and

asked to write their name at the top. They were then requested to write down two names (without consultation with others) in response to the following question:

“If you were able to spend a week on a desert island with two people who would you choose?”

The question was worded to encourage the children to consider their selection in terms of a relaxed, non-educational context (a holiday on a desert island), and also, through the flexible phrase “two people”, to give them the opportunity to choose males or females.

A small minority of the response sheets came back in an unusable state, most commonly because the child had forgotten to write down their name. In several other cases the children had chosen individuals who were not in the same class. In these instances both the selectors and those selected were simply disregarded in the final group selection due to the problems of accessing ‘external’ children. Interestingly, in a few cases, mainly involving girls, the children had chosen members of the opposite sex. However, opposite sex selection was rare and mainly confined to the older age group. This insight supported the decision to hold single sex groups and suggested that within this age group friendships in school were generally confined to children of the same gender.

Final groups were chosen by drawing up a diagram of links between individuals. Obvious selections were cases where all three children had chosen each other. At this point the teacher’s opinion was accessed in order to gain brief feedback on the children, including their willingness to talk and probable enjoyment of the project. There was generally an encouragement by the teachers to use “good” students. For example one of the teachers at private school discouraged the use of two children who he considered “less bright”. In general such academic assessments were dismissed with the emphasis being placed on the strength of ‘friendship’ rather than intellectual ability. Some account was however taken of issues such as extreme shyness or difficult family circumstances which might prevent entry into homes.

5.3 Gaining access and building rapport

Following the observation and selection of friendship groups in the playscheme, and the friendship surveys in the schools, there were three introductory and rapport building sessions with the children before they took part in the first individual interview. This process was time consuming but the rationale was based on the 'ethnographic' intentions of the study and the need to gain the confidence of the children and become familiar with them before the first interview. In practice the process took the following format. The children selected were asked to join the researcher for an initial meeting. These meetings took place in a variety of settings. For the children in the playscheme one of the separate games rooms was used. Locations in the different schools depended on the facilities available: a library in the private junior school, a music room in the private senior school, the dining room at Wetheral Primary, and a special tutorial room at Corby High and Wetheral High. Biscuits and sweets were provided and general information was supplied about the nature of the project. Then some preliminary background information was acquired through asking the children a few 'grand tour' questions about themselves and their families. (For example: How old are you? What are your favourite hobbies? Do you have any ideas of what you would like to do when you leave school? Do you have any brothers and sisters?).

The children were not asked to decide whether they wanted to take part during the meeting, rather they were asked to "think about it" and inform either the researcher or their teacher the next day. Those keen to participate were given a permission letter (see Appendix C) to be signed by their parents. In practice there were only two children who withdrew from the project at this stage. One girl from Wetheral High was not able to take part as her mother was due to give birth during the following two weeks. In another case a boy from Wetheral Primary had to withdraw after he was involved in a road traffic accident. In both cases it was possible to substitute other children who had emerged as good friends through the friendship survey. These children were met individually to explain the project and then integrated into the later meetings.

5.4 Procedures: Photo Diary and Individual Interviews

During the second meeting in schools and in the playscheme the children were given instruction sheets (see Appendix D) for the photo stage of the project and encouraged to ask any questions. They were requested to take at least four and no more than ten photos of their bedrooms in order to include everything that was important to them. In addition they were asked to make a 'photo diary' with the rest of the film which illustrated "a week in their life" and all the important activities and people involved.

After ensuring that all the children understood the instructions, basic information was given on the use of the cameras and a guidance sheet was provided. The single-use cameras were selected for their ease of use but a trial camera was also passed round to provide all the children with the opportunity to take a few practice photographs. At the end of the session the children were given their cameras and asked to return them to their teacher the following week once they had completed the project.

There were surprisingly few problems associated with the photo-taking exercise. One girl's bedroom photos did not come out at all so she asked the researcher to come and provide assistance. Having gained parental permission, a range of photos were taken under her direction. In another situation one of the boys dropped his camera down a stone staircase and was provided with a replacement. Finally, some of the children's photographs showed minor signs of inexperience including thumbs and other digits in front of the lens, and occasionally they appeared to be living in black holes where the flash never went off. However, in general the photos were more than adequate for the purpose of autodiving the individual interviews.

Two copies of the photographs were obtained, one copy was kept by the researcher and the other was given to the child as a gift. For the children on the playscheme these were dropped off individually at home, for the others a brief third group meeting was held in schools. The children spent some time examining their photographs and seemed genuinely pleased to receive their own copy. On a practical level these individual and group meetings also provided an opportunity to discuss

interview times. Interview arrangements were then confirmed with parents by telephone, or in person with the parents who came into the playscheme.

Turning to the individual interviews themselves, Green and Hart (1999) argue that “different contexts produce different types of stories... and different repertoires of social competencies”. Thus, questions about venue are not merely technical questions about validity and reliability, but involve rather more theoretical decisions about research aims (Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999). In keeping with the child-centred, broadly ethnographic aims of the study both the individual and group interviews were carried out in the children’s homes. The parents were asked if it was possible to use a room where the researcher could speak to the child “quietly” and “individually”. In practice most of the interviews took place either in the sitting room or the child’s bedroom, and a few took place around the kitchen table.

The in-depth interviews were based on the phenomenological interview framework provided by Thompson et al (1989), in order to emphasise human experience as described from a first-person account (Kvale, 1983). In practice the focus was firmly placed on the child and their life experience as seen through the photographs they had taken. Thus, in keeping with autodiving techniques (Heisley and Levy, 1991) they were given the photographs and asked to discuss them. The bedroom photographs were handed over first (using the basic format ‘Tell me about anything that is important to you in this picture?’) followed by the photos they had taken of a week in their life (applying the approach ‘Tell me about this picture?’).

The dialogue was driven by the children and the interviewer’s input was to use the photographs as prompts and use follow-up questions in order to gain clarification or further elaboration. In practice the discussions were as eclectic as the children themselves reflecting their own personal interests and persuasions. In some cases the photographs were dominated by one pervasive interest, for example football or a favourite media star, and the focus of the interview naturally homed in on these aspects. However, even in these cases there was generally thematic interest across broader areas such the media, possessions, activities and the people in their lives.

Thus, although no predetermined questions were used a number of thematic or “grand tour” areas (including media likes and dislikes, favourite possessions, family, friends, hobbies, heroes, spending, fears and aspirations), which emerged as important during the pilot study and initial stage of interviewing, were incorporated to guide the later interviews. This use of specific iterations in which domains are investigated on the basis of the analysis of preceding interviews has been supported by Spiggle (1994).

On a practical level most of the time was spent discussing the bedroom photographs. Those taken over the course of the week tended to back up areas of importance highlighted within the bedrooms. For example an interest in football, seen in the array of posters, trophies and sports equipment in the bedroom, was often continued through the ‘photo diary’ with pictures of football games with friends, or evidence of football affiliations including trips to live matches. In other cases important links with friends identified by the children through pictures, possessions and the media in the bedroom were further emphasised by means of photographs of friends at school, in the park, and at sleepovers. As the children ‘drove’ the interviews there was some variation in their duration. The shortest was about 40 minutes long while the longest, in the cases of two particularly loquacious children, were just under one and a half hours. However, in general the interviews lasted for about an hour.

5.5 Procedures: ‘Ad Lists’ and friendship group discussions

Following the individual interviews the children were asked to complete the Ad Lists and gather examples of advertisements (see Appendix E). These were handed in to the appropriate teacher in the schools or given directly to the researcher during the playscheme. All the children’s selected ads were typed onto a single sheet of paper to allow the researcher to prompt the informants with their own ads and examples during the friendship group interviews. In this way it was intended to gain equal contribution of all the informants and to ground the discussion in the children’s own selection of ads, rather than ones proposed by the researcher.

The group discussions themselves comprised the three friends originally derived from observation in the playscheme and the friendship survey in schools. All the interviews took place in one of the children's homes in consultation with all the informants and parents involved. On a practical level there were surprisingly few problems in finding one child who was willing, along with his or her parents, to house the group event. Indeed in a number of cases the process of gathering the children in one house became something of a friendship event. A number of the children turned the meeting into an opportunity to get their friends together to have a meal, watch TV, test out a new computer game, play football or just to show them some of the new items in their bedrooms. Such activities suggested that the children felt at ease, particularly as they were willing to continue with these activities in the researcher's presence.

The groups began with a period of general conversation and interaction before the tape recorder was turned on. The interview began with the researcher emphasising the intention to discuss the role of advertising in their everyday lives. The children were then asked to talk about any ads which they liked, disliked or could simply remember.

In a small number of cases the children were initially uncertain or self-conscious about discussing advertising. In these cases the researcher simply asked one of the children to describe one of the adverts they had written down on the Ad List. This acted as a springboard for further discussion which could then be prompted with other ads taken from the Ad Lists if necessary. Generally, however, the children were eager and boisterous in their discussion of advertising, and rather than prompting the children the focus was more on encouraging a stream of natural ad discourse which might be broadly described as a literacy event (Ritson and Elliott, 1995), while still ensuring that any less dominant group members were able to contribute. Focusing on their grounded experience, the children were also asked whether advertising ever came up in their interactions with friends, family or other people in their everyday life. If their response was positive they were requested to provide descriptions of these events in the manner suggested by Thompson et al

(1989) for phenomenological interviews (e.g. Tell me about a time when you have spoken about advertising?).

At a suitable, rather than predetermined, point during the discussion the children were asked to create an ad of their own for the imaginary soft drink, 'Spike'. Barbour and Kitzinger (1999) note that collective tasks during focus groups encourage participants to concentrate on one another rather than the group facilitator and may encourage them to explain and defend their differing perspectives. The product class of soft drinks was selected for two main reasons. Firstly, it was presumed that the children would be aware of soft drink advertising as a result of the apparent dominance of advertising for food and soft drink products on children's television highlighted by Dibb (1993). The prevalence of these product categories was at least partly upheld by the children through the high percentage of soft drink and confectionery ads written on their Ad Lists. Secondly, it has been noted that beverages are generally a highly symbolic and richly connotative product class (Levy, 1981). In keeping with the child-centred focus of the study, the product name 'Spike' was taken from a suggestion by one of the children in the pilot study. While this name may have alcoholic connotations for adults, it was proposed by the child as a simple combination of the brand names 'Coke' and 'Sprite'. Finally, near the end of the discussion the children were asked to talk about the examples of ads which they had collected from magazines and newspapers.

In sum the fieldwork involved a number of stages and minor variations according to the initial recruitment of children from the playscheme or the later schooling locations. A brief overview of the process of the fieldwork can be found in Table 5.3

Table 5.3: Overview of the process of the fieldwork

	PLAYSCHEME	SCHOOL LOCATIONS
GROUP SELECTION	Observation.	Friendship survey.
FIRST MEETING	Project introduced, background information gained on children's interests and families etc, permission letters.	(As in playscheme)
SECOND MEETING	'Photo diary': asked to take photos of their bedroom and a week in their life. Given cameras and instructions on their use.	(As in playscheme)
THIRD MEETING	Photographs returned to children individually at home.	Photographs returned to children in groups at school.
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS	Interviewed at home on their 'life world' using photos as projective stimuli. 'Ad Lists': given form and asked to write down 8 or more ads he/ she can remember, and to collect ads from magazines and newspapers.	(As in playscheme)
FRIENDSHIP GROUPS	Children interviewed in their friendship trios at home. Asked to discuss ads they remember, using examples from 'Ad Lists' as prompts, and ads collected from magazines etc. "Make an ad" exercise included.	(As in playscheme)

6. Analysis of the data

The text was interpreted using a phenomenological, part-to-whole form of interpretation. In line with Thompson et al (1989) the researcher aimed to adhere to the methodological criteria of the emic approach, autonomy of the text, bracketing, and the hermeneutical circle.

Firstly, at the centre of the 'emic' approach lies the need to remain at the level of the informant, using their terms and category systems. Thus, the goal is to describe experience in lived rather than conceptually abstract terms. Secondly, the autonomy of the text is maintained through two methodological approaches. One approach is that there is no attempt to corroborate informants description by external verification. A further approach requires that interpretation of the text should not include hypotheses, inferences, and conjectures that exceed the evidence provided in the transcript. Thirdly, the methodological criteria of 'bracketing' or holding back preconceived theoretical notions about the phenomena, was attempted. While the interpretation of the transcripts was grounded in the meta-assumptions of the broader interpretive paradigm, the researcher aimed to "grasp, rather than impose, meanings emerging from the dialogue" (Thompson et al, 1989: 140). Finally, the hermeneutical circle was adopted as a methodological process for interpreting qualitative data. Through the use of this iterative, part-to-whole mode of interpretation, it was attempted to interpret "part" of the qualitative data in relation to the developing sense of the "whole" (Thompson et al, 1994).

Although qualitative interpretation supports the use of joint collection, coding and analysis of data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) the timetable constraints of accessing, recruiting and interviewing children, while also transcribing the data, made complete adherence to this approach impractical. In practice only a small part of the transcribing was completed during the data gathering process. However, hand-written memos, emergent themes and categories were noted through listening to as many of the recordings as possible during the fieldwork process.

Table 5.4: Transcription Conventions

I:	Interviewer talking.
C:	Child's speech indicated by a selected initial
.....	Talk omitted which is irrelevant to issue being discussed
CAPITALS	Emphatic speech
(.....)	Description of other vocalisations, physical actions or interruptions e.g. (laughs) or (pulls face) or (pause)
(?....)	Unclear wording
"....."	When speaker is quoting someone else e.g. I love the way Austin Power goes "Oh Behave!"

Most of the transcribing took place after the interviews and friendship groups were completed. Following a lengthy transcribing process, using the conventions displayed in Table 5.4, some 1400 pages of interview data were generated. All the data were loaded into the computer analysis software, QSR NUD*IST Vivo. Initially the system was selected on the basis of the document system features which allowed an effective means of coding and retrieving data. This organisation facility was seen as vital given the 'voluminous' (Patton, 1980) amount of data resulting from the fieldwork. However, in reality the features of the software's index system (Richards and Richards, 1998), such as the ability to organise nodes into hierarchies, and to add memos to documents, as well as the modelling system, provided a useful means of manipulating concepts and exploring ideas both on an individual basis and with colleagues.

The individual 'lifestory' interviews were analysed first before moving on to the advertising based friendship groups. The aim was to identify salient themes, recurring ideas and patterns of belief that link people and settings together (Marshall

and Rossman, 1995) and describe common patterns in experiences (Thompson et al, 1989). An important aspect of the interpretive process was the intention to develop a set of cultural (Spradley, 1980) themes and emphasise patterns of meaning derived from the children's discussion of their lives. The identification of broad themes has been the aim in other interpretive, particularly phenomenological, approaches to consumer research (Mick and Buhl, 1992; O'Guinn and Faber, 1989; Thompson et al, 1990).

Each transcript was read as a separate 'part' and emerging themes and patterns were coded within it and analytical memos were written. Individual transcripts were then analysed across progressively wider groupings within the 'whole': other members of the friendship group, other participants within the class, and other participants within the school or playscheme. Thus, patterns were sought both within informants (idiographic analysis) and across them (nomothetic analysis) (Thompson et al, 1990). The flexibility of the software meant that coding could be adapted and rethought in the light of later transcripts. Thus, it was possible to merge, retitle and reposition nodes (as was the case with the many emerging themes on friendship) and even electronically 'colour code' quotes that emerged as particularly useful for later incorporation into the qualitative story (Creswell, 1994).

Moving on to the friendship group interviews the researcher sought themes and patterns running through the children's advertising experiences. Once again these patterns were sought both within friendship groups and across them (Thompson et al, 1990).

After the data from both the individual interviews and friendship groups had been coded, the retrieval function of the software was used to assemble the data coded at individual nodes. Emerging themes were compared between individual interviews and friendship groups. Further reading and rereading of this thematically assembled data allowed the generation of more detailed concepts and the identification of common patterns known as 'global themes' (Thompson et al, 1989). This process was continued until 'theoretical saturation' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was achieved

and no new insights were gained. Finally, emergent ideas and hypotheses were tested and evaluated through the data (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). This process involved the adoption of a more sceptical stance involving searching the data for negative instances, challenging the hypotheses and seeking alternative explanations.

Once the material had been analysed in this way the 'analytical memos' written during the coding process were drawn together and used to write up the analysis. In accordance with the child-centred approach applied in the study the informants' perspectives and worldviews formed the framework for structuring and presenting the analysis.

7. Evaluation of the study

While there is still considerable division concerning assessment criteria for qualitative research (Guba and Lincoln, 1998) a decision has to be made on how to approach this aspect of research. Hammersley (1992: 57) outlines a number of basic positions on the constituent elements of good interpretation in qualitative research. Firstly, some researchers apply the same criteria to qualitative research as those used in quantitative work, believing that there is nothing unique about qualitative inquiry that requires an individual set of criteria. Secondly, postpositivists argue that a special set of criteria should be developed for qualitative research. In practice there are many divergent views on the exact form of these criteria, and many parallel positivist criteria but within a naturalistic research context. Thirdly, postmodernists argue that the character of qualitative research is such that there can be no criteria for judging its products. They believe that assessing postmodern research is opposed to the nature of this research and the world it studies. Fourthly, according to poststructuralism a new set of criteria, separate from the positivist and postpositivist traditions, should be developed which flows from the qualitative project and focuses on such aspects as subjectivity, emotionality and feeling.

The researcher noted the advice of Thompson et al (1989) who have argued that despite differences in ontological and methodological assumptions, logical

positivism and interpretivist paradigms share a common commitment to conducting rigorous, empirical research that is open to careful scrutiny. Nevertheless, she was drawn by the specific evaluative language which has been developed within interpretive research in recent years. For example, Lincoln and Guba (1985), Wallendorf and Belk (1989) and Erlandson et al (1993) discuss quality criteria involving “trustworthiness” and “authenticity”, while Spiggle (1994) proposes five criteria, namely “usefulness”, “innovation”, “integration”, “resonance” and “adequacy”.

It was decided to utilise the specific evaluative criteria of ‘trustworthiness’ which parallel those used in positivism but are adapted to the naturalistic context (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). These criteria suggest four main questions for assessing research. Firstly, in terms of ‘credibility’ (paralleling internal validity) we can ask whether we can have confidence in findings in terms of the level to which they reflect reality. Secondly, we can address the ‘transferability’ (paralleling external validity) of the current study by questioning the degree to which the findings apply in other contexts. Thirdly, in relation to ‘dependability’, we can ask whether the findings could be replicated if the study was repeated. Finally, we can consider the ‘confirmability’ of the study by asking to what degree the findings emerge from the respondents and the individual context, and not only from the researcher.

While on a general level the researcher attempted to adopt a general stance of scepticism towards developing ideas (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) the study attempted to address the broad issue of trustworthiness through a variety of specific methods proposed by interpretive researchers. In Mick and Buhl’s (1992) study of a meaning-based model of advertising experiences, the researchers employed member checks and an external auditor to verify their idiographic case analyses. Such techniques have been proposed as useful in increasing the internal validity and trustworthiness of phenomenological and naturalistic research when interaction with informants has not been extensive (Thompson et al, 1990; Wallendorf and Belk, 1989). However, in the case of the current study these precise approaches were not practical. Firstly, it was considered ethically undesirable and cognitively impractical to ask children to

verify themes derived from their interviews. Whilst adults may be able to cope with the process of having life reflected back at them, it is possible that children would find the process disturbing, hurtful or simply incomprehensible. Secondly, the sheer volume of text derived from the interviews made the role of a single external auditor an impractical and burdensome task. Thus, a range of more applicable methods were applied during the various stages of the study.

At the fieldwork stage of the study the researcher adhered to the central tenet of child-centredness which ensured that the data stemmed from the children's own contextually based experiences. For example the children were interviewed in their own homes and individual spaces, sometimes even in their bedrooms. They framed the interviews in terms of photographs they had taken of their bedrooms and a week in their lives. In addition they were asked to discuss these photographs in terms of what was important to them, rather than in terms of what seemed important to the researcher. Finally they filled in an Ad List and collected examples of advertisements so that the friendship group discussions were based on their own knowledge and experience of advertising.

During the process of interpretation three methods were employed to maintain trustworthiness. Firstly, the researcher attempted to hold to the notion of the autonomy of the text (Thompson et al, 1989) so that interpretation would be grounded in the evidence provided by the transcript rather than the hypotheses or inferences of the researcher. Secondly, negative case analysis was used with the intention of seeking out specific cases that disconfirm the emerging analysis (Spiggle, 1994).

Thirdly, formal and informal discussions of the analysis with fellow students and colleagues, allowed some of the benefits accruing from the interpretive group approach (Thompson et al, 1989). These discussions of particular transcripts and emerging themes sensitised the researcher to important issues and provided a 'fresh vision' and alternative way of seeing. Further such interactions served to facilitate

bracketing by consciously questioning the assumptions utilised by the researcher, and also helped to ensure that proposed interpretation was at the level of the respondent's lived experience.

As a last note, it is recognised that the reader will act as the final judge of the viability, usefulness and meaningfulness of the research findings. As Thompson et al (1989: 143) have expressed:

the final use and value of any given piece of research is determined by the scientific consumer who will either see and agree or will not see and agree with the themes of ... analysis.

8. Conclusion

This chapter has described the objectives of the study and the focus on a more contextualised, child-centred approach. The research's philosophical basis within the interpretive paradigm was considered and justified, as well as the application of a broadly ethnographic approach. The process of data collection was planned and adapted to suit children's needs and was based on 'Photo Diaries' comprising photographs taken by the children of their bedrooms and a week in their life. It specifically employed "autodriven" individual interviews to explore children's life worlds and friendship groups to examine children's experience of advertising in the context of their life worlds. In addition 'Ad Lists' were used to allow children's advertising discourse to be drawn from their own experiences. Finally, the study was assessed according to the evaluative criteria of 'trustworthiness'.

It is believed that the design and process of the empirical research provided the basis for further understanding of children's experience of advertising. The focus on social and cultural context, particularly children's life worlds, and the adoption of child centred methods and techniques went some way to redressing the narrow perspectives of earlier effects studies. The findings of the analysis presented in the next five chapters were grounded in the advertising and broader life experiences of

the children. The next chapter acts as an introduction to the analysis, providing some initial details and impressions as we enter the life worlds of the children.

Part Three: The Main Study

CHAPTER 6

ENTERING THE LIVES OF THE CHILDREN

1. Introduction

The methodology chapter highlighted the adoption of a contextual, child-centred approach focusing on children in the last year of Primary School and the first year of Secondary School in three different schooling locations. In order to provide a contextual view to the reader this chapter sets out an initial picture of the children. The aim, thus, is to ease the reader into the particular life worlds which were observed by the researcher during the fieldwork.

The first meetings with the children took place in a games room at the playscheme, and common rooms, libraries and seminar rooms within the schools. There was general enthusiasm on escaping the confines of the classroom and any initial uncertainty was soon dispersed through the discussion of the project. Almost without exception the children were eager to talk about their lives and experiences and they provided preliminary details on their family, hobbies and interests. However, their contextual stories only became apparent when they stepped outside the educational establishments

2. Lifeworlds through the lens

On receiving the children's photographs and then visiting the children's homes a richer sense of who they were became apparent. While six of the thirty-nine participants in the study had no siblings, the majority had brothers or sisters, some coming from large families with as many as five children. Nine of the informants

came from single parent families or had parents who were separated or divorced. Due to the sampling across three disparate schooling locations there was in some cases significant differences in living conditions between children from poorer areas, a number of whom had parents who were unemployed and on benefits, and those from more affluent backgrounds. For example, the parents of one boy from private school ran a chain of businesses, the success of which was reflected in his opulent living environment including swimming pool, open plan fitness area, snooker and games room, and a fully decked bar and drinking area. Outside the house was surrounded by a large garden and adjoined by a garage housing five cars including a convertible sports car, a Mercedes and a Rolls Royce. The living environments of some of the other children told a rather different story. The words of caution received from one head teacher in Wetheral concerning the need for vigilance around the estate flats due to violence, vandalism and drug problems, became apparent on visiting the children at home. Many of the informants lived in high rise flats built in the last thirty years but often in a bad state of repair. Entering one boy's block of flats was an education in itself:

Liam lived on an estate rather further away from the school than the other children. It was four thirty in the afternoon and the sun was shining brightly when I pulled in front of the block of flats. Even in the sunlight it was one of the least inviting places I had ever seen and seemed strangely silent apart from a group of youths hanging out rather suspiciously on the other side of the central 'wasteland'. I headed towards the entrance and was somewhat deterred by the sight of a burnt out flat next door, which had been blocked up and clearly deserted for some time. The battered door hung open and inside there was a stench of filth and urine. There was rubbish everywhere and on the first landing a broken window had been left untouched with shards of glass scattered over the ground. I reached the door of the flat and found it covered with graffiti and spray paint...

(Fieldnotes, Wetheral, June 1999)

Despite this disparity in living environments many of the flats in less affluent areas reflected the pride of their owners and were homely and well kept inside. The bedrooms themselves indicated considerable consistency with an abundance of identity material and evidence of shared interests across the sample.

3. Into the bedroom

The richness of bedroom cultures amongst young adults and teenagers has been discussed by Willis (1990) and Brown et al (1994) however there was little preparation for the realities lying within many ten to 12 year olds' bedrooms. Some of the rooms were simply covered from floor to ceiling in visual materials (see Plate 6.1) relating to pop stars, media idols, sports heroes, and animals. The visual diversity further extended to scantily clad males and females, football itineraries, Playstation game posters, achievement certificates and trophies, photographs of friends and family, love notes, hero shrines, newspaper cuttings, creative projects, and caricatures. Shelves and floors were often covered with sports equipment, toys, cuddly animals, models, make-up, jewellery, books, CDs, clothes. However, the visual feasts provided were not equally apparent in all locations. Some of the children, most notably a few from Corby and private school, obviously had restrictions laid down by parents which required that freshly painted walls were protected from blue tack and selotape, and surfaces were kept clear. Even in these cases, however, evidence of child culture inevitably seeped through. Thus, one Corby boy discussed a small doorway in his visually neutral and unfettered bedroom which led to his "sop cupboard". Here he kept the many treasures which he was not allowed to pin up on his walls or leave lying on his floor. In other cases the children had negotiated the installation of cork boards and other protective surfaces on which to pin favourite posters and other visual items.



Plate 6.1 Posters as wallpaper (Girl, S1, Wetheral)

Aside from visual material and other possessions the children's rooms incorporated an abundance of media resources. Livingstone and Bovill (1999) have highlighted children's bedrooms as 'media rich' sites and this was firmly supported by the children's photographs and their discussion of them. As Table 6.1 indicates some 79% of children had televisions in their bedrooms. Although the numbers were comparable for boys and girls, parental restrictions meant that televisions were more prevalent amongst the children from Wetheral than those from private school. One girl sadly commented:

K: I'm not allowed one. My mum thinks I'll watch *South Park* and *Celebrity Death Matches* and *Eurotrash* and all this stuff that's on at midnight.

(Girl, P7, private)

A number of the children also had video recorders in their bedrooms and access to cable and satellite channels. Of the other media resources, stereos were present almost without exception and at least a few books were generally evident in all rooms. Many of the boys in particular owned games consoles and in a small number of cases boys and girls had computers and telephones in their rooms. This provision of media

of media made the bedroom an attractive space to stay “a bit longer” and “hang out”, and an important site for socialising with friends.

Table 6.1: Percentage of children with TV in bedroom

All	79%
Boys	76%
Girls	83%
Corby	86%
Private	58%
Wetheral	91%

While the children had not appropriated poster or magazine ads for the purpose of decorating rooms like one informant in O’Donohoe’s (1994b) study, their bedrooms nevertheless hinted at the importance of marketing influences. A number of the children mentioned that they had advertising screen savers for alcoholic beverages such as Guinness and Budweiser, in one case these were stored on a child’s bedroom computer. Brand names oozed from clothes strewn over chairs and sports equipment lying on shelves. One boy revealed a pin board covered with labels he had collected of favourite designer brands, another proudly displayed a Mercedes emblem which his brother had dubiously acquired while out “choring”.

Taken as a whole it was clear on talking to the children that the bedroom was regarded as a special place. As one girl noted “It’s the best room in my house” . In some cases it even appeared as a private sanctuary (Mathews, 1995) maintained through fitting locks and displaying “keep out” signs on their bedroom doors (see Plate 6.2) to prevent the entry of “parents” and “wee sisters”. Bedrooms in this way emerged as secluded independent sites for the active construction of identities (Brown et al, 1994) and for the display of their personal materials touched on above. One P7 boy from Wetheral described his room as “good” because “I can do what I

want”, similarly one of the girls highlighted the personal value and privacy of the space:

I: How important is your bedroom to you then?

A: Very important, cos like I can go in there, and I can just sit there and no one can come in.

(Girl, P7, Corby)



Plate 6.2 'Keep out' sign (Girl, P7, Corby)

4. Engaged lifestyles

The bedroom highlighted the children's active construction of identities and also their engagement with life. Further their physical, cognitive, emotional and often hedonistic interaction with life was palpable through their lively discourses. One group of S1 private school boys spent at least five minutes at the end of their focus group blowing 'raspberries', the S1 boys from Wetheral proceeded to engage in a not so playful 'play' fight once the tape was turned off, while the P7 boys from private school used a quick break in the middle their focus group to partake in some joint Playstation action. Some of the younger private school girls demonstrated a performance of a Spice Girls song that they had performed at a school show, while

the senior girls from Wetheral greeted my arrival with a stirring rendition of 'I will always love you' which they were watching on a TV chart show.

Certainly the children seemed to be engaged rather than passive consumers of life. Engagement emerged as a mode of living which was deeply embedded in their life stories. In their extensive study on children's leisure time and media use, Livingstone and Bovill (1999) noted that children and young people constantly talked of 'being bored'. The children in the current study also regularly referred to the horror of 'boredom' in their daily existence. Indeed, for many, life was characterised as a constant battle against the encroaching force of boredom, or a search involving what one boy termed "getting unbored". As for the children in Livingstone and Bovill's research, this condition was most often associated with being lonely or without friends. It was also most commonly allayed by either initiating interactions with peers, or through the media, especially television. Good friends were able to subdue boredom and transform the mood of the individual through "laughing", and being "funny" and the media served similar purposes, at times allowing you to "laugh your heed off". Discussing the flow of psychic energy Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981:185) note that "Every conscious experience lies on a continuum ranging from boring sameness at one end to enjoyable diversity at the centre and, finally, to anxiety-producing chaos at the further end." The notion of 'flow', or the optimal state of involvement in the middle regions of experience, seemed pertinent to the children in the study. What was surprising in many cases was there apparent eagerness to push the boundaries and reach as close as possible to the far end of the flow experience as possible. Thus, there was regular discussion in the groups of interest in intense cognitive, novelty and sensory stimulation (Hirschman, 1984). Perhaps most visible was their emergence as seekers of sensation related experiences such as rollercoaster rides, horror films and even drinking and drug taking. These were children who wanted and indeed appeared to be actively engaged in life. Metaphorically and in practice they were willing to ride the rollercoaster.

Even on this initial view then it seemed likely that the children would be actively engaged with another aspect of their lives: advertising. Further it seemed likely that it would be possible to establish pervasive themes running through the children's lives which impacted upon their advertising experiences. The next four chapters will explore two central existential concerns emerging from the children's discourses about their photographs. While the reader may wish to frame these concerns in terms of Mick and Buhl's (1992) consideration of life themes and life projects, these terms will not be applied. The evolving nature of children due to their cognitive and physical development makes the focus on solidified life themes and projects a less salient approach. This was not a comprehensive analysis of personal history, nor an attempt to identify lifelong themes, rather an approach aiming to reveal shared concerns at a particular life stage and their relevance to advertising experiences. It is to these current existential concerns, starting with the desire for autonomy, that we will now turn.

CHAPTER SEVEN

AUTONOMY

1. Introduction

Research by J Walter Thompson has suggested that children's existence within an adult-run world leaves them feeling powerless, and they consequently fantasise about power and achievement (Matthews, 1995; Eden, 2000). Literature reviewed in chapter four also indicated that children may be gaining increasing opportunities to demonstrate personal power through the changes taking place in family life and through developments on the media landscape. Meeting the children, entering their homes, listening to them discuss their photographs, and finally analysing the interview transcripts it became apparent that children not only fantasise about having power but in very real ways they seek, and attempt to demonstrate a form of personal power and sense of self which has been termed 'autonomy'. This drive for autonomy may be related to Erikson's (1987) conception of psychosocial development and the school aged child's need to resolve the conflict between industry and inferiority. Thus, at the core of the children's everyday lives emerged an existential concern (Mick and Buhl, 1992) with establishing an independent and competent self, and demonstrating this through their interactions with the people and concrete particulars of their lives. The children's drive for autonomy took various interlinking forms. Therefore, this theme will be discussed in terms of the dimensions that were most distinctive in the interview transcripts and which due to their saturation across the different schools and ages emerged as the most integral to the children's lives.

The central dimensions of 'mastering', 'controlling', and 'criticising' will structure this chapter through a consideration of the salient contextual aspects considered in chapter four: self and society, possessions and the media.

2. Mastering

It has been noted that human beings in general attempt to achieve a sense of power and control over their lives (Gleitman, 1991). However, for the children in the study the concern to acquire and demonstrate mastery emerged as a prominent value in life. The term mastery revolves around the children's concentration on achieving and displaying competence through the self and in dealings with others, but also through interaction with possessions and the media. The children presented themselves as engaged in the active building of physical and mental skills, and as successful participants in competitive play. In keeping with Erikson's (1987) depiction of school age children their interaction with the world around them indicated a concerted need to achieve and present competence, and to win recognition through the skills and tasks presented in the sociocultural environment. Further, involvement in industrial pursuits involved comparisons with others. The theme of mastery will be considered under three related headings. Firstly, it will be approached in terms of self mastery and personal achievement under the heading of 'Skill Builders'. Secondly mastery will be described in terms of achievement with others under the heading of 'Winning'. Thirdly, attention will be given to children's mastery of possessions.

2.1 Skill Builders

The children emerged as strongly motivated to build a variety of skills, and achieve competence in using cultural tools (Erikson, 1987). While both boys and girls emerged as 'skill builders', the boys were especially keen to display physical competence. Thus, the boys' photo diaries were interspersed with close-ups of themselves attempting perfect golf swings, dangerous bike stunts, rollerblading tricks, and precision football skills (see Plates 7.1 and 7.2). They discussed their own skills with pride and admired sportmen for their prowess and mastery. As one boy commented on his numerous photographs of himself performing 'keepie uppies' and other football tricks:

I like practising wee skills like flicking it up. And doing stuff like Renaldo. I like him. He's my like idol for football. I'd like to do skills like him.

(Boy, P7, Corby)

In this way skills emerged as something to build and hone through hours of practice, with the ultimate goal of becoming as accomplished as their heroes on the sports field.



Plate 7.1 Football skills (Boy, S1, Wetheral)



Plate 7.2 Golf swing (Boy, P7, Corby)

The children's concern with mastering skills extended to cognitive matters and particularly the desire to appear intellectually clever. This point was tangibly highlighted by one girl's favourite item of clothing, a T-shirt depicting the cartoon character Tweedie Pie and the words "you are no match to my superior intellect". However, "superior intellect" did not seem to be directly equated with academic performance but with the more specific possession of facts, figures and sometimes obscure information. Some spoke about swotting up on their knowledge of footballers and popstars. One private school boy in P7 who was a fan of the pop group Oasis admitted "sometimes I learn the lyrics and I can sing along to them".

Showing a concern for more personal knowledge a number of the girls discussed “learning about” their favourite media stars. Thus, one girl noted:

E: I just buy the magazines and buy their CDs and learn about them (the pop stars)...Just their name and sometimes their age, and what they like doing and stuff like that.

(Girl, P7, Wetheral)

Another P7 girl from Corby discussed the “interesting facts” she had gained from a science and technology magazine which she had sadly only been able to afford for a few weeks. While Roger was keen to disseminate his knowledge about motorbikes and cars, plus more gruesome details on reptilian creatures:

...I was reading about all the reptiles and that and it’s interesting cos a snake can eat an egg before chewing on it, just unlock its jaws and swallow an egg whole. Pretty cool! And the way it can kill people by strangling it and that.

(Boy, S1, Wetheral)

Other forms of skills highlighted by the children were linked to the media and the value of amusing the peer group through masterful performances. Indeed when describing their friends, many of the children admired the ability of certain individuals to do impersonations and to copy accents. One of the P7 girls from Wetheral described a recent lesson at school when the teacher had asked the children to discuss what all the members of the class were good at doing. Elaine enthusiastically revealed one boy’s admired achievement in the arena of character impersonations, particularly his resonant bursts of “ooooh behave” in the style of film character, Austin Powers. Such admiration meant that “doing the voices” was a favourite occupation amongst a large number of the children. It was perhaps not surprising that their discussions of favourite television programmes and films were generously scattered with enthusiastic impersonations (see Plates 7.3 and 7.4). Cries of “oh my God, you killed Kenny!”, “if you smell what The Rock is cooking...”, and “look Ma, I’m road kill!” were enthusiastically received by the other children during the focus groups, and were even provided for the researcher in the individual interviews.



Plate 7.3 South Park 1 (Boy, P7, Wetheral)



Plate 7.4 South Park 2 (Girl, S1, Wetheral)

2.2 Winning: “ha ha I beat you....”

C: She’s (piano teacher) an old goat, she’s an old fart and I hate her so much. And she like mentally put me off this competition. She said “Cathy, you’ve got no chance of winning unless you practice” and I thought “Oh, my God, she said I’ve got no chance of winning”. And everyone turned round to me when she said, “And the winner is...”, everyone turned round to me. She picked someone who hammered down *The Entertainer*. I hate *The Entertainer*, I hate *The Entertainer*....

(Girl, P7, private)

As Cathy’s words suggest the need for power and control over others through mastering the tools of the culture was a distinctive and sometimes desperate aspect of life for the children in the study. Cathy’s bitterness at not winning her school music competition highlights the importance the children placed on winning and ‘being the best’. While her individual desperation to win might be seen as the result of intensive socialisation by successful parents, or simply the humorous account of a self parodist, the evidence in the children’s bedrooms supported the view that winning and achievement were indeed a pervasive theme. Throughout the girls’ and

boys' rooms there were medals, trophies, notice boards covered with certificates and beaming pictures of children on days of achievement including the netball victory or scoring a hat trick in a football match (see Plates 7.5 and 7.6). Some of the children had even taken photographs of their symbols of success and were keen to draw attention to them:

That's the wee thing what I got for football cos I done well.

(Boy, P7, Wetheral)



Plate 7.5 Certificates (Girl, P7, Corby)



Plate 7.6 Trophy shelf (Boy, P7, Corby)

Whilst these items formed tangible evidence of the importance of winning, the revealing fact was that the children, particularly the boys, often selected them as the most treasured and important possessions in their bedrooms.

I: Tell me about anything in the room that's important to you?

N: That trophy. I won that at this rugby thing.... and I got that for BEST player over the week.

(Boy, S1, private)

As Nigel's reply to the first question in the interview suggests, one area in which winning was seen as particularly important was in the arena of sport. Achievement on the sports field was regarded as particularly meaningful to the boys. They pointed to their football medals, rugby trophies and golf prizes with evident pride. However, the girls also emphasised the importance of certificates and medals gained for sports such as swimming, water polo or dancing. Despite sport's elevated social value, the children also drew attention to other areas in which their achievements had been formally recognised such as music certificates, school test results and even school behaviour awards.

Aside from such formal recognition of achievement and in keeping with Michel Montaigne's (1580) comment that in the case of children "their games should be seen as their most serious-minded activity", the children also spoke of the desire to be better than others in their play. Smith, Cowie and Blades (1998) highlight the work of various developmental theorists who link the benefits of play with social competence. According to their analysis Vygotsky saw the affective drive behind play as being to do with the child's confidence and mastery. Similarly, Piaget regarded the functions of play as the provision of a sense of 'ego-continuity' while Freud thought play provided children with an means of achieving wish fulfilment and mastery. For the informants in this study play emerged as a surprisingly serious tool of mastery. Three examples concerning physical contests, computer games, and fantasy war battles highlight the use of play in enhancing the ego. Firstly, many of the boys across the three schools talked enthusiastically about wrestling. They enjoyed the World Wrestling Federation programmes on Channel Four, spoke about their wrestling heroes such as 'The Rock' and 'Stone Cold', and took part in their own wrestling matches and peer contests. These inter-peer wrestling flurries occurred regularly and often quite unexpectedly, even on occasion during the friendship discussions as the following field notes illustrate:

The boys were becoming slightly distracted about 25 minutes into the focus group so I decided to stop for a while. "OK, a five minute break". The boys rushed out of the kitchen and into Graham's bedroom. I sat for a moment writing down a few notes and Graham's mother came in from the sitting room and offered

me a cup of tea. After a few minutes, and on hearing a few squawks from the bedroom, I went through to investigate. All three boys were rolling on the floor: Colin was trying to sit on Graham, while Gary seemed to be attempting to detach Graham's head from the rest of his body. Feeling somewhat concerned for Graham's safety I called them into the kitchen again. They all got up smiling, Graham was looking a little crumpled but laughed and said that he would get them next time....

(Boys, P7, Corby)

Physical play was not absent in the case of the girls but was far less prevalent. On the occasions when it did emerge it was more obvious amongst individual characters, notably two of the Wetheral girls, Diane and Laura. Diane in particular talked regularly about "battering" the boys and having "play fights" with her mother. As one of the self-confessed tomboys her play fighting suggested a male orientated focus on physical control.

Secondly, social mastery was regularly attempted through media competition. Lull (1990) has noted how the television serves as an effective means of demonstrating achievement and competence. For many of the boys the most popular means of displaying this mastery was through another medium, their prized Playstation or Nintendo 64 (see Plate 7.7). These games consoles were regularly named as favourite possessions in their bedrooms and were usually accompanied by a shelf full of assorted games most typically those centring on racing, action and fighting. One boy even had a whole wall specially wallpapered in pictures from his favourite games (see Plate 7.8). Although some of the girls were also enthusiastic players, particularly of the adventure and search genres, the activity as a whole was most vigorously enjoyed by the boys. They played the games in order to build specific "skills", to develop "hand co-ordination", and to beat their peers, or better still adults.

A: My dad, he just works every day of the week apart from Saturday and Sunday. And on Saturday and Sunday he plays Championship Manager... He's quite good, he's Raith Rovers, and he beat Rangers, he went top of the League, he won the Scottish Cup. He's quite good but I'm better!

(Boy, P7, Corby)



Plate 7.7 Games console (Boy, S1, private)



Plate 7.8 Games pictures (Boy, P7, Wetheral)

Thirdly, fantasy game playing was discussed by a number of the children, and emerged as an especially persistent subject amongst one group of P7 boys from Corby. These three boys largely dismissed competitive sport but their emphasis on issues of winning was expressed through the intellectual challenge of the game 'Warhammer'. The boys had constructed their own terrains and had "built up an army" of hand-painted figures or "guys". These warscapes were the centre of social interaction amongst the friendship group, although "battles" also took place at school when a small selection of guys were smuggled into lessons and fights were enacted on the top of desks. Thus, the mastery and winning theme stretched into fantasy fields of endeavour as the boys controlled the way their 'guys' looked through the precise art of hand painting, they designed and built their own war worlds, and most importantly spent hours attempting to beat each other in the mental skills of battle strategy.

Despite the diversity of evidence as to the value of winning to both boys and girls, it was clear that being better than others was more integral to some children than others. As in the case of piano playing Cathy, children from private school focused more intently than the state school children on the occasions and trappings of winning, perhaps due to the particular familial and educational socialisation they received. Within all the schools, and in keeping with the male focus on competitive play (Berndt, 1982) the boys tended to emphasise winning more than the girls. Achievement was firmly tied into both the aspirations and day-to-day experiences of many of the boys, particularly if those future and current experiences involved football:

I: Tell me what your ideal life would be like after school?

P: Being a football player and playing for Man United, winning all the trophies and that.

I: Tell me a little bit about winning, what does it mean to you?

P: Everything.... Today at school I won the football. We won 13-3 or something and I scored a hat trick!

(Boy, P7, Wetheral)

2.3 Mastering possessions

E: I just sort of really like it (remote control car) sort of controlling it and being in the power of being able to do what you want with it.

(Girl, S1, private)

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg Halton (1981) and Gentry et al (1995) have argued that possessions in youth years are often selected to reflect ability, control and power. As Elly highlights above, the children in the study were likewise attuned to this practical and symbolic dimension of possessions. Further, the contents of their bedrooms closely reflected Erikson's (1987) central task during middle childhood of building a sense of industry, and developing feelings of achievement and competence through success in making, doing and building.

In the individual interviews all the children were asked to look at their photographs and to indicate and discuss anything that was particularly important to them. In this way the children highlighted a wide variety of possessions of which the most regularly mentioned were:

1. Sports equipment and collectibles
2. Cuddly toys and dolls
3. Stereos
4. Televisions
5. Furniture (including beds, chairs and desks)
6. Achievement awards
7. Games consoles
8. Cars and bicycles



Plate 7.9 Sports paraphernalia



Plate 7.10 Media possessions

In a similar fashion to the youth samples interviewed by Csikzentimihalyi and Rochberg Halton (1981) and Kamptner (1991), the children in the current study highlighted possessions focusing on active, instrumental and self-related concerns. As the list above indicates sports equipment accompanied by sports collectibles and

paraphernalia (see Plate 7.9) formed the most regularly mentioned category, closely followed by cuddly toys and dolls. Other significant categories apart from those listed above included paraphernalia related to media icons; beauty, body and image products; creative projects; and childhood nostalgia items.

While a female interest in emotional aspects of possessions, seen in the emergence of cuddly toys and childhood nostalgia items, reflects findings with adults (Dittmar, 1992), the general concern with functional and use related features of possessions was found in both boys and girls. In this way they closely matched the dispositions of the ten to 11 year olds in Kamptner's (1991) research. Their ownership and use possessions signifying control, activity and success went some way towards aiming for what Erikson (1987) referred to as the psychosocial strength of competence.

Perhaps the most relevant aspect of their use of possessions for means of mastery was in their discussion of favourite media in the bedroom. As was noted above both boys and girls selected certain media as highly important possessions. The proliferation of media in the bedroom (see Plate 7.10) has been highlighted by Livingstone and Bovill (1999). Further Brown et al (1994) have proposed that the media may constitute a salient resource for identity construction in the bedroom. Several media notably televisions, stereos and games consoles were seen as important to the sense of self. Even if they were not directly mentioned stereos were present in almost all the children's bedrooms, while games consoles were largely the preserve of the boys. In a typical reference to the functionality of his favourite possessions one boy noted:

D: I like the CD player cos I like listening to music and to keep me amused there's my games machine.

(Boy, P7, Corby)

As David highlights, new media, such as games consoles, were seen to provide almost unlimited flexibility and accessibility in leisure activities. They emerged as the ultimate functional tool ready to entertain and amuse at any time of the day. As he went on to attest:

D: The games system's better (than the TV) cos the programmes on TV last for about half an hour or so but you can play it whenever you like, the games system. But for a TV programme you have to wait for a special time of day to watch it.

(Boy, P7, Corby)

However, despite the higher flexibility attributed to games consoles amongst some of the boys, bedroom televisions were generally considered a particularly empowering resource allowing a wide choice of channel and programme options. The vested mastery of these items was further enhanced by some children's access to satellite and cable channels, and even video recorders in their bedrooms. Far from being overcome by the number of channels, they talked eagerly about favourite programmes which they were able to select and switch to at a moment's notice.

The power provision of the bedroom television may be usefully viewed in the light of Morley (1986) and Lull's (1990) discussion of the prevalent conflicts in families over channel selection. While the family television provided some opportunity for establishing control for the children in the study, as when Wayne laughingly described how he would enter the sitting room in the morning and turn off his little brother's favourite cartoon channel, it also emphasised their relative lack of power. Many of the children referred to disagreements over television viewing emphasising the dominance of fathers and older siblings. As Leslie noted:

L: I just usually have it in my room cos my dad always wants to watch football..... like every time the football's on me and ma mam always watch like *Eastenders* and that. He's like "no" cos I want to watch the football. And he usually ends up winning!

(Girl. S1, Wetheral)

What is interesting about Leslie's comment is that, although she might ideally prefer to control viewing within the family, the television in her bedroom provides a means of satisfying her programming desires. Although power may not be complete, the emergence of multiple TV homes in which many children have their own television in their bedroom (Sherman, 1996) suggests that children can exercise the power to choose in their own private space. Indeed when talking about the importance of

bedroom televisions and in their descriptions of bedroom viewing, the children emerged as independent media masters rather than powerless viewers:

A: And there's my other bed and my two TV changers....that's my video one and that's like for brightening up the screen, putting the sound up and all that stuff. So all I have to do is reach over and get them if I want to watch TV.

(Boy, P7, private)

However, while dimensions of mastery were apparent through the children's discussion of important individual items, including media, these were further enhanced through their discourse concerning collections.

2.2.1 Collecting

All the girls in my class have collections of things....

(Clare, P7, private)

Furby (1978) has attested that control over the use of possessions is most salient to children in late middle childhood and early adolescence. It is at this time that the activity of collecting is most popular with children before declining as they advance into adolescence (Olmsted, 1991). Collecting, defined as the process of actively, selectively, and passionately acquiring and possessing things removed from ordinary use and perceived as part of a set of non-identical objects (Belk, 1995: 67) has been referred to as the distilled essence of consumption (Belk et al (1991) and a natural part of life for children and adults alike (Baker and Gentry, 1996). Certainly it emerged as a popular hobby for many of the children in the study.

Belk et al (1991) have argued that self definition is often highly dependent on our possessions. Collections may be especially implicated in the extended self for children due to visibility and representation of the owner's tastes and judgement. In this way the representation of extended self seems to account for many of the self-enhancing motives for collecting such as "seeking power... mastery and control"

(Belk et al, 1988). These self enhancing motives, particularly the provision of control, were also evident in the children's discussion of their collections.

The bedroom photographs revealed a wide and occasionally bizarre range of collections. For example, the girls gathered cuddly toys (see Plate 7.11), jewellery, foreign coins, ornaments, toy pigs, *Point Horror* and other books, bus tickets, make-up (particularly nail polish), model houses, teddies, CDs, videos, Beanie Babies, objects connected with the programme *Friends*, bottles of bubble bath and shampoo, posters of pop stars and other heroes, stamps, stones and shells, pop magazines, key rings, photographs and frames, stickers, pencil sharpenings, china dolls, mugs, hair and body sprays, perfumes and postcards.



Plate 7.11 Cuddly collection (Girl, P7, Corby)



Plate 7.12 Star Wars items (Boy, P7, Wetheral)

The boys were generally less concerned with collecting and some referred to the activity as something they “used” to do. Nevertheless they gathered a variety of items such as piggy banks, computer magazines, sports paraphernalia, sports clothing, posters of female personalities, posters of media stars and other heroes, videos of action films, money, golf tees, golf balls, Warhammer figures, deodorants,

music videos, model cars, motorbikes and aeroplanes, and science fiction collectibles (see Plate 7.12).

The nature of these collections, particularly the boys' focus on sports equipment and collectibles, reinforced the drive for active and functional possessions noted above. However, through the children's discussion of the motives lying behind their collections they also highlighted their symbolic self-enhancing role. Firstly, collections can be seen to centre on the drive for acquisition. To acquire something is to take possession of it and to have it under one's control (Belk et al, 1991). The children in the study enhanced their sense of self through assembling large collections, such as the popular Beanie Babies. On occasion the children's collections were so large that special storage units had to be set up to accommodate them. Thus, Annabel had recently acquired a special shelving unit to display her extensive cuddly toy collection. Some girls revealed, in distressed tones, the anguish involved in appeasing parents who had decided that at least part of their teddy collection had to be stored in the attic. Likewise one of the Wetheral girls disclosed that as she possessed such a large collection of stamps, cups, and "Winnie the Pooh stuff", her mum had suggested she should "start up a shop with it".

Secondly, the sense of control gained through the size of a collection seemed to be enhanced by the endless possibilities of acquisition. While the children acknowledged that it would be impossible to possess every possible ornamental house, cuddly toy or model car, the access to an infinite number of collectibles seemed to be closely connected to the notion of control. Thus, Graham who had boasted about his acquisition accomplishments in "building my (Warhammer) army" went on to note:

G: But you buy one Warhammer truck and you can put a grabber or a swing ball on it, an exhaust, a jetpack. There's lots of different types. Once you've got all the types, which you'd probably never get unless you were a millionaire, you can still add more, you can just keep going, it's like numbers they go to infinity.

(Boy, P7, Corby)

Thirdly, the appeal of an infinite number of items available seemed to be related to what Baker and Gentry (1996) refer to as the convenience of many collections. Many of the objects the children collected were easily accessible or convenient resources such as shells and stones gathered on trips to the seaside. Some collections began through an opportune gift by family or friends, others commenced through plentiful items that the child had chanced upon. Thus, Helen, who was in S1 in Corby, spoke about how she had thought long and hard about what she should collect and decided upon the rather unusual choice of pencil sharpenings. She apparently already had them in abundance in a spare pencil case. Likewise Elaine, in the quote below, reveals how her collection of foreign coins was literally going free:

E: It's just foreign money cos, um, my Mum, she used to work for Barnardos, um collecting, um, sort of going round with collection boxes, um , and when she was emptying them she was always finding coins and she didn't have any use for them so I started collecting them and I've got a big tub of them now.

(Girl, S1, private)

Finally, one of the more surprising findings in the children's discussion of collections was the regularly mentioned incentive of future value. Thus, both the girls and boys collected items in the hope, and often fervent belief, that they would be able to sell their collections for large sums of money in future years. Such incentives went as far as to include dreams of television stardom and an appearance on the popular BBC1 programme the *Antiques Roadshow*:

In a couple of years time or when I'm older they'll (her Barbies) be worth quite a lot of money and things, and I could go on the *Antiques Roadshow*.....

(Girl, P7, Corby)

Although generally less interested in collecting the boys nevertheless emerged as especially interested in accumulating and collecting items of perceived financial value. While none of them sought a starring role on the *Antiques Roadshow*, the notion that something might be "worth a lot of money" was integral to their motivations for collecting:

I: So what do these cars mean to you now when you look at them?

R: A lot of money! The red yan is a collector's item, in a couple of years that'll be worth a lot of moneys.

(Boy, S1, Wetheral)

Their interest in instrumental and specifically financial aspects of possessions was made particularly apparent by the fact that many of their collections actually were 'money'. When asked about collections, Barry laughed about a male friend who "just collects money!". Others boasted more explicitly about the high level of their financial resources. The power aspects of money will be considered in more detail in the next section.

3. Controlling

I want to be a youth squadron leader and work really late hours so mum can't come along and say 'now why have you got all this mess in your room'....

(Boy, P7, Corby)

The powerlessness of childhood (Mathews, 1995; Eden, 2000) was noted at the beginning of this chapter. The children as a whole employed various techniques and strategies to distance themselves from this aspect of childhood. They disliked being considered as "kids" and envied the ability of adults to control their own lives through the treasures of independence and freedom. This need for separation from childlike associations was expressed in various forms.

Firstly, they aspired to live the day-to-day in an independent fashion and so talked proudly of possessions that provided them with a sense of independence, particularly bicycles (see Plate 7.13). In addition they referred to recent and forthcoming occasions when they were able to walk to school without their parents and go shopping with friends. One group of girls even highlighted an unusual interest in acquiring and keeping bus tickets. While these items were obviously attractive for their ease of collection (Baker and Gentry, 1996), the crucial draw emerged as the

novel experience of bus travel (see Plate 7.14), and particularly the independence provided from parental figures:

A: It's just like whenever I go on the bus I just collect them and I've got a big purse filled with them....

I: So, what started you collecting them?

A: Oh, I don't know. It was ages ago. It was at the start of um, in the middle of P7 I think I started collecting them, cos that's the first time like I was allowed to get the bus by myself... We were allowed to like, um like without your Mum and Dad always coming on, and we were allowed to go from like place to place...

(Girl, S1, private)



Plate 7.13 Bike independence (Boy, P7, Corby)



Plate 7.14 Bus travel (Girl, P7, private)

Secondly, demonstrations of control in everyday life also related to displays of emotional maturity. One girl's comment "You just have to face your fears" seemed to have particular relevance in this respect. For a few of the children controlling their fears was a personally relevant experience as in the case of Kirsty who felt she needed to face her fear of snakes. She spoke of her attempt to control her fear and walk independently and unassisted through the reptile house. For others, facing fears was a shared experience, as in the ability to confront the physical thrills of

fairgrounds and theme parks. In this respect rollercoasters were a particularly alluring topic of conversation. A number of the children discussed their love of the rollercoaster experience seeing it as a test of bravery. Having boasted of their own fairground endeavours, they took unmistakable delight in the fact that adults, in this case mothers, were often less able to endure the fear factor:

L: My mum is a feardycat of rollercoasters!

A: Oh so's mine!

L: Yeah cos like we went on this one that was so slow. And she was absolutely frightened of it.

A: Oh holiday there was this thing called Space. And it goes round like that (demonstrates) and I went on it with my cousin, my uncle and my dad. And ma mum she was down the road with my aunty and my little cousin. And like she'd have to go away because she couldn't like just stand there and watch me. She found that so scary.

J: My mum's like that on some rides. She's like if it's a big drop then she says "I can't even watch that, it's gonna make me feel sick and gets all worried that something's gonna happen to her". So like she just goes and wanders off.

(Girls, P7, Corby)

Facing fears and demonstrating independence was perhaps most evident in the children's discussion of horror. Willis (1990) noted the appeal of horror to young adults, while Buckingham (1996) drew attention to the 'distress and delight' of the genre across boys and girls, working class and middle class children. For many of the informants in the present study horror also held wide appeal. In the younger age group some of the informants eagerly divulged the details of a series of ghost story books called 'Goosebumps', while for the majority of the readers the clear favourite was the Point Horror series. These books seemed to allow the children to immerse themselves in the fear experience and to test their own limits of courage.

Horror films themselves were raised as a favourite form of media entertainment by many children within the individual interviews and the friendship groups. The popularity of this genre seemed partly related to Buckingham's (1996: 111) notion of the 'adult status' to be derived by children from horror films:

'learning to take it' was seen to be a central aspect of gaining experience as a viewer, and of growing into maturity. Becoming a 'true' horror fan meant learning to conquer your fear, and to see the experience through to the bitter end.

Being able to conquer the fear of the experience or at least appear to do so also emerged as an important avenue for gaining adult status amongst the children in the present study. Although the girls were avid consumers of horror and the words "I love horror films" resonated through their interviews, the boys were more anxious to exhibit their bravery skills. They discussed their ability to sit through horror films without feelings of fear. In this way comments such as "that one's not very scary", "it was kind of predictable", and "that was dead funny" echoed through their discussions of films like *Scream*, *Nightmare of Elm Street*, and *I Know What You Did Last Summer*.



Plate 7.15 Part time jobs (Boy, S1, Wetheral)



Plate 7.16 Pet owners (Boy, P7, Corby)

Thirdly, the children highlighted responsible roles that they played in their everyday lives. For example, they proudly discussed part time jobs such as delivering papers (see Plate 7.15). In addition they highlighted their responsible roles as pet owners

(see Plate 7.16) “cleaning out the rabbit hutch”, “training” the cat and “feeding” the dog. The emphasis was placed on their increasing ability and independence. As one boy reflected on his pets:

That’s my fish... I had my rabbit when I was only seven and I didn’t really take care of it that well. I mean I used to handle it and play with it but I never ever cleaned it out. My mum always had to do that. And I never remembered to feed it or water it. I was just playing with it. And then I got my hamster and I was about ten and I just... I do everything with my hamster. My mum doesn’t help.

(Boy, S1, private)

Fourthly, the desire to break away from adults was expressed through presentation of the self in terms of the use of make-up, ear and body piercing and clothing. Those children seen as unable or unwilling to mould their appearance through their choice of clothing and negotiation with their parents were variously teased or pitied as this group discussion about a classmate “ruled” by her mother illustrates:

J: Like Jane is like a mummy’s girl (others groan). Like she will do anything for her mum.... And like her mum wants her to wear pink non stop, so she does it.... She doesn’t really make her own decisions....Her mum makes all the decisions....I know like our mums do want to like look after us and things but....

L: ... We’ve got to make our own choice.

J: ... You’re not going to wear pink every day.

A: ...Her mum used to, like when I used to go to her house and things, I used to choose my own clothes and her mum she used to like lay out her clothes for her. And if she didn’t wear that she would get a row. She had to wear the clothes that her mum put out for her like the little frilly skirts and all that.

J: And she’s 11 and she still has to do it. (Pause). But it’s not like, she does have a life, but like her mum’s ruling it.

(Girls, P7, Corby)

Finally, and perhaps most prominently, the children referred to the importance of money in their lives.

3.1 Money and saving

Belk (1988) and Gentry et al (1995) have noted that money may be particularly symbolic of power, playing an important role in the provision of control and independence. For the children in the study, money formed an integral part of the children's "photo talks". They expressed an interest in the accumulation of money, and often boasted about the level of their funds, their use of bank accounts and the relatively expensive items, including bicycles, stereos and televisions, that they had acquired through their own financial resources. This was not to say that they all had access to extensive monetary funds but for many the receipt of pocket money was a much anticipated symbolic event giving them access to the possessions and activities they desired.

An analysis of the levels of pocket money was not a pre-planned element of the fieldwork but as many of the first children spoke about money, and due to the topic's relationship with advertising and consumer issues, it was decided to include some discussion of monetary matters in the interviews. Due to the very limited size of the sample the figures (see Tables 7.1 and 7.2) need to be interpreted with care. Indeed there were further limitations of the data since several of the children did not receive a regular sum of pocket money and others received variable amounts depending on their general behaviour and performance in various household chores such as keeping their bedroom tidy. In addition a few, mainly boys, gained most of their money through organised jobs such as paper rounds and, therefore received pocket money on an irregular basis. Whilst the remuneration gained in these few cases was quite considerable, ranging from £7 to £15 a week, the figures provided include only pocket money received from parents and grandparents.

Table 7.1: Average pocket money according to age and school

	Private	Corby	Wetheral	Total
Primary Seven	£2.25	£1.25	£4	£2.50
Secondary One	£4	£3.33	£8.50	£5.28
Total	£3.125	£2.29	£6.25	£3.89

Table 7.2: Average pocket money according to age and gender

	Male	Female	Total
Primary Seven	£4.35	£2.50	£3.42
Secondary One	£3.50	£5.11	£4.30
Total	£3.93	£3.80	£3.86

Nevertheless the figures in Tables 7.1 and 7.2 do provide some useful indications of differences between the age and schooling groups involved. As can be seen there is

a general increase in levels of pocket money as the children get older. In fact it became evident that parents often had pocket money rates scaled according to the exact age of the child and the rates were seen to move upwards quite rapidly as the children moved towards teenage years. In the following quotation a secondary girl complained about the unfairness of pocket money rates in her family in which her younger brothers received the same amount of money as herself:

G: I get £2 a week now and when I'm 13 I'm gonna get £5 a week.... My sister Sammy (age 14) gets £5 a week at the moment. And Michael and Stevie get £2 as well when they're only supposed to get like £1, because that's all I had when I was their age. And I'm sort of like "that's not fair" and everything!

(Girl, S1, Corby)

The exception to pocket money rising with age came in comparison of boys and girls. This anomaly seems to be due to one particularly fortunate boy in P7 who received between £10 and £15 each week, and also due to the exclusion of money earned by the older boys through paper rounds and part-time jobs.

Perhaps most notable are the differences in pocket money levels between the different schooling locations. The pupils in Corby tended to receive less pocket money than the private school pupils, but it was the generally less affluent Wetheral children who consistently received the highest sums. It may be that parents in this area were trying to compensate for the lack of other luxuries in life. However the children's discussions suggested that a significant percentage spending was predetermined by parents for the purchase of necessary items such as their morning "play piece" and lunch. Many of the Corby and private school children seemed to have more control over their financial resources. The pocket money given to them could generally be freely spent on non-necessities and luxury items, for example magazines, make-up, and compact discs. In this light the control and spending power derived through monetary resources seemed to be at least as significant for the children from more affluent backgrounds despite their lower sums of pocket money.

Aside from differences in spending power between the groups, it also became clear that in talking about money the children made continual references to various aspects of control. Thus, as Belk (1988) and Gentry et al (1995) have suggested, money, particularly combined with saving, was seen to give them personal power through the freedom and ability to buy whatever they wanted, whenever they desired, for a variety of individual and social purposes:

A: I just want to save it just in case I see something I want, like cos I can afford like anything in a shop practically, except like a computer or whatever.

(Boy, S1, private)

This notion of being able to take possession of whatever you want from the broader cultural world into the individual life world through accessing saved resources emerged as an important control device for many of the children. However, a clear difference in the attitude towards saving was evident between the different groups. The Corby and private school children spoke determinedly about saving up for future purchases. Although some of the Wetheral children had bank accounts they did not seem to be driven by a similar desire to save and money tended to flow in and out of their hands with greater rapidity.

Perhaps the most evident division, however, came between the boys and the girls. The term 'Money Mercenaries' has been coined for ten to twelve year old boys by the Children's Research Unit (www.YORG.com) and there appears to be good reason for this title. The boys used money and saving as a distinctive tool of control. They emerged as individuals who were excited by money and the possibility of making money, indeed as noted earlier some of them even talked about "collecting" money as a personal hobby. Sometimes this interest went as far as utilising financial terminology and language in their general discourse and using money as a source of social power. One of the P7 boys, Graham, referred to his pocket money as a "salary", and spoke about getting "interest" from his father if he chose to receive his pocket money once every month rather than every week. His extensive discussion

on his intended future career aboard a cruise ship was similarly framed in terms of financial considerations:

G: I want to work on a cruise ship when I get older. Cos they **pay** for your water, your **tax** and all that. They give you **free** food and all your drinks are **free** because you work for the company. You're gonna get like **£5000** for, not **£5000** about **£50,000** for like a **year contract** and your house is the ship, they give you your room **free**, and so you're not **paying** for your **mortgages**, your **tax** and all that. You'll obviously have to **pay tax** because you have a job but it'll all be there for you.I mean maybe it's gonna be good cos if you want to go on a cruise within your two weeks holiday, with like say someone like your mum and dad or something, then you can get it **half price**, or they might give it to you **free**, or get a **deduct** from your **salary**, you won't have to bother with **Access**, and "have you paid your **Gold credit card**". It's kinda like you're gonna like you're gonna get it **half price**, and you don't have to worry about whether this **credit card's** been **paid** yet or whatever...

(Boy, P7, Corby)

Graham's financial concerns, though often somewhat contorted, led to his title of "the Bank Manager" during the analysis process. Despite his somewhat over-enthusiastic deliberations about money his financial orientation did not seem to be solely related to family socialisation. Indeed he joked on a number of occasions about other family members, particularly his younger sister's and father's, inability to deal with money. Thus, for Graham, money emerged as a tool of power and competence. While the other boys expressed less interest in taxes, interest and payments on Gold Credit cards, they too highlighted the power derived from money.

This is not to say that the girls did not have a keen interest in money. However, their relationship with money and saving suggested a somewhat different dimension of control. For the girls money was regularly saved for the expressed purpose of being "blown". It emerged from their discourse that the end purchase was rarely as important as the ability to visit the shops and spend freely. Thus, girls' experience with money seemed to be more volatile; they clearly enjoyed being able to control money by saving it, followed by the experience of venturing in to the shops with their purses brimming:

A: ... I spend it all when I go shopping and then I save it all up for ages and then spend it all.

(Girl, S1, Corby)

C: ...I save up my money for ages and then I just blow it all in one day.

(Girl, P7, private)

There were of course exceptions to the girls who relished “blowing” their money but in keeping with the male/ female divide the most obvious cases involved self-confessed “tom-boys”. In this example one such girl took a stance more similar to the boys when talking about the importance of reflecting carefully upon the issue of saving and spending:

K: ...I normally just save up, normally I don't spend my money. If I buy, if I get money, but I don't really HAVE much money, so if I do get money I probably, like, think, “put it in the bank, it can get more” and then take some out and buy a Beanie. But I've doubled my money instead of wasting it all at once. So I think, clearly, if I do get like £5 I'm like, I might put it in the bank or it kind of depends, cos if we're going to Morningside and I have my £5 I could go to the craft shop, or to the bank which is beside it. Craft shop, Beanie, bank - in goes the money. Think about it. So probably, probably my first instinct is “get a new Beanie Baby, yeah, be like the rest of the class” and then I think ‘well, OK, I can wait for another month, see what happens, it's my birthday coming up soon, or something. I mean it isn't but I can get more money then, so...

(Girl, P7, private)

Clearly Kirsty's position may stem not only from gendered divisions but also the socialising forces of family and social context. Indeed as in the cultural comparisons relating to possessions and money noted by Gentry et al (1995) some of the children, especially those who attended private school, seemed to have been socialised to believe in deferred rather than instant gratification.

4. Criticising

Some dimensions of mastery and control over the media have already been expressed in earlier sections. However, of particular importance to the overall theme of autonomy, was the finding that the children were eager to knowledgeably analyse, discuss and even criticise the media. The realism of media texts was particularly important in this respect and the children were keen to contemplate and muse over media offerings.

This interest in media reality may be associated with the fact that children at this age are characteristically curious about the world they live in and intent investigators of its phenomena. Again there seems to be relevance here in Erikson's (1987) notion of the school age child seeking a sense of industry and competence with the available cultural tools. Certainly the pervasiveness of the media in their lives provided access to an abundance of cultural tools to test out and achieve proficiency in. However, what was notable amongst the children in the current study was the degree to which 'reality' had become a major and unprompted consideration in their lives. The children were not merely randomly noting reality but judging media on the basis of this factor. This finding reflects Appleyard's (1991) discussion of the role of the reader as 'thinker' in teenage years. According to Appleyard one of the most important critical yardsticks that adolescents apply to stories is whether or not they are true to life. While for Appleyard realism is an issue for adolescents, it would appear that this is already the case amongst ten to 12 year olds. In keeping with the theme of children 'getting older younger' noted in chapter four, the children in the study had already discovered that a story's truthfulness to life is not something a reader can take for granted but must make a judgement about. In this way they could be seen as having adopted an important dimension of autonomy known as the 'spectator' role, that is the psychological position of the onlooker, for whom reading is a process of attending to representation of events and evaluating the significance and adequacy of their representation (Appleyard, 1991).

In the case of adolescents Appleyard has noted that the criteria of realism take different forms. Sometimes it is the fact that the story reflects the reader's experience accurately. At other times the story is realistic because the reader can easily imagine similar situations. Lastly, a further criteria of realism is that the characters are not ideal types or one-dimensional. These first two elements in particular were regularly applied to a variety of television programmes with every genre from gritty drama and horror to comedy examined under their real life microscope. In this light Cathy talked about her favourite television show *Friends* (see Plate 7.17) and the way in which she could easily imagine similar situations:

I: What do you like about *Friends*?

F: I like how it's so realistic, you know. It doesn't have mad things happening, and it could actually happen to you, and it's so funny.

(Girl, P7, private)

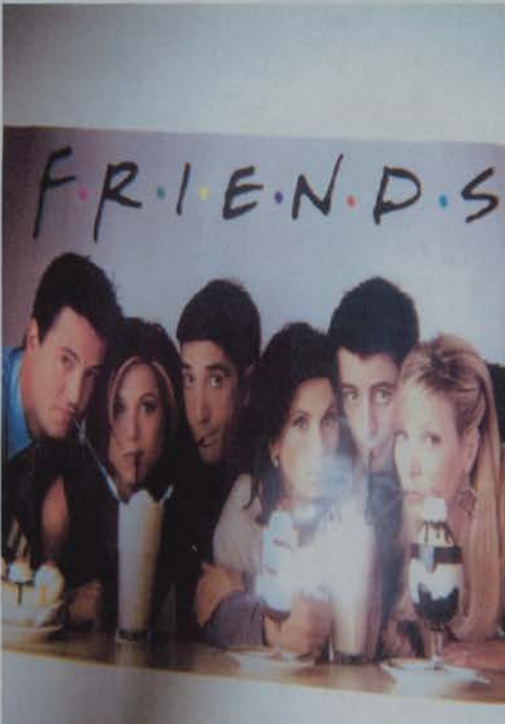


Plate 7.17 Realistic TV (Boy, S1, private)



Plate 7.18 Game realism (Boy, P7, Wetheral)

In another instance one of the boys turned around the perspective on reality. According to his assessment, it was the lack of reality in the popular animated comedy *The Simpsons* which provided its appeal:

I: *The Simpsons*, what do you like about that?

G: Um, *The Simpsons* is just, I just find that really funny as well because most of the time the things that happen on it couldn't really happen in real life, which makes it funny as well. I mean, it's just sometimes you're just watching it and something really stupid will happen and that will just be really, really funny and then, that's just really how I watched it.

(Boy, S1, private)

Although Geoff obviously enjoyed the programme he felt the need to acknowledge its degree of modality and justify the fact that it "couldn't really happen in real life". This congruence with Appleyard's (1991) notion of children's use of realism as a judgement issue was highly visible in their popular discussion of horror films. This evaluation served very practical purposes of self control in distancing the children from the presumed fear effects of the genre. By reminding themselves that the scene was merely fantasy, "not real life" and involved things that "couldn't happen to you" the children were often able to remove themselves from the effects.

The power and distancing derived from the adoption of the role of 'thinker' was also apparent in their discussions of media styles and conventions. Horror films, once again, served to highlight their knowledge and competence in this area. Although some of the children were described as coping with horror through "hiding behind pillows" and "huddling together" others revealed how they dealt with their fear through understanding and predicting the genre:

S: I like *Scream* but that wasn't that scary, it was kinda corny cos it was predictable what was going to happen... there's always gonna be an attack on a girl and she's always gonna be sitting alone, she'll either be watching a scary movie or she'll be in her bed. And he'll always phone and he'll go "heeeeeello" and then he'll say her name and then they'll get freaked. They'll go to the door, open it and then they'll come in the back door, they'll shut it, lock everything and they can't get out and then they get killed.

(Boy, P7, private)

This distancing from media effects was further apparent in the children's regular dissection and evaluation of production techniques and what they described as "good effects".

I: So what is it about horror movies, explain that to me?

L: ...And like in *I know what you did last summer*, I really enjoyed it cos it had like good effects when like the guy went through, when it was like a hook went into the guy's throat and all the blood came out. And I thought "I dunno how they do that"..... in *Friday the 13th* it wasn't scary because it put special effects when like the woman was on the bed and she found a dead body and the knife went up her throat. But I thought "how can they do that?".

(Girl, P7, Corby)

Linda frames her enjoyment of the films in terms of the quality of the visual effects. While viewing horror films, and in her reflections on such experiences, she seems to be balancing the copious 'gore' and 'blood' with what Buckingham (1996) has referred to as cognitive coping strategies. She describes her "thought" processes during the film and deliberates upon and questions the role played by producers in achieving gory visuals.

Although horror was a particularly popular topic of conversation amongst the children, technical details and producers intentions were discussed in other media. Favourite video games were praised for being "realistic" and for including technical details and visuals, which paralleled real life (see Plate 7.18). Thus, in a typical example one of the Corby boys eagerly described his favourite racing game, the *Colin McCrae Rally*, noting the realism of the "vibrations", the "detail" of the landscape, and the inclusion of the voice of "Colin Macrae himself":

I: You said about it being 'realistic'. Tell me a bit more about that?

B: Um, well, the graphics are really good and like in *Colin McCrae*, it's come out really well and the games like, it's quite a new game that, and the vibrations, at the same time as you hit something, it's not just all the way along, and like all the trees, they've gone down to everything in detail, like other drivers, the trees, even the ground's like quite good. And it's really good because you can go into a rally school and it goes "Right, you're

going to do this” and he tells you, Colin McCrae himself, he tells you what to do, and it’s very good.

(Boy, S1, Corby)

Video games provide an interesting example in that, as in this case, the children were judging the reality of a situation they had not experienced. Most children of eleven or twelve have barely sat in the driving seat of a car never mind taken part in rally competition. Despite this the children were able and eager to evaluate the provision of reality, even if this meant fantasising about what reality might be like.

In sum, as in Appleyard’s (1991) analysis the consistent use of realism, and attention to media conventions and special effects, as criteria of good media content represented an important distancing tool. The desire to employ this distancing tool can be seen to provide the children with power over the text as they avidly take on the role of thoughtful onlooker. Further, it implies the advanced nature of the children in the study who, like Appleyard’s adolescent readers, are seen to make judgements about the reality of media content in relation to their own experiences.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has found that in a world where children face feelings of powerlessness, ‘autonomy’ emerged as an existential concern. Dimensions of this concern for autonomy were found to comprise mastering, controlling and criticising and these seemed to be closely related to Erikson’s (1987) psychosocial strength of ‘competence’. Firstly, in terms of mastering, the children presented themselves as actively engaged in building physical skills and displaying their “superior intellect” including facts, figures and esoteric information. Further many, particularly the boys, were concerned with demonstrating social competence through ‘winning’ and partaking in various forms of competitive play. Finally the children displayed a concern for mastering possessions. Important items, such as sports equipment, bedroom media, and special collections, emerged as extensions of the self and reflected the individual’s power and competence.

Secondly, the dimension of 'controlling' was seen in the children's desire for independence and the attempts to distance themselves from childhood. They were attracted to objects and experiences associated with independent lifestyles, and attempted to express their autonomy and detachment from adult figures, particularly parents. They were keen to demonstrate their emotional maturity, even to face their fears through watching horror films. In addition the children highlighted their responsible roles, for example as pet owners or employees, and demonstrated their 'maturity' through actively moulding their appearance. Finally, control was indicated through the importance of money in their lives. Money emerged as a tool of power and independence being actively accumulated and used to gain access to desired items.

Thirdly, the children emerged as detached 'onlookers' who were keen to adopt the role of the 'thinker' through criticising and analysing the media. They were concerned with the notion of 'reality' and keen to judge media material on this basis. Evaluation of 'reality' emerged as an important distancing tool but distancing was also apparent in the children's discussion of media styles, conventions, production techniques and visual effects,

These findings suggested that children were actively engaged with the world around them and concerned to demonstrate their autonomy and self governance in their daily existence through their activities and through interactions with people, possessions and the media.

CHAPTER EIGHT

AUTONOMY AND ADVERTISING EXPERIENCES

1. Introduction

The children's existential concern with autonomy was outlined in the last chapter and was found to be closely attuned with Erikson's (1987) central conflict between industry and inferiority. This chapter considers children's advertising experiences in the light of the drive for autonomy. While children may face feelings of powerlessness in many areas of their lives (Mathews, 1995), advertising appears as an area in which children can display authority. Ritson and Elliott (1999) have drawn attention to the ubiquity and shared "experiential basis" of advertising. This very pervasiveness seems crucial to its appropriation by the children as a valuable cultural resource. The discussion of children's advertising experiences is structured around the three dimensions of autonomy highlighted in chapter seven: Mastering, Controlling, and Criticising. The chapter will provide a comprehensive exploration of their roles as Masters, Controllers and Critical Onlookers.

2. Masters

Erikson's (1987) focus on the importance of 'competence' in the school years was found to be relevant to the children in their broader life worlds. Lull (1990) has suggested that the mass media may provide people with a means of displaying their competence. This section aims to demonstrate that the related concern for mastery was apparent in children's advertising experiences.

The primary skills that the children demonstrated related to their mastery of advertising text and imagery. These skills emerged through the children's discussion of advertising generally and through the specific creative exercise in which they were asked to create an ad. The competencies displayed reflect those derived from the advertising literacy perspective (Meadows, 1983; O'Donohoe and Tynan, 1998; Ritson and Elliott, 1995, Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998) however it is the underlying concern for displaying autonomy which can be seen to frame the children's experiences. Their advertising mastery will be described in terms of the roles they undertook as Meaning Masters, Style Masters and Performance Masters.

2.1 Meaning masters: "it'll be Smoky Beckham next...."

The focus groups did not directly require the children to interpret individual advertisements in the manner used by Mick and Buhl (1992). However, though the process of designing their own executions, the children displayed their skills in interpreting and actively manipulating the imagery and cues used within ads. In this way they readily displayed their mastery of the text.

Ritson and Elliott (1999) have noted the drive for meaning in sixth formers' interactions with advertising. They referred to the "power" derived from meaningful interpretations. The children in the current study, though much younger, often considered the derivation of meaning as an intellectual challenge involving the demonstration of valuable skills. This evidence of ad mastery in terms of the children's enthusiastic and often creative interpretations led to the label of 'Meaning Masters'.

Although children might be expected to display available interpretive skills in an exercise situation, their approach to the creative task of making an ad for an imaginary soft drink was illuminating. Their discussion of the imaginary brand name *Spike* highlighted not only their ability but also their interest in understanding and articulating different levels of meaning. The use of an amalgamation of the brand names, *Sprite* and *Coke*, was described in the methodology chapter. However, the

children's reaction to the task indicated an immediate need to question the validity of the name. Some of their 'readings' suggested an advanced consideration and evaluation of interpretive issues. A number believed that the name was inappropriate for a soft drink as it implied that the product contained alcohol. One group of girls thought that this underlying meaning could be used to good effect to encourage purchases:

K: That's a bit weird cos like you spike people's drinks.... But Spike is just a super name to call it because people might think that it's like a spiked drink or something.

(Girl, P7, private)

Many used their understanding of the word 'spike' to propose a variety of related imagery. Their storylines included visual images which highlighted their symbolic creativity including "metal spikes" coming out of cans and beds, characters with "spiky hair", and even "a hedgehog with lots of fruit stuck to its spikes". Yet others emphasised their understanding of the advertising genre by making intertextual links with well-known programmes and celebrities to suggest a suitable endorser. In this category the dog named Spike in the popular *Rugrats* cartoon was suggested as an endorser in several of the interviews.

Further demonstrating their competency in the use of intertextual links some of the children drew on other ads they had seen and even other media in their ad creations. One group of S1 boys from Wetheral focused on the selection of a meaningful soundtrack. Their employment of a jingle transposed from the Spice Girls pop song 'Spice up your life' highlighted their mastery and understanding of the intertextual links used in the creation of ads. However, perhaps more importantly the tongue-in-cheek reinterpretation of a song they evidently considered immature and "for girls" suggested the need to appear as sophisticated consumers who were able to make fun of the advertising genre:

SPIKE up your life... Every boy, every girl... Ooooooooooooooh!
(laughter)

(Boys, S1, Wetheral)

In this way the creative exercise could be seen as an outlet for the children in demonstrating their mastery of advertising. They were able to use a variety of images to portray the imaginary drink Spike. Further their approach to the task emphasised the desire to appear as 'wise' and knowledgeable consumers (Buckingham, 1993). However, their meaning mastery was also apparent in their wider discussion of advertising through their understanding that ads contained a message, their enjoyment of the search for meaning, their interest in "getting" the ad, and their ability in making intertextual links with other texts. These forms of meaning mastery will be discussed in turn.

Firstly, the children understood that advertisements contained what they referred to as a "message", "meaning" or "point". Buckingham (1993) found that the children in his study had an understanding of the persuasive and commercial functions of advertising. Similarly informants in the current study were keen to convey this knowledge. They employed unprompted phrases such as "it means", "which is meant to represent", and "they're trying to say" in their explanations and descriptions of the language and imagery of liked and disliked ads.

Secondly, and perhaps more expressive of the active concern to display mastery, many of the children seemed dedicated to displaying their interpretive skills, often finding genuine enjoyment in the search for meaning. Lull (1990) has proposed that the mass media provides a means of demonstrating competence. Drawing on this notion O'Donohoe (1994b) distinguished the use of advertising by the young adults in her study for purposes of ego-enhancement. The pre-adolescent children in the present study ably highlighted this perspective. As one boy noted:

I like ads with meaning to it...
(Boys, P7, Corby)

Many of the informants enjoyed the intellectual challenge of working out advertising meanings. One S1 girl from private school noted her appreciation of ads which

“turned the meaning of the thing”. In a similar vein another girl discussed a magazine ad for Hewlett Packard printers which she had torn out of a magazine. In an unprompted display of mastery she raised the portrayal of an old pair of trainers in the air and tested the interpretive skills of her friends:

K: Don't look at the bottom if you already have. (She folds the bottom back so we can't see the product name). Right what do you think that's an advert for?

S: Shoes!

C: No air freshener!

S: Air freshener, cos it says....

C: Smelly shoes!

K: Yeah the advert's for Hewlett Packard. It's clever because I thought, I saw this advert and thought it was really clever. Because when I first saw it I thought it was for an air freshener. But it's actually for like the printer, cos it says "Only reality looks more real" I thought it was like well done, clever basically because you think it's an advert for air freshener and then it's actually an advert for Hewlett Packard.

(Girls, P7, private)

Kirsty seemed to view advertising as a puzzle or game to be worked out by the viewer, the resolution of which might be used to impress friends (Mathews, 1995). In asking her friends to interpret the ad she highlights the challenges presented by the advertising genre and seems intent on positioning herself as competent and skillful.

This type of social interaction concerning an ad, or what Ritson and Elliott (1995) would refer to as a literacy event, underlines the importance of mastering ads to the children in the study. This concern with jointly working out the ad puzzle sometimes took a more applied approach. Thus, a group of S1 boys from private school discussed a recent campaign for the Army. The ads presented the viewer with a typical problem that an army soldier might face such as 'how to cross a ravine' and 'where to walk when the tank in front of you has hit a mine'. These executions generated much engaged deliberation and argument over the correct approach to take.

Thirdly, the drive to demonstrate meaning mastery was further underlined through the children's broader interest in "getting" an ad. Some of the children boasted that they had managed to "get" difficult ads the "first time", or perhaps on the second viewing as the following informant revealed on his reading of a Snickers ad:

I think I got it second time actually because the first time I wasn't really looking. The second time was good.

(Boys, S1, Corby)

On other occasions informants admitted:

I haven't actually got that, I don't understand it. (Weak voice).

(Girls, P7, Corby)

Such confessions were made unwillingly and meekly, often followed by an embarrassed laugh, suggesting the satisfaction involved in possessing interpretive power and feelings of inadequacy related to meaning failure. That the children in these examples were driven to demonstrate interpretive power (Ritson and Elliott, 1999) and even felt inadequate when they perceived themselves as lacking the requisite skills is in line with O'Donohoe's (1994b) finding that informants generally liked to know the identity of the advertiser as well as what was going on in ads. Such knowledge was seen as bound up with the young adults' sense of self-worth, a notion that seems to be reflected in the dejected tones of some of the less competent children in this study.

The admittance of understanding failure quoted above was made in reference to a Levi's Jeans ad in which a man and "a wee yellow puppet", otherwise known as *Flat Eric*, are pulled over by the police. This particular ad was much deliberated upon throughout the group interviews. A number of the children were puzzled, even perplexed by the imagery and cues it presented. However, they were keen, and generally able, to attempt a reading of the ad and explain the visual cues provided. In some cases mastery was manifested through the ability to possess a meaningful interpretation with peers (Ritson and Elliott, 1999) and indeed to impress them

(Mathews, 1995). Thus, in a number of cases children offered interpretive clarification to their less adept peers:

B: That's quite a smart ad... they change the girl's photo around to a posh photo of his mam or something. So the policeman doesn't know that he's stolen it, so he looks like a nerd. And cos the Levi's, the jeans that they've stolen, they've put them neatly with the tops that they've stolen, so it looks like he's a nerd and not actually stolen them.

A: Oh, he stole them, that's what it's about! (Laughs sheepishly).

(Boys, S1, Corby)

Finally, in other instances the children demonstrated their ability in making meaning links with other texts. Fiske (1989) has drawn attention to the intertextuality of popular culture with its characteristic 'leaky boundaries' between texts. The children in the study were also keen to recognise these textual connections in advertising. They described how Gary Lineker brought his image of football's "Mr Good Guy" to the Walkers crisps ads, and Vinnie Jones utilised his persona of football's tough "hardman", to add meaning to the same campaign. In a number of instances they were keen to demonstrate their broader cultural competency by acknowledging the source of ideas used in ads. Thus, following her retelling of a Maltesers ad, one informant spontaneously pointed out a reference to the *Godfather*, along with television listing details:

S: She's got two Maltesers left, right. And then she puts them in her mouth and goes "CARLOOO CARLOOO" (imitates deep growling voice) or something.

C: "Respect the Family...". Which is also representing the *Godfather Trilogy*, which is on in three consecutive weeks!

(Girls, P7, private)

Similarly, a girl in the same group was eager to articulate her knowledge of actor Dennis Hopper's role in the 60s film, *Easy Rider*, in order to derive meaning from his past and present role in a Ford Cougar ad:

K: It was something like he was in films about motorbikes, he was always driving a motorbike. And then you see him on the motorbike, and he's supposed to be amazing on the motorbike. And then you see him on the motorbike and in the car going down the road. But it's like one of these canyon type things and there's a steep road around the corner. And the motorbike's on the inside but the car overtakes it an' stuff. So it's just goin' ta prove that two of the same people driving the same thing, one's supposed to be really good at it and the car beats it. So the car must be AMAZING!

(Girls, P7, private)

2.2 Style Masters

Aside from their demonstrations of interpretive power, the children's discussions of ads highlighted other areas of competence. The younger women in Gordon's (1982) study emerged as sophisticated consumers who were able to identify a variety of styles and categories of advertising. For the children in the current study their strivings for mastery of the various styles and approaches used in the advertising genre, led to them being attributed the title of Style Masters.

2.2.1 Style creation

Perhaps the most apparent means by which they attempted to show their mastery of ad styles was through their generation of ideas for advertising the imaginary soft drink '*Spike*'. Indeed soft drink advertising was regarded as a particularly recognisable, and easily mastered form of advertising. As one S1 girl from private school commented on the creative task: "with a drink advert I just sort of knew what to start with and worked it out". Certainly their creative attempts indicated a depth of knowledge and ability to source inventive approaches concerning "what to start with". In particular they discussed and developed two central thematic approaches based on obsession and transformation.

Firstly, the children discussed "obsession" based approaches. This was seen as a humorous approach that was used to convey product desirability. In their executions

the product was portrayed as so crucial to existence that the lead character was willing to go to any lengths to obtain it, however dangerous or humiliating. Thus, one group of boys created an ad “just for girls” which centred around the premise of a boy willing to go to any lengths, even pretending to be a member of the opposite sex, to get a drink of *Spike*:

I: How would you make an ad for say a soft drink but it was just for girls?

A: A little boy wearing a skirt an’ he’s going “hey, I’m a girl” (squeaky voice) An’ an’...

D:An’ the girls are drinking it, an’ he really wants it, an’ he starts drinkin’ it. An’ the girls go “noooo that’s our drink” (uses croaky voice) An’ “PPPOOOWKKK”, they take him out.

I: (Laughs) So the girls aren’t having any of it?

D: Cos the boy’s dressing up cos he likes the drink so much and he wants it, an’ he even dresses up as a GIRL.

E: Yeah, with LIPSTICK on, smothered all over his face!

(P7 boys, Corby)

Secondly, in keeping with Puto and Wells’s (1984) distinction between informational and transformational ads, the children displayed an understanding that certain products could be presented as having special powers or effects on the consumer. In this way ads were seen to involve a variety of transformations from the ordinary and usual to the special, spiritual or even fantastical. Transformation was envisaged in terms of an alteration of mood, physical ability or appearance. It was also described in terms of the move from reality to fantasy, and from social isolation to social acceptance. These varied approaches in the children’s creative executions will be briefly outlined.

Firstly, the children linked soft drink advertising with a transformation of mood, usually from a colourless world filled with apathy and boredom, to one suffused with a vibrant party atmosphere. For example:

J: You could make it like it's on a tropical desert or something and like all these...

A: Wallace and Gromit....

J: Yeah Wallace and Gromit on a desert island drinking it. Being bored yeah and like then maybe take a drink of it, like a party...

L: ... It's a party.

J: Suddenly the party's there and they're having the best time of their life.

(P7 girls, Corby)

Secondly, soft drink ads were regularly created in terms of the theme of transforming an individual physically and mentally. Many of the children's own ads endowed the drink with the power to enhance the individual physically and provide instant prowess and skill.

J: Right you know how sorta the Olympics or something, and then you're throwing a javelin and you can't do it and it starts to go all messy. And ya take a drink of Spike and then you can do it.

A: And like a spike in the ground.

J: And so it makes you want to think "this'll give me energy".

L: Yeah so like I'm gonna keep drinking it.

(P7 girls, Corby)

This theme was particularly popular and seems especially pertinent in its focus not only on the children's mastery of ad styles but also on the allure of the mastery theme in ad content. Through its regular appearance it seems likely that the desire for self-transformation in terms of prowess and skill has already been recognised by advertising agencies. The ability of advertising to reflect culture has been addressed within advertising research (Pollay, 1986). Mathews' (1995) discussion of mastery as an enduring theme amongst children in J Walter Thompson's Kid Panel suggests that agencies are already attempting to 'mirror' this dimension of child culture in the ads they create.

In a similar vein to the transformation theme above, the children also created soft drink ads portraying another type of physical transformation. Thus, some of the

children's creative tasks highlighted the role of the product in altering appearance including facial and body features. In essence the product was given anthropomorphic powers which were described as contagious or "catching", in the sense that the effect passed from one person to another:

S: No what it does, there's this one for Lucozade and people drink it and then it's orange Lucozade and they just go orange and "shhhhh" (makes noise). And then they hand the drink to someone else and they just go "shhhhh".

I: And they go orange?

S: Yeah and what you could do is like for the drink Spike you could err someone's going into the shop and he gets some Spike and he pays for it. And then he goes out and goes "sluuuurp" and then he just goes "tshoooo" and his hair goes all spiked and he just goes all spiky. And then he gives it to someone else and then it just eventually wears down on him. And then they drink it and their hair goes all spiky and they go "tshooooo".

(P7 boys, Corby)

Thirdly, the children competently highlighted another possible creative approach in which the leading character moved from the reality of every day life to a fantasy environment, and finally back to reality again. The children discussed this approach in terms of a move from the current context of everyday life to a tropical fantasy land:

B: Well you could have someone walking along a dull street, just missed the bus (all chuckle). They're walking along and they see this sign in the shop and they go "haaaa". And they've got extra money cos they missed the bus and they had to walk home, and they've got 50p, and it's 50p so they walk in, buy some and then they drink it....

P: ... And it spiked them up.

B: They SPIKE up and they go to the TROPICAL place (says in silly voice and chuckles). And he goes, he takes a little bit and then he's like at a party. And then some woman taps him and he comes back to reality, this woman taps him and she goes "are you alright dear". And he gives her it so she tries it (all laugh).

(S1 boys, Corby)

Finally the children described the theme of transformation from social isolation to social acceptance. In this way the product was portrayed as able to move the individual from outcast to group member:

E: Well you might have somebody that was covered in spikes and they went into a bar and when they drank the Spike all their spikes disappeared and they turned into a normal person. Like cos when they first went in they might have been sort of stared at but after drinking this Spike they might sort of be just sort of normal playing snooker or something with all his mates in the bar.

(Girls, S1, private)

The above examples emphasise the children's competence in applying approaches they had seen in other ads to the creative task of making up an ad. However, the reader may be concerned that the creative exercise merely acted as a forced mechanism for demonstrating mastery. Surely the provision of a test, in the form of a creative task, only demonstrates that children 'can' be masterful and skilful, not that they 'want' or even 'need' to be so? However, the vibrancy and enjoyment which characterised so many of the children's responses, alongside the mocking, joking and cynical tones applied, situated the task as not so much a test of skills but closer to what Ritson and Elliott (1995) would term as a "literacy event". The children seemed concerned to prove their mastery to themselves and their peers in a non-educational context.

Further their mastery extended to a consideration of other styles and approaches, the most discussed of which related to the use of music, humour and different national styles.

2.2.3 Musical styles

Musical creativity was evident in the children's practical executions. It has already been noted that the S1 boys from Wetheral were brave enough to provide a revamped rendition of the chart hit, "Spice up your life". In considering an appropriate idea for

advertising 'Spike', a number of the children stressed the necessity of providing a "catchy" tune. They drew on ideas from existing soft drink ads and the music and jingles utilised. Thus, there was discussion of a recent Sprite ad and the effect of its "catchy" tune on playground interactions:

K: But you could have it, oh like the funny one for Sprite... It's very catchy. And then the next day, once you've seen it for the first time, everyone's going "Jukey, Jukey.... It's a party in a can...." (sings).

(Girls, P7, Wetheral)

Outwith the creative exercise, the "music", "soundtrack", "song", "theme tune" or "jingle" was often the most important element of the ads the children described. Thus, music was integrated into their ad descriptions and was commented on in many instances. Music was categorised as an aspect which alternatively "wraps up an ad", "attracts your attention", "catches in your head", "something that you remember" and "helps you concentrate on what's actually trying to be sold".

Different types of music were described but predominantly the references were to "chart", "pop", and "disco" music. Apart from the term "old" in relation to music, the terms "70s" or music "my mum likes" were used to refer to various songs from a past era. In addition one group used the word "posh" to describe older classical music.

Of primary interest to the children were the advertisements using current "chart" or "pop" music. Reflecting young adults' competence and familiarity with intertextual references between advertising and other cultural forms (O'Donohoe, 1997) the children demonstrated similar skills in relation to the music in ads. Many of the ads featuring pop music were directly referred to by the name of the musician or group. For example, one popular car ad was labelled "the Lenny Kravitz one". The children were aware that advertising music was often released in the charts and discussed how current bands and solo stars including the Spice Girls, Steps, The Cardigans, and Mr Oizo were involved in advertising executions. Such connections between advertising and the charts were made for a variety of product categories including cars, breakfast

cereals, soft drinks, and clothing. Thus, one of the private school girls boasted “I’ve got that one on single” during a discussion of the Peugeot 206 commercial. Similarly one of the boys admitted that if they discussed an ad at school and the name of the theme tune had slipped his mind then he was likely to rush home and rummage through his music collection:

Like if ya can’t remember a song that really nips me. I go home
and search through all my CDs.

(Boys, S1, Corby)

Also recognised were advertisements using music adapted from well known older tracks or current chart songs. As one male informant noted, it’s “Steps’ song ‘Tragedy’, it’s that tune but it’s like a song about Weetabix”. The combination of familiarity with the music and the humour of the adapted lyrics meant these soundtracks were both popular and remembered in detail. Thus, a number of the groups took part in enthusiastic renditions of “Oooooooh Ahhhhhhh it’s Ambrosia...”, adapted from the Pet Shop Boys song ‘Go West’. Similarly a group of P7 boys keenly sang the theme song for another Weetabix ad, with lyrics adapted from the Gloria Gaynor 1970s pop classic, “I will survive”.

Another form of music categorised by the children was “jingles”, more often known as “wee songs” or “catchy tunes”. These were sung with great gusto throughout the focus groups with those pigeon-holed as having “cheesy”, “annoying” or “embarrassing” tunes gaining as much, if not more airing, than those with “nice songs”. Particular favourites included “I feel like Chicken Tonight...” for a pre-prepared cook-in sauce, and “Chooo choooo Thomas...” for a Toasted Poppets ad starring Thomas the Tank Engine.

Music taken from other media was also highlighted. For example a group of boys spoke about how an ad for a pudding had utilised the theme tune from an old children’s cartoon called *Rhubarb and Custard*:

S: They've got like banana flavour and chocolate flavour with custard. And you know the cartoon, *Custard* and the other doggy one?

A: *Rhubarb and Custard*.

S: "De na na naaaa...de na na naaaa" (copies theme music) and there's always somebody standing there and then they get a big slab like banana or chocolate on their face, and they go "ummmm chocolate!"

(Boys, P7, private)

Finally, there was some disregard for brands which consistently employed the same theme music over a prolonged time period and across a variety of advertisements:

S: "Always Coca-Cola" (imitates). Same tune every time....

(Boys, P7, private)

In this way musical styles emerged as an important means of establishing and expressing mastery over the advertising genre. Similar, though perhaps less detailed, abilities were observed in the children's recognition and appreciation of humorous styles.

2.2.2 Humorous styles

Buckingham (1993) refers to the intense pleasure derived from advertising by many children. Perhaps the most obvious source of this pleasure in the text was through their appreciation of its various styles of humour. While the application of humour, particularly visual or slapstick, was apparent in almost all their creative executions, their interest in humorous styles of advertising was evident before the group discussions took place. The children's Ad Lists, which were used as the basis for the group discussion, highlighted the centrality of humour in their perception of advertising. Where reasons were given for liking or remembering an ad the most common was "because it's funny". Favourite ads were labelled "funny", "hilarious", "very amusing" and "makes me laugh".

Within the groups the humour of advertising in general was presented as the main reason for liking ads. Different styles of humour were attributed to different forms of ads. Thus there was some indication that the children understood the nuance between humorous styles. For example some 'funny' ads were categorised as "stupid". Such ads held considerable appeal to the boys. As one of the P7 boys from private school exclaimed "I like stupid ones....Stupid ones that make no sense!". The girls appeared more discriminating, indeed one group explained the pervasiveness of "stupid" ads by noting:

...that's what people like, people who watch things like that, because people are stupid these days.

(Girls, S1, Corby)

'Funny' ads were also categorised as "embarrassing", "bizarre", and "silly". The boys were especially adept at highlighting and describing what they referred to as "rude ones". As the P7 boys from Corby noted:

G: We like ones that are rude...

C: Well not exactly that rude.... There was this one on telly for Batchelors. And it's these workers and they stand on the stair and they drop their little pasta thing from his cup. And the worker at the bottom's bending over and like his trousers are like are half down. And you can just see the little line and he drops it down and it goes down his bum! (All laugh madly). And then he goes "Batchelors Cup a Soup. Fills a hole" (Much laughter).....

In discussions relating to efficacy, humorous executions were delineated as particularly valuable forms of advertising. One group of girls believed that funny ads were most effective "because you can remember them". Further they regarded them as particularly appropriate for boys because "boys usually like funny adverts that they can laugh at".

Thus, in their discussion of 'funny' ads the children emphasised their mastery in understanding the distinction between advertising styles. This competence was further indicated in their consideration of national styles.

2.2.4 National styles

In their creation of ads for the soft drink ‘Spike’, the children made direct references to the use of a typically ‘American’ style. In a number of cases they suggested American locations, used Americanised characters, and employed American accents.

In their advertising discourse generally they spoke in more detail about the setting and nationality of ads. Such topics often emerged due to recent trips abroad. In one case a girl from private school received her Ad List the day she returned from a holiday to the United States. As a result some of her remembered ads, including one for the chocolate biscuit Kit Kat, and one for the clothing store Old Navy, were ones she had seen on American television. These were eagerly described, imitated, and compared with British offerings. The same group also considered that foreign ads might concentrate more heavily than British advertising on specific products. Thus, Kirsty suggested that in America:

K: ...you get lots and lots of like food, chocolate, like the Kit Kat one... you have lots of things to do with eating like knives and forks, cutlery, plates, a table for your meal. It’s always to do with food cos they’re like OBSESSED.

(Girls, P7, private)

In another case a group of S1 girls from private school discussed their love of French ads. One informant distinguished them from British ads by exclaiming “French ads are class”.

Although some of the children from wealthier homes seemed to have access to more exotic foreign locations and tended to speak more enthusiastically and knowledgeably about ad executions from overseas, there was still evidence that some of the children from less advantaged homes had the opportunity to travel. They too had recognised, if not always fully understood, different marketing approaches abroad. Thus, Frances and Elaine, two P7 girls from Wetheral noted that the shops abroad had only sold soft drinks labelled “light” rather than “diet”. This, they

presumed must be because foreigners did not understand the meaning of the word “diet”.

Many of the children highlighted Scottish ads in discussions of their preferred executions. The title ‘Scottish’ was applied to ads for products perceived to originate in Scotland, such as Famous Grouse Whisky, Tennent’s lager and Irn Bru, or those utilising Scottish accents or settings, such as the anti-smoking ad by the Health Education Board for Scotland with its much copied vernacular: “This tastes BOGGIN”.

While some of the children demonstrated advanced understanding and even affinity for certain styles, the children as a whole readily assumed the role of advertising Style Masters. They revealed their familiarity with stylistic matters relating to music, humour and nationality in their general discourse and their creativity in this regard was underlined by their attempts to design their own ad. From these abilities regarding ad styles we now turn to the children’s role as Performance Masters.

2.3 Performance masters

While the picture presented thus far of the children emphasises their intellectual engagement with advertising, a further skill, that of performing the ad, suggests a more playful relationship with the genre. It was noted in the previous chapter that various developmental theorists including Piaget, Vygotsky and Freud have linked the benefits of play with the achievement of competence (Smith, Cowie and Blades, 1998). This same drive for competence was reflected in the children’s advertising experiences. Buckingham (1993) drew attention to the pleasure children gained from ‘acting out’ ads, singing along to music, and repeating key catchphrases. Similarly it was seen in the last chapter how the children enjoyed copying the voices and accents of characters in the mass media generally. Consistent with Mathews (1995) notion of ads being used to impress friends, these performances extended beyond pleasure, and were seen as a distinctive skill which was admired by others.

Advertising's provision of rich material for such playful interaction and aping was immediately evident during the focus groups through the profusion of amplified accents, vivid voices and manic movements which were readily undertaken. A central reason for displaying such imitation skills seemed to be to impress and amuse their peers with their competent renditions. Cries of "This tastes BOGGIN", "Yooooou Beauty!", "Lights ooot!", "Let's see that again" suffused their advertising discussions, generally appearing without any encouragement or prompting. While endless examples were provided perhaps one of the most widespread and popular performances was that of the frogs in the ad for Budweiser beer. This was one of the few ads which was regularly imitated as a complete artistic work by boys and girls of both ages. Though it is hard to recreate the vivacity and finely honed vocalisations of a group of eleven year olds imitating American frogs, a typical rendition went along the following lines:

D: But what about the other one, the Budweiser one? "Bud WEIIIIIS EEEEEER" (imitates in low, deep croaky voice).

A: Yeah, there's a Budweiser right. And all the frogs right they're all sitting on little lily pads. And they're going "BUD WEEEEEEIS...". They're trying to say Budweiser, and he goes "BUD WEIS". (All laughing while he describes and imitates it). And then they start going "BUD WEEEEEEIS BUD". And then they go "BUD WEIS BUD WEIS EEER". And by the end another frog goes. "Eeeeeerrr" and they go "uuuuuur". "BUD WEEEEEEIS EEEEEER!"

D: And there's another one when the frog's looking for a girlfriend and he goes "BUD" (imitates low croaky voice). And he goes hopping along the lily pad. And then he hears "WEEEEIIIS" (imitates high female voice). And then he jumps along because he's following the voice. And then he goes "BUD" and the girl goes "WEEEEIS". And then he finds the girl and he goes "BUD" and she goes "WEIIIS" and he goes "EEEEEEEEER!" (They laugh).

(Boys, P7, Corby)

That such joyful outbursts were regarded not only as a means of recovering pleasure (Buckingham, 1993) but as a skill which could be assessed and appreciated by the peer group was underlined by the group of S1 girls from Corby in the following conversation:

I: Do any of the guys at school talk about those beer and lager ads?

A: Yeah usually. The Budweiser ad.

G: Yeah. Lenny is really good at Budweiser.

A: He could have a go at Mr Bean... He sounds more like Mr Bean than Budweiser!

(Girls, S1, Corby)

Unfortunately Lenny's skills do not appear to have impressed all the girls. Nevertheless the notion of "being good at" an ad seems to suggest the importance of advertising as rich material for the aspiring and real 'masters' who form this age group.

Aside from performance skills other playful activities were mentioned. Some of the children spoke about games that they played with ads including guessing the brand being advertised, and estimating when the ads were going to end and the television programme would restart. However, little detail was provided on these activities perhaps because they revolved around the actual process of viewing ads rather than the later social interactions regarding them. More important to them seemed to be the task of skillfully retelling ads. Some stress was placed on the ability to correctly remember plot lines, characters, plus visual and verbal elements, often in minute detail. The discussions were therefore characterised by regular interruptions and corrections made by other members of the group. The P7 girls from private school argued at length over whether or not the boy in the HEBS anti-drug ad was carrying a football, and whether he was walking with his girlfriend or a group of friends. Some of the children showed signs of irritation due to the corrections, and additions made to their renditions:

A: Fairy Liquid I like them ones. She's sitting in the living room, she's sitting there and its "Today you'll need a washing up bottle, some paper, and some sticky backed... (cut off).

H: "Some sticky backed plastic"

G: "A toilet roll tube and a yoghurt pot".

A: And she goes to turn around and "it's, oh it's still full". And then her mum comes through, it's like five day later (cut off)

G: Two weeks.

A: Ooooh will you shooosh! So many days or weeks later.....

(Girls, S1, Corby)

Jingles and theme songs were recalled with considerable clarity by many of the children. However, while all the group members often joined in with these renditions it was unclear whether an active attempt had been made to remember them, or whether the ubiquity of ads in general and their broader love of music, were more relevant factors. Nevertheless there was very obvious enjoyment to be had by sharing these memory skills:

D: I like the Weetabix one.... when he's a vet....

A: It's a little song and he goes "I've got a safari park to do, an alligator with the flu"

D: "But I'll survive, as long as I have Weetabix"

E: "I might just stay alive" (all sing loudly in unison)

(Boys, P7, Corby)

The active attempt to learn complex ads was however noted in some cases. For example the S1 private school boys discussed an ad for Snickers in which "the footballer's looking through the dictionary asking for things... 'aardvarks' and 'bunsen burners'...". One boy admitted that he had learnt all the words, a fact supported by his friend who shouted "you know it all, we always say it at school". Given his apparent familiarity with the text, his unwillingness to provide a full rendition was probably due to the presence of the moderator. As he was not a particularly shy boy, his reticence suggested an awareness that this dimension of ad mastery was for the appreciation of peers, and not for adults.

3. Controllers

In the last chapter children were keen to exert control over both themselves and their environment. They enthusiastically demonstrated their independence from adults, their emotional maturity, their responsibilities, their control over their appearance, and their empowerment through money and saving. This section discusses how their

advertising experiences reflected similar proclivities and concerns with autonomy and control through the emergence of three roles: empowered viewers, ad avoiders, and independent consumers.

3.1 Empowered viewers

The children's selection of favourite storylines highlighted the importance of control in their advertising experiences. As all the ads were driven by the children's own suggestions their discussion of ads could be seen to reflect their own interests and motivations. In this light many of the ads were based on characters and subjects that seemed to reflect their desire for control. Ads showing children in positions of power were much appreciated. One group of P7 boys from Corby eagerly discussed an ad showing a boy obsessed with his prowess on a Playstation game. The secondary girls from private school admitted to being "addicted" to an ad depicting a child bravely fending off a shark. Particular relish was derived from ads representing children pulling one over on adults, as in the following discussion of teacher miniaturisation:

E: I think the Dairy Lee Lunchable one's quite funny...When the wee kid he makes the teacher smaller at the end. And he brings in an alligator to school and that.

D: Oh aye and he makes everyone go to sleep and that.

I: Tell me about that?

E: Like at the very end he shrinks the teacher down to a small little miniature thing!...

D: Yeah. Letting them make the teachers look like wimps!

E: They are, they are wimps!

A: They are!

(Boys, P7, Corby)

Apart from wimpish teachers, parents were also the focus of derision. Many of the children across the groups gleefully related a McDonald's ad in which a young girl asks her father "where do babies come from?". There was much satisfaction derived from the squirming image of the father who "hasnae got a clue!" and "doesnae want

to tell her the real thing” offering a diversionary trip to McDonalds, only to be told by his daughter “and then you can tell me all about it!”. Further the demonstration of independence and control in relationships was appreciated by many of the girls and boys. For example there was much hilarity amongst the P7 girls from Corby about a recent ad for the Fiat Punto where a women reaped revenge on her boyfriend for staring at other women.

Extending this last theme the active application of ads in social discourse sometimes served to highlight independence from the controlling forces of adult figures. In this way applied ad meanings were on occasion used to demonstrate relative competency. For example, Boris proudly divulged how, on sitting down for a quiet family meal at home, he had drawn on his knowledge of a Health Education Board for Scotland ad in which a cartoon character who tries a cigarette for the first time shouts in a broad Scottish accent “This tastes BOGGIN”. On trying the food his mother had prepared he also shouted out the same phrase. Boris’s mother took the outburst to be an open insult and responded with a physical rebuke:

I got a smack for that actually! (All laugh)
(Boy, S1, Corby)

What is interesting here is that the boy’s enjoyment in retelling the incident and his friends’ laughter seemed to derive from the fact that he not only managed to insult his mother but did so in a ‘clever’ way. In the eyes of his friends, if not his mother, he managed to demonstrate his cultural competency and ‘get one over’ on an adult.

3.2 Ad Avoiders

Many of the children, particularly in Wetheral, suggested not only that they were uninterested in advertising but also that they rarely saw advertising:

I dunnae really watch adverts
(Girls, P7, Wetheral)

If I watched the telly I would remember them all but....

(Girls, S1, Wetheral)

The fact that these girls indicated that they rarely watched TV or ads seemed doubtful in line with their subsequent lively discussion of advertising. However, it is revealing that many of the children went as far as to deny their exposure to advertising. In this respect such claims may echo the ‘myth of personal immunity’ in relation to advertising effects (Pollay, 1986). It seems that children may try to present a veneer of independence from advertising through an espoused disinterest in the genre alongside a denial of exposure.

At times the group discussions led the children to provide detailed descriptions, re-enactments, and evaluations of advertising. When asked about the “effect” or “influence” advertising appeared to have had on them, they gave replies which removed themselves from blame and highlighted instead the pervasiveness of advertising. Thus, when they entertained notions that advertising might have an effect on them they were clear in their reasoning. Advertising was remembered because “you see so many ads”, “they’re all on... they’re just hard to avoid”. At times counteraction was taken against the barrage of advertising. Some of the children attempted to physically control and limit advertising exposure by moving away from the television, turning the TV off, plugging their ears, or covering their eyes. Thus, the following group of girls discussed the deliberate actions taken against “annoying” ads such as those for furniture retailers:

E: If there’s anything on like that Landmark one with that annoying jingle I just turn the TV off. I mean problem solved!

L: I just walk out of the room cos most of the time other people are watching it so when an annoying one comes on....

E: I tend to put my fingers in my ears but it doesn’t work so I bury my head under the couch.

(Girls, S1, private)

Such extreme and seemingly futile physical actions suggested that the children recognised the possibility of vulnerability and were actively engaged in avoidance strategies.

3.3 Independent consumers

The children were unified in stressing that advertising did not influence them. As the following example illustrates they highlighted their control over purchase decisions, and saw advertising not as an influence on purchases but rather a diversionary amusement:

I: Do you think you are influenced by advertising?

All: No.

G: I don't, I know when I go to buy something I know what I want to buy and I don't change my mind.

C: Most adverts are a load of trash anyway.

S: I know they say "you can do this" with whatever it is but you don't, you can't....

G: I mean the Pot Noodles don't influence me to buy Pot Noodles.

C: It makes you laugh.

G: I know but.

(Boys, P7, Corby)

The children in this instance dismissed advertising as "a load of trash", but other descriptors such as "rubbish" or "boring" were also regularly applied. However, the admittance that advertising at times "makes you laugh" suggests that a distanced stance from the commercial brand message was often combined with a playful involvement with aesthetic content. This reflects the notion of the separate advertising and brand consumption attributed to young adults (Nava and Nava, 1990; O'Donohoe, 1997) and teenagers (Ritson and Elliott, 1999). Maintaining this distanced yet engaged position seemed to be a practical dimension of children's desire for power over the text. This form of ad consumption was further emphasised through the active deconstruction of ads into their lyrical, verbal and visual

components through some of the play and performance activities described earlier. As one group of girls commented on their playful recreation of a Toasted Poppets ad:

I: You know I just don't believe you when you say you never imitate or talk about ads in school. (They all laugh).

D: We didnae I swear (laughs loudly).

M: The only bit we do is the "Whoooo whoooo Thomas Chooooo Chooooo Thomas". We do that all the time!

(Girls, S1, Wetheral)

Being able to enjoy an ad, even recreate the dialogue, sing the theme tune or mimic the physical antics of the characters, and yet still maintain control over the ad suggests a powerful form of ad interaction. This sense of power gained additional impact through other denials of advertising effects.

Furthering Pollay's (1986) notion of the 'myth of personal immunity', the children characterised 'others' as being vulnerable to the effects of advertising. In Buckingham's (1993) work the cynicism displayed by children in talking about advertising seemed to be based on an "implicit contempt for the 'other people' who are presumed to take the ads seriously and to be influenced by them". There were strong indications in this study that advertising effects were also linked with "other" people. These people were sometimes derisively described as "maniacs", but as will be demonstrated they also comprised people in foreign countries, adults, people with money and younger children. Firstly, people in foreign countries, particularly Americans, were seen to be more susceptible to the powers of advertising, as the following girl described:

K: They're massive people! I mean you see people "boom boom" (imitates large person walking and others laugh). It's disgusting like ripple ripple. I mean they are this big (indicates). They are HUGE. And I think it's probably because they see something and they go, "oh that's nice" like adverts. I reckon that if they didn't have as much adverts for food, if they didn't have so many different kinds of them, then the people wouldn't be as big. I reckon. But I think it's a bit disgusting.

(Girls, P7, private)

The existence of this perception was most apparent amongst the private school children although this may simply reflect more numerous travel experiences.

Secondly, as described by Buckingham (1993), effects were linked to parents and adults. They were seen as more likely than themselves to succumb to advertising pleas, because they were “the people that have the money”. In this way Graham, a P7 boy from Corby reflected that “Dad just watches them and buys things” while his friend Gary was more concerned about his mum watching ads and then coming out of the supermarket with “ten trolley loads of stuff”. This concern about the vulnerability of adult figures ties in with Mathews’ (1995) enduring theme of children’s desire to be in control. Children seem to relish the notion of being more knowledgeable, informed and restrained than the grown-ups, a form of power reversal which in this case is applied to advertising effects.

Thirdly, despite the regular connection between adults and advertising effects, the majority of concerns about those influenced by advertising were directed towards individuals younger than themselves: “children, young children”, “kids” or “my wee brother”. Thus, Kirsty mocked her own behaviour in the past, when she was “little” and used to plead for toys seen in television advertising:

I: So do you reckon you do things cos you see them in ads?

K: I did when I was little. You know you see something on the television like a toy or something. An’ ya go “maammmy I want that for Christmas, I want that for Christmas” (imitates babyish voice). And like there’s a new Barbie or something when you’re little, an’ you’re like “I waaant that one, no THAT one”.

S: “That doll pleeeeeeease”.

(Girls, P7, private)

In a similar vein the following dialogue on ad effects stemmed from a discussion about the misleading content of Lego ads. In this instance advertising effects were associated with four or five year olds. The boys themselves claimed that being

“eleven years old” they are no longer “dumb” enough to fall for advertising, and unfortunate classmate “Martin” is derided for yielding to advertising influence.

I: Do you often feel that you're misled by ads?

D: Yeah but I don't believe them anymore.

I: So why don't you believe them now?

A: Because we're eleven years old!

D: Because we're not dumb now!

A: We used to be (laughs).

I: So who is influenced by ads then?

A: Martin Kelly!

D: This boy in our class.

A: “Kelly has a big fat belly.....

E: “...cos he eats a lot of jelly!” (Sings).

D: Right four year olds and five year olds they would really really think that that would do that, cos they're into Lego. And they would really think cos some of them aren't that bright so they'd think that it really does that.

(Boys, P7, Corby)

Derision of those immature enough to be influenced by advertising went even further. In some cases advertising effects seemed to have entered folklore, becoming stories of warning and subjects of amusement for those of an older age. Thus, a boy from Wetheral disdainfully retold a story he had heard about a child who had imitated the main character in an animated ad for Peperami:

I: Well tell me about some of the ones that you remember?

W:The advert where he takes his heed and he grates it up into a cheese grater (sounds delighted). He gets the cheese grater then grates himself and there's none left. Cos there was a wee laddie watching and he went through the kitchen and grated his heed. And he lost half his hair (laughs manically with Roger). He was sitting grating his face. And his ma came through and there was blood everywhere and she goes why were ya doing that? And he goes “cos the guy on the telly does!”.

(Boys, S1, Wetheral)

The hilarity surrounding someone stupid enough to take a course of action “cos the guy on the telly does” suggests that children’s relationship with advertising can be seen in terms of the drive for control. This derision of ‘other’ people suggested the empowered position of the individual in relation to advertising. The next section turns to a consideration of advertising from the perspective of the critical onlooker.

4. Critical onlookers

In chapter seven children were seen to distance themselves from media texts through adopting the role of ‘onlooker’ (Appleyard, 1991). Research has indicated that critical judgements about advertising serve to establish the speaker as a ‘wise consumer’ somehow distanced from advertising effects (Buckingham, 1993). Similar discourse and other distancing techniques were observed amongst the children involved in the present study. In particular they undertook three main roles with respect to the text, emerging as precocious planners, reality questioners and tactical technicians.

4.1 Precocious Planners

O’Donohoe (1994a) applied the term ‘surrogate strategists’ in reference to her young adult informants. Amongst child audiences Buckingham (1993) found that the children possessed a wide range of technical knowledge. They were able to speculate about and criticise the intentions of producers in relation to executional quality, techniques, strategic aims, representation of reality and target audiences. The children in the present study were also keen to integrate some strategic understanding and dialogue in their advertising discourse, a critical position which served to distance them from the text. In short they were able to display their autonomy and critical distance through assuming the role of ‘Precocious Planners’. In this respect they demonstrated their engagement with, and knowledge of, aspects concerning the aims of advertisers and the focus on target audiences.

4.1.2 Aims of advertisers

The children demonstrated their ability to understand the role played by those developing ads. Although an explanation of the aims of advertisers was not directly requested of the children, they discussed such issues through the process of making an advertisement, and through their wider discussion. The role of advertisers was seen as assumed knowledge. Indeed initial questions on the purpose of advertising during the pilot study were withdrawn in the main study due to the children's resentment at being asked such 'obvious' questions. Nevertheless their general discussion of advertising during the main study showed that the children regarded advertising as primarily focused on generating sales. Products were advertised "to get you to buy them", "to sell this new product", and advertising generally "encourages you to buy stuff". It is likely that their view of such knowledge as assumed may have reduced their discussion of advertisers' aims.

Meadows (1983) perceives advertising literate consumers as demanding that their attention be earned. Outwith the drive to generate sales the children also referred to the need for advertisers to create ads that were not "just sort of boring" but instead attracted consumers' attention:

It's got to be CATCHY so people like notice it.

(Girls, P7, private)

Often the aim was described, if not in precise terminology, but in the spirit of brand awareness. Thus, ads aimed to be "eye-catching" and "to get your attention". Many highly visual ads were described in this way. Thus, one group of boys held a lengthy discussion on car ads, including one for Honda which used mirrors and reflections "just for effect" in order to be distinguished from other ad campaigns:

G: It's just original, not everyone does like something like that, it's just different, so you watch it more.

(Boys, S1, private)

The children revealed that in their aim to attract attention, advertisers needed to create ads for children which were “funny”, “rude”, “colourful”, “original” or accompanied by a good “tune”. If an ad failed to incorporate the particular needs of the youth audience it was described as meaningless and unworthy of attention:

It just passes my mind. It goes through one ear and comes out of the other, just like most of the stuff.

(Boys, P7, Corby)

Connected to the above, another aim of advertising concerned brand recall. Effective ads were seen to “stay in your head” and “catch in your head” often through continual repetition and the use of “catchy tunes” and “rubbish jokes” which were difficult to forget. As one P7 girl from private school commented on memorable ads “I think you remember (them) because of the music”. Further some products were discussed as only using very discrete advertising. Thus, in their consideration of Jaguar cars one group of boys from Wetheral reflected that they had no need to drum up business through obvious television advertising techniques rather their elevated brand image meant they merely had to “remind” customers that they were still in the marketplace through more discrete newspaper and magazine ads.

4.1.3 Targeting

While the informants in Buckingham’s (1993) research were able to speculate about target audiences, the children in the current study seemed actively engaged in demonstrating their understanding that ads were targeted at different groups within the population. During the creative exercise they showed a relatively advanced appreciation of how advertising content could be manipulated to “appeal” to different sections of the population. They understood that ads aimed at them would need to include elements which they themselves appreciated. Thus, one girl declared that in order to make an advertisement for her own particular group of football-loving, male-obsessed friends:

D: You just put a football one on and then put a Celtic top on right. Or Rangers or Hearts top right. And you get the best BEST looking, tidiest looking guys right and you've got it just perfect.

(Girls, S1, Wetheral)

Targeting tactics went beyond the employment of football tops and the "tidiest looking guys". Thus, there was recognition that certain products were aimed at specific groups in society, such as washing powder ads for "mothers" and "housewives" or energy drinks "for people that play football", they were most sensitive to the means by which ads could be devised to appeal to people of different ages and gender. They realised that ad content could be developed to appeal to younger or older age groups. In this way they were highly cognisant of the targeting of less mature individuals. Ads made "to appeal to young children" were derisively stereotyped as television executions containing young child actors, bright colours or "wee cartoons".

Audiences of different ages were recognised as being targeted through the specific media they enjoyed. They saw themselves as being mainly targeted through the television but also mentioned other media as being applicable for narrower interest groups. In this way more risqué ads, such as one for "Free Sex" in a mountain biking magazine, were aimed at a more mature audience through the general readership of the vehicle:

A: It's usually older people, I think they're expecting older people to buy it.

(Boys, S1, Corby)

Likewise many of the girls noted that the magazines they bought, such as 'Shout', 'Smash Hits' and 'Just Seventeen', were appropriately, or inappropriately as some of them described in embarrassed tones, filled with ads for personal feminine hygiene products.

Reeves (1979, in Young, 1998) found that boys tended to choose same sex TV characters as primary role models, whereas girls chose mostly females but a

significant one third also selected males. In terms of gender targeting, the children in the current study demonstrated similar sensitivities. Ads directed to boys and girls were believed to showcase children of the corresponding gender. Boys were particularly sensitive to this issue, in that they disregarded television ads starring girls, and expected to see boys in the main roles of ads aimed at them:

D: Cos it's a boy, cos he's aiming it for boys, cos boys like racing cars and all that, or Scaletrix, the same for boys.

(Boys, P7, Corby)

In addition, many of the children at least appeared advanced in their appreciation of the opposite sex. While there may have been an element of bravado and boastfulness in their comments, they were keen to note how ads could use "hunky men" or other inducements to target the interest of the opposite sex:

A: I'd probably get like this 19 year old girl with a really really short skirt (all laugh) and like huge big long legs. That would probably get their attention or something like that.

(Girls, S1, private)

They were particularly aware of how ads were directed at their own age group, and understood that much advertising was youth directed. Thus, when discussing public information films they considered that many ads focused on children. They were aware that they were moving into a higher risk age group and so might be tempted to indulge in illicit activities:

G: I think quite a lot of the ads are like based towards children because like the HEBS advert and that. And it's like cos we're gonna be the ones that go out and...

N: ... take the drugs.

(Boys, S1, private)

They also expounded that they, and children like them, were a particularly attractive audience, and were often targeted in anticipation of their possible future purchases and actions. As one S1 boy from private school explained, a growing number of

traditionally non-youth oriented companies were now trying to attract their attention because “we’re the next generation”

4.2 Reality questioners

We have seen in chapter seven the importance of the reality issue to literary readers moving into adolescence (Appleyard, 1991). In terms of television experience, Young (1998) has noted that being able to distinguish between reality and representation is a basic foundation on which all other skills depend. Hawkins (1977) coined the term ‘social expectations’ in describing the extent to which TV reflects beliefs about the social world. The relationship between social expectations and age was found to be curvilinear with the youngest (4 to 6 year olds) and oldest (12 year olds) seen to be most sceptical about television content. For the children in the present study issues surrounding the reality of the text were uppermost in their minds and often suffused their evaluations of advertising.

There was considerable discussion about the advertising convention of product glamorisation. They presented a clear comprehension that advertising often visually, verbally and symbolically enhanced the reality of product or service in order to appeal to the consumer. As one S1 boy from private school commented on a washing powder ad “it makes it look good”. In this way some of their creative ideas were interlaced with portrayals of the product in an almost iconic, sacred light, in this case enshrined in the interior of the fridge:

A: An’ then he jumps up an’ opens the fridge... You see the BIG bottle of ‘Spike’ an’ it’s all SHINING....

(Boys, P7, Corby)

Similarly, and rather cynically, one boy revealed that if devising an ad for an alcoholic product then:

G: Even if the beer tasted rubbish you will just advertise it in any way that would make you want to buy it.

(Boys, P7, Corby)

The concern about the apparent dichotomy between advertising and reality sometimes focused on the visual and verbal details used within ads. Thus, there was involved consideration of the truth of some advertising visuals. For example an ad for Herbal Essences shampoo showing a woman washing her hair in the Ladies bathroom on an aeroplane was criticised for the accuracy and continuity details of its depiction. One P7 girl from private school wondered whether there would really be a loud speaker in the bathroom, “why would you have a speaker in your toilet? Do you want everyone to hear you doing the toilet?”. Another older girl from Corby was concerned by how the actress’ hair was suddenly dry in the following scene, “when she comes out her hair’s dry. She’s had a shower and there’s no hairdryer”. Other examples concerning obscure details abounded. One private school boy in S1 was concerned that advertising for Quavers crisps was sometimes “false” because in one ad a boy drops a crisp out of a window and “it floats down dead slowly... but it would really just like fall and that would be it... it wouldn’t fall that slow”. An S1 girl from Wetheral deliberated upon a scene in a Hooch drink ad in which a man screamed out after being stung by a mosquito saying “it cannae hurt that much”.

This questioning of reality extended to more pointed comments about the misrepresentation of products and situations in ads. A number of food ads were seen to bear little relation to the reality of the offering, as the following boys described:

G: But that’s another thing, in the McDonalds adverts they always seem to have a big massive burger....

N: ... I know they’ve got a huge burger and when you really get it it’s all small...

(Boys, S1, private)

This scepticism led to theories about how advertisers could make the product look so effective. Discussing a Gillette Mach ad one group of girls concluded that:

The guy on the advert probably shaved before the advert and just put a bit of shaving foam over the top....

(Girls, S1, private)

Similarly for others the apparent chasm between their real life experiences and way the product was portrayed on television led them to speculate on the techniques used. In this case a group of girls considered the advertising for Bounty kitchen roll:

E: They advertise it's good but it's no really good.... because when you wipe it still rips eh. But on the telly when ya wipe it like fills up.

F: She does it like soft on one bit of the cooker and on the other one she does it really hard so it looks like the other one's horrible.

(Girl, P7, Wetheral)

Some of the children were so sceptical that advertisements, especially those on TV, "just make up a load of stuff" that they used the words "scam", "set-up" and "false" to describe them. As in Buckingham's (1993) study the children's comments often took a mocking and amused tone as if to further highlight their superiority over the genre and their ability to distance themselves from it. Certain categories such as beauty and cleaning products came under particularly heavy fire. In this respect the "Daz Doorstep challenge" was the focus of many humorous and disdainful comments. Discussion of the campaign evinced disparaging cries of "can you test this on your whites?", "oh yeah I use Daz I'll just go and get you a white shirt", "it WREALLY WORKS!" and "Daz brightens up your life". Perhaps the most detailed and cynical recreation was provided by a P7 girl:

K: And then he goes "It's the Daz challenge...your whites as white as they can be", "do you use Daz?" And she goes (in very funny voice) "yeeeah, its bwwwilliant, look at my whites, this is my son's shirt, and he plays football every daaaaay, an' look at it. Whiiiiite. Whiiiiite." And like they're BRAND NEW things, you can see the creases on them. And it's like SO tacky. And it's all SET UP. It's like a set up OBVIOUSLY, and they make it as if it's not.

(Girls, P7, private)

Some of the children appeared to be so hardened to what they called “false” advertising that they applied converse interpretations to these ads. Thus, one girl, outraged by the number of ads on television for price offers in furniture retailers, cynically noted:

E: “While stocks last” usually means that they don’t have any left so they just want you to come to the store and buy. That’s basically it.

(Girls, S1, private)

4.3 Tactical technicians

Discussing advertising literacy amongst the population in general Meadows (1983) highlighted the ability to comment on production values and communication techniques. Similarly Buckingham (1993) proposed that some of the children in his study were able to place themselves in the position of producers, using arguments informed by technical knowledge. Extending this perspective the term ‘tactical technicians’ has been selected to highlight the particular enthusiasm of informants in the present study with employing, discussing and evaluating technical aspects of ads.

Firstly, the children incorporated a variety of technical details into their creative executions for the imaginary soft drink Spike. They proposed alternative filming techniques, such as the merging of black and white into colour film, borrowed from a recent Kit Kat Chunky ad. Furthermore, they considered techniques using computers and modern technology:

S: I’d make it computerised, like the beer could talk. That’d be funny.... There’d be all these people chasing after this can of beer and he’d be like have wee legs and arms and he’d be running across the desert with this big mob of people chasing him....

(Boys, P7, private)

Secondly, outwith their own ad creations the children’s discourse displayed a keen interest in matters technical. There was considerable deliberation and excitement

about using “dead, dead, dead expensive cameras” in advertising. The children indicated further proclivity towards technical matters through their discussion of “camera angles”, particularly in car advertising where the role of the director in providing “a better view” was seen as crucial. More specifically, in referring to various advertisements, they applied a range of terms including “close-ups”, “clips”, “split screens”, “flash backs” and “editing”.

In keeping with the expansion of new media, including computers, in children’s lives (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999), they utilised various terms pertaining to modern technology. The use of “virtual” techniques was mentioned in relation to an ad starring a cow taking part in “virtual skiing”. They also referred to the use of “special effects”, “computerised” images and “computer generated” effects. Thus, one group gave critical appreciation to a beer ad which used computer technology to connect one set of legs onto another individual’s body:

A: Another one when he goes into the bar and there’s all the people that are dancing with their feet, and their normal bodies are standing still but their feet are all moving. And he’s playing snooker and the guy’s feet are like doing the highland fling or something but the top of his body’s just normal. That’s a good one... They use computers. Technology.

G: Computers, cut them in half.

(Girls, S1, Corby)

Similarly, one boy capably evaluated an ad for the Ford Puma by drawing attention to how the ad was made. He proudly revealed his knowledge about how footage of deceased actor Steve McQueen, in the 1960s film *Bullitt*, was adapted to portray him driving the new car around the streets of San Francisco:

S: They got photos of him and put them on a computer and they computer generated it. And then they put him in the car....

(Boys, P7, private)

Perhaps not surprisingly the children’s technical language was not as advanced as that found in studies of adults (Gordon, 1982; O’ Donohoe, 1994a). Nevertheless,

their use of technical terminology exceeded expectations derived from studies with similarly aged children (Buckingham, 1993). However, it is not so much their proficiency with technical language and approaches as their apparent desire to use and draw upon their technical knowledge however limited that might be. Thus, on occasions where they were unaware of the precise terminology, they attempted to explain the technical processes involved in their own language. In this way one informant described an ad featuring footballers with dubbed voices saying:

They're just pictures and they took the sound away and put different voices in. Cos it looks like they're actually doing what they say!

(Boys, P7, Corby)

Similarly, another girl explained the blue screen technique that she had seen used in an ad in the following manner:

K: I mean you know where they have the background but it's like blue and you can put different things on....

(Girls, P7, private)

The children's eagerness to share technical knowledge was perhaps best seen in their discussion of the stories behind advertisements and explanations of "the way they'd done it". In this respect the role of Tactical Technician closely resembled young adults' emergence as 'Causal Cognescenti' (O'Donohoe and Tynan, 1998). Thus, one P7 boy from private school explained in considerable detail that the footballer, Paul Gascoigne's, dramatic crying performance in a Walkers crisps ad was created by "pipes going up to his eyes" which were later "blanked out". Likewise theories were readily proposed to answer the question of how products were made to look attractive, better, or larger. In this respect the way in which advertisers were able to make cars appear "bigger on the inside" was considered in this discussion on the apparently large capacity of the Citroen Safira:

T: That's just because they've put the seats forward... What they do is they put the middle seats forward so it looks bigger at the back. Then they put them back and then it looks bigger in the middle. That's what I'd do anyway.

(Boys, S1, private)

Likewise, practical issues as to how toys were made to move during advertisements were suggested:

E: Well she skated across the screen and they probably used like a wire thing and then took it out while they were editing bits. And she just sort of rolls over the screen...

(Girls, S1, private)

In addition visual "tricks", such as reforming cars in insurance ads, were described in considerable detail:

E: There's one, the car, it got crushed. And what they'd actually done, it had been crushed and they made it go back into a new car. And the way they'd done it is they'd crushed a car and the bloke advertising it had to learn to talk backwards, and walk backwards, and get in the car backwards and things. And it was just really well done cos it looked like it had been forward and they made the car out of all the rubble.

(Girls, S1, private)

Other stories related to the characters and performers in ads. Performances by animals were a particular focus of interest, for example a number of children had somewhat dubious stories about the antics of Andrex puppies, and how the cats were encouraged to "miaow" at the screen in a Whiskers pet food ad. That the children should feel the need to display such technical knowledge, and the desire to tell 'stories' about ads, seems to be explicable in terms of the life theme of autonomy. The children regarded advertising as providing a distinct and valuable collection of skills to be mastered and displayed to peers.

Taken as a whole this interest and participation in the practical and folklore aspects of ad techniques suggested a keen interest in strategic issues and willingness to consider and evaluate ads on this basis.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that advertising experiences were bound up with the broader existential concern of autonomy. The children appropriated advertising as a valuable cultural resource and undertook various roles in order to display their autonomy. In some cases their roles echoed those of much older audiences, like the young adults described by O'Donohoe and Tynan (1998). In this way they emerged as Masters, Controllers and Critical Onlookers of the advertising genre.

As Masters the children tried on three different roles. Firstly, they appeared as Meaning Masters due to their active engagement in the interpretation of ads. They were keen to demonstrate their understanding that ads contained a message and indicated enjoyment in the search for meaning, seeing ads as puzzles or games to be worked out. They displayed a broad interest in 'getting' the ad and even indicated feelings of inadequacy when meanings were not understood. In addition they demonstrated their knowledge of advertising's intertextuality and its 'leaky boundaries' with other cultural forms. Secondly, the children assumed the role of Style Masters through their strivings for competence of advertising's styles and approaches. In this respect they included a range of approaches revolving around obsession and transformational themes in the creative exercise. In addition they eagerly demonstrated their knowledge of musical styles from 'cheesy' jingles to adapted pop song themes. Humorous styles also received their attention being variously categorised for example as 'stupid', 'embarrassing' and 'rude'. Further, the children incorporated direct references to the styles of ads used in different countries. Scottish, French and American ads were recognised as particularly distinctive. Thirdly, the children demonstrated a playful relationship with advertising through trying on the role of Performance Master and striving for

proficiency in the performance of ads. Character imitations as well as singing jingles and theme songs were regarded as distinct skills.

The findings also indicated that as Controllers the children took on a range of advertising related roles. Firstly they emerged as Empowered Viewers in which light the selection of favourite storylines highlighted the presentation of children in positions of power and authority, pulling one over on the adults and making them look like “wimps”. Further ads were used in interactions with adults in an attempt to demonstrate greater cultural competency. Secondly, the children appeared as Ad Avoiders through claiming disinterest in advertising and rare exposure to the genre. They even discussed taking extreme physical action against advertising, for example by plugging their ears and covering their eyes. Thirdly, the children took on the role of Independent Consumers. Advertising was regularly consumed separately from the brand and many of the children stressed that advertising did not influence them. There was much derision of the ‘other’ people who were seen to be vulnerable to advertising effects. These included foreigners, adults, people with money, and younger children.

Finally the children undertook three roles in their position as Critical Onlookers. Firstly, they assumed the role of Precocious Planners. In this respect they demonstrated their ability to understand the role played by those developing ads. Advertisers efforts and aims were seen to revolve around the generation of sales but the need to create innovative, ‘eye catching’ material which stimulated brand recall was similarly stressed. Further, the children were keen to speculate about target audiences and how advertising could be adapted to appeal to different sections of the population. Secondly the children emerged as Reality Questioners. Many attested that advertising tries to make products “look good” and even criticised the accuracy and continuity of details within ads. Considerable scepticism was displayed according to the misrepresentation of products and the clever techniques used by producers, indeed many children were adamant that advertising was simply a “scam”. Finally, a significant number of the children played the role of Tactical Technician. This role reflected the particular enthusiasm by which they discussed

and evaluated the technical aspects of ads. For example they included numerous technical details in their creative executions and in the discussion of ads more generally applied a range of professional terms and phrases pertaining to technical approaches. Further the children expounded upon their technical knowledge by discussing the stories behind, and techniques used within, advertising.

CHAPTER NINE

AFFILIATION

1. Introduction

We have seen in the previous chapters how the search for mastery, control and critical distance enabled the children to establish and enhance an independent sense of self. The issues of power were related to Erikson's (1987) central school age conflict between industry and inferiority. In this chapter attention will be given to the children's expressed need to build and maintain relationships, and their desire to conform to evolving social roles. The importance of affiliatory needs has been highlighted by Csikszentimihalyi (2000). Drawing on Maslow's (1968) hierarchy of human needs Csikszentimihalyi argues that the need for 'love and belonging' is rooted in our fear of isolation and loneliness. Humans are genetically programmed to seek out the company of others and have evolved a more specific desire to be close and to share the experiences of one or a few other persons. Further, Erikson (1987) views development as heavily dependent on cultural context and deeply entwined with social relationships. In the context of adolescence, individuals seek to define their psychosocial identity and overcome role confusion, in so doing they turn to one another for support and a sense of unity.

The dialectical tension between the drive for autonomy and the current exploration of affiliation needs will become apparent through the consideration of three central themes emerging from the children's discourse: 'bonding', 'belonging' and 'becoming'.

2. Bonding

If you want to be my lover,
You gotta get with my friends.
Make it last forever,
Friendship never ends...
(Spice Girls, 1996: 'Wannabe')

Throughout the children's photographs the importance of the 'others' in their lives was apparent. They had photographs of parents, siblings, members of the wider family, neighbours, teachers and close-ups of animals and pets. Most obvious, however, was the inclusion of innumerable photographs of friends. Friends were depicted at play in the bedroom, posing in the classroom, grinning madly to the camera in the playground, energetically taking part in sports, browsing around the shops, dressed up to go to the cinema and tucked up in sleeping bags during 'sleepovers'. The importance of others, and in particular the need to bond with others, was reinforced during the interviews. Connections with friends seemed to play an integral role in the daily existence of these children and if anything seemed to increase as they moved from primary into secondary school. The growing status of peer bonding will be highlighted in this section, and explained in the light of the relevant literature.

2.1 Parents to peers: The importance of friendship

Reviewing the research on child development Bernstein et al (1988) note that from as early as the age of two onwards, the nature of children's relationship with their parents changes, as they start to seek increasing autonomy. Later, during the early school years, the desire to socialise with peers, rather than parents, augments. Thus, by ninth grade, adolescents say that their relationships with their peers are closer than those with their parents. One of the obvious consequences of the gradual shift from parent to peer affiliation is that the norms and values of peers are likely to become increasingly important, while those of parents may become less so (Smith, Cowie and Blades, 1998).

At the core of all the interviews emerged a basic drive for connections with friends. For many of the children these affiliations were highlighted as one of the most important elements of their lives. For some the significance of friendships was so great that losing their friends formed a major fear in their lives, for others, particularly the girls, friends were self-defining and something to boast about:

I get on with everybody. I've got my own little special thing with everybody. Kirsty, we get on great; Clare, we're mad, like I can really get mad sometimes. And then Sophie well I like Sophie cos like she's really a dits, yeah, and I'm just like the person who tells her what to do and stuff and she always asks me for advice.... And Ruth she's SO nice, she understands you. You have a problem and you go to Ruth.... She understands you completely.

(Girl, P7, private)

As this quote indicates the importance of bonding with friends was a major concern for the children. For many, as in the case of the girl above, social acceptance and 'being popular' were their primary concerns. Once acceptance was achieved friends could be gathered, almost like a collection, and enjoyed for their diversity and individuality. As the children disclosed, they often had different types of friendships with different individuals.

Despite the diversity of friendships, there did appear to be certain patterns running through children's lives relating to peer bonding. These can be usefully discussed according to the similarities and differences between the groups.

2.2 The nature of friendships

The nature of bonding with friends was at times quite distinct. In terms of the number of friends, the boys generally operated within wider friendship groups. Although some of them talked about having a 'best friend', in general their activities and interactions emerged as group based. Perhaps this fact was best illustrated amongst the many keen footballers who regarded their friends broadly as those they

played football with (see Plate 9.1). Ranking of friends in terms of their importance was, however, very obvious amongst the girls. They tended to have a well defined relationship with a 'best friend' (see Plate 9.2) and generally associated in blocks of two or four i.e. just with a best friend or together with another best friend pairing. These findings are in line with Lever's (1978) study of 10 to 11 year olds in playgrounds in America which highlighted the disparity between boys' and girls' friendships. In Lever's research the boys were found to play in larger mixed-age groups, while the girls tended to play in smaller numbers or same-age pairs.

There was also some evidence of larger friendship groups developing as the children moved into secondary school. Smith, Cowie, and Blades (1998) have noted that in the early stages of adolescence large same-sex 'cliques' or 'gangs' become common. The children in this study, with an upper age of 13 years, seemed to be on the brink of moving into these new adolescent friendship groups and some of the older children, particularly in Wetheral, talked about their friendships in terms of "gangs" and "groups". Mostly, however, the nature of friendships for all the Primary Sevens and the majority of the Secondary Ones seemed closest to the findings described by Lever (1978).



Plate 9.1 Football friends (Boy, S1, Wetheral)



Plate 9.2 Best friends (Girl, P7, Wetheral)

The earlier development of “gangs” in Wetheral reflects Erikson’s (1987) consideration of the importance of ‘cliques’ in adolescence. Generally, however, the children’s discussion of the nature of peer bonding suggested little difference between the different age and schooling locations. However, gender comparisons provided a valuable insight into both the similarities and differences between the boys’ and girls’ friendships in terms of the importance of humour and the focus on ‘doing’, togetherness, continuity, volatility and intimacy. Firstly, one aspect suffused all the children’s descriptions of their friends: humour. When talking about and describing their friends the most common words were “fun” and “funny”. In a typical comment one girl described her friends as:

Hilarious. They’re just really good fun to be around.

(Girl, S1, private)

The boys similarly talked about their friendships in terms of having fun and “cracking jokes” and both sexes spoke of the importance of being able to laugh and make others laugh:

I: What makes a really good friend?

D: She’s always there. Has to be funny and just make you laugh - a lot.

(Girl, S1, Wetheral)

Secondly, like the preadolescents in Douvan and Adelson’s (1966) study, the children highlighted the importance of shared interests and activities in their friendships. Berndt (1982) found that boys’ play activities centred around competitive team games with more complex rules and role structure. Their social relationships were seen to stress ‘political’ skills of cooperation, competition and leadership. From the descriptions of the boys in the current study it was apparent that the boys tended to focus on the physical, active and competitive aspects of their relationships. The verb ‘to do’ suffused their comments. Thus, as Ben in P7 at private school reflected on his bestfriend: “we just DO lots of stuff together...”. The

boys talked about their joint activities, especially competitive sport, and indicated admiration for friends who had developed high levels of sporting prowess and fitness. Observations such as “he’s good at football” were the central determinants of a ‘good’ friend for many of the boys. Thus, friendship was viewed as a relationship of joint activity and competition.

The girls, however, indicated a more emotional and integrated approach to friendship. Thus, while they also talked about shared interests and hobbies, their attention was more concentrated on the sharing and togetherness aspect of the experience rather than the physical and competitive. Sports were mentioned in this regard as activities friends enjoyed together but more often the girls spoke about “going out”, “going to the cinema” or “shopping” together. The following quote highlights the importance of togetherness for the girls. The dialogue stemmed from Elaine’s description of her friends, in which she had stressed that “they’re just sort of always there”:

I: Tell me about them always being there. What do you mean by that?

E: Well, they sort of like, every class, always there, never really sort of, not really all that like, never really all that ill, just sort of always there, always friends. And like at games and everything, instead of like going off somewhere sulking on their own, they just sort of come with you, be friends, and sort of stand in a group being cold. It’s just like, like one big group and we always sort of stick together, like we’re tied together with a piece of string.

I: Tell me about that. Tell me about the piece of string?

E: Well, it just never seems to go beyond a certain length, that’s all. It’s like, it’s saying “How long is a piece of string?”. Well, when you’re tied to one of your friends, not very long.

(Girl, S1, private)

Elaine’s portrayal of friendship as being “tied together with a piece of string” presents friendship in a more restrictive light. However, it also highlights the importance of feelings of closeness and togetherness expressed by many of the girls.

Thirdly, the boys were much more likely than the girls to focus on the length and continuity of their friendship, with comments like “he’s been like my best friend since P1...”. Sometimes references to this span of time together suggested almost a passive acceptance of friendship, as if a friend was someone who you just bumped into on a regular basis:

I: Tell me a bit about Peter and Jake, why are they good pals and what makes them special to you?

S: Cos we’ve been together for seven years. And just keep seeing each other all the time. And at High School we’ll just do it again.

(Boy, P7, Wetheral)

This expectation of relationship continuity was less pronounced in the case of the girls. Their relationships appeared to be considerably more volatile and short-lived than those of the boys. They made regular references to “ex-best friends”, “falling out” and dramatic rifts in the classroom due to friendship break-ups. Such findings reflect those of Douvan and Adelson’s early observational study of friendship amongst 3000 American adolescent girls. They concluded:

Best friends may change in a moment; strange partnerships may come into being... Even our solid and enduring adolescent friendships may turn out, if we remember them closely enough, not to have been quite so unbroken and harmonious as they first appear in retrospect. They may in fact have blown hot and cold, responsive to all the rise and fall of feeling in self and others (Douvan and Adelson, 1966: 179)

Alongside this volatility seemed to be a greater intensity within the girl’s friendships, almost jealousy in some cases. The best friend emerged on occasion as a possession to be owned, as well as something to be fiercely and maliciously protected. This seems to be tied in with Berndt’s (1982) emphasis on exclusiveness in girls’ relationships. The following quotation focuses on Cathy whose concern with social acceptance and popularity made her an intriguing, and highly visible, example in this regard. She enjoyed a number of creative hobbies but was particularly keen to share, not only her fashion designs, but also a rather illuminating line in creative poetry:

C: Oh yeah, I like writing poetry as well, especially hatred poetry.

I: Hatred poetry?

C: Yeah. "I dedicate this to Lisa."

I: Can you read it out loud?

C: All right.

**"You follow us about every day,
When all the time we think 'just go away'.
You're taking away you know who,
Wake up and look around she hates you.
We hate you,
Nobody likes you, Lisa."**

Right, when it says "you're taking her away, you know who" she won't leave Clare (her best friend) alone, and Clare's just going along with it, which I hate about Clare. Actually she goes off with everybody.

(Girls, P7, private)

Clearly Cathy was very possessive of her best friend, so much so that she felt the need to express the exclusivity of their relationship through a form of 'symbolic creativity' (Willis, 1990) that she referred to as "hatred poetry".

Finally, Berndt (1982) revealed that girls' relationships focused more on intimacy than those of boys. While some of the boys in the current study mentioned the importance of loyalty, trust and keeping secrets, for girls the depth of this need for intimacy appeared far greater. The girls focused on the importance of communication, the need to dispense and receive personal advice, and the significance of sharing and keeping secrets. Although these characteristics were seen throughout the girls' interviews, perhaps the best examples of this trusting intimacy came in the case of two best friends, Frances and Elaine. As Elaine said of Frances when describing her friend:

E: Kind, funny, talkative, just a good friend. She shares and she just like tells me her secrets and that.

(Girl, P7, Wetheral)

As Frances noted of Elaine:

Ya can tell her like secret stuff and she willnae tell ANYONE. She can tell me like secret stuff and all that, and I willnae tell anyone....

(Girl, P7, Wetheral)

They further illustrated the intimacy of their relationship through the disclosure that a crucial part of their friendship involved writing letters and hand delivering them on the way to school. One of the girls read out the contents of a recent letter:

F: She gave me that one (letter). "For Frances's Eyes Only. To Frances Hiya from your best pal Elaine Best Pals Always. If destroyed still true."

(Girl, P7, Wetheral)

The letters had been carefully crafted and illustrated with different coloured pens. Stars, shapes and patterns had been drawn in the margin and the letters were meticulously folded to ensure their security. Each of the girls produced a shoebox in which they kept and treasured these handcrafted momentos. The ritual of writing letters to a best friend they saw every day, alongside the obvious importance of letters as treasured possessions highlights the intimacy of this relationship. In fact the ritual was comparable to the private and confidential writings of secret lovers. Perhaps in this sense the girls' friendships at this age could be seen as preparations for future relationships with the opposite sex. Certainly the girls' friendships reflected that they might be getting older younger. Thus, echoing Selman's (1981) description of the young adolescent as 'friendship philosopher' the girls seemed more concerned with intimate and socially shared relationships with friends.

3. Belonging

...our contemporary social life is marked by membership in a multiplicity of overlapping groups in which the roles one plays become sources of identity which, like masks, provide temporary 'identifications' (Maffesoli, 1996: xii)

According to Maffesoli (1996) we are living in the time of the tribes. As mass culture has disintegrated, today's social existence is conducted through fragmented tribal groupings. Cova (1997) views this phenomenon in terms of the desperate search for community. With the emergence of neo-tribalism, everyday life seems to mark out the importance of a forgotten element: the social link. In this way postmodern consumption emphasises the "linking value" of products and services.

Amongst the children in the study the search for tribal groupings and community was also apparent. In addition to expressing a need to bond and build relationships with friends, the children expressed the desire to 'belong' to specific groups. The term has been selected to suggest the desired sense of connectivity to others and the focus on group membership. In this light, the children's central consumption concerns including sporting goods, collections, brands, and the media will be highlighted. These consumption concerns have been chosen due to their centrality in many of the children's lives and their pervasiveness across all the groups involved in the study. The aim will be to address the means by which these elements were utilised by the children to connect themselves to, and position themselves within, the peer group, and, thereby, to provide a sense of belonging and establish social identity.

3.1 Belonging through possessions

Examining the role of possessions in people's lives, Belk (1988) has argued that such items are part of the extended self. The individual categorises himself or herself in society, and alleviates self-transitions through symbolic consumption. Likewise Kleine et al (1995) have proposed that symbolic meanings of possessions may reflect not only a person's individuality, but also their desired affiliations with others. The importance of these affiliatory links provided by possessions will be discussed through reference to sporting possessions, brands and collections.

3.1.1 Sporting links

The role of possessions in creating social links between children and the people in their lives was seen throughout the transcripts. As was noted in chapter seven, sports equipment and sports collectibles emerged as the most important type of possession for the children, although the salience of these items was far greater for the boys than the girls. Along with the sense of autonomy and mastery gained from sports related possessions, there was a strong indication that sporting paraphernalia was symbolic of social integration and social positioning. One boy who had just arrived at senior school referred to a variety of rugby possessions in his room and contextualised his discussion in terms of the sense of belonging and membership rugby had given him:

G: ...I was new in the summer, so getting into the rugby team kind of got me more friends, because they all go like "well he's in the rugby team, I know who he is". And then I just sort of, more people knew who I was and then I got a bit more friends, I got more friends early on than I expected to at the beginning. And that was probably because of the rugby.

(Boy, S1, private)

Geoff was clearly pleased to have joined the rugby *tribus*. The paraphernalia of this neo tribe (Maffesoli, 1996), which included balls, tops and caps, seemed symbolic of his new found connections. However, for many of those stressing the need to belong, it was football related possessions which emerged as the most socially symbolic. The contents of the girls' rooms supported advertising agency research findings concerning their growing interest in football (Eden, 2000), however it was clear that for many boys football was quite simply the most important aspect of their lives.

Even on an initial glance at many of the boys' photos it was apparent that the main focus of the interview would be football. They had posters plastered on walls, football medals and trophies placed on shelves, game schedules taped to doors, "Big Head" replicas of famous footballers lined up on mantelpieces, well-thumbed

autograph books filled with their favourite players' names, piles of videos of past games in bookcases, mounds of football magazines scattered over available surfaces, and often hundreds of newspaper clippings confirming team successes jammed into drawers (see Plates 9.3 and 9.4).



Plates 9.3 Football magazines (Boy, S1, Wetheral)



Plate 9.4 Football posters (Boy, P7, Corby)

Together these artefacts demonstrated an intense interaction and engagement with football. However, through the interviews and the children's discourse, it was recognised that aside from allowing children to demonstrate their competence, football also played an integral role in their affiliations with others. Although for many the interest in football had familial roots, for example following their father's favourite team, the sense of community with peers emerged as a vital aspect of their football paraphernalia and team supporting activities. They commented about the inclusiveness of the community in which "most of the people that I know are Hearts fans" and friends were defined in terms of their football ability and team allegiances:

I: Why is Dennis your best friend?

A: Just cos I play with him a lot and he's a good football player and that... and he's a Newcastle and Hearts fan.

(Boy, P7, Corby)

Further, Eden (2000) has noted that football is central to daily discourse amongst boys and provides unity through its provision of a common interest and shared passion. Certainly football talk in general and the comparison of football related possessions provided a sense of tribe membership; they argued about the quality and relative skills of their pitch heroes, and they teased and tormented peers who supported the team that had been beaten in the previous night's game. In short their fandom, knowledge, and symbolic involvement through the collection of football paraphernalia provided them with a ticket of entry into the football fraternity.

3.1.2 Brand belonging

When we dress according to fashion, use the latest kitchen appliance, or take a vacation at the 'in' resort we feel that we are part of a group we aspire to belong to, and that we are accepted by its members.

(Csikszentimihalyi, 2000)

Csikszentimihalyi's (2000) description of how the need to belong is expressed through consumption seems particularly salient in terms of children's relationship with brand names. Considering the role of brands in identity, Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) have noted that all voluntary consumption carries, either consciously or unconsciously, symbolic meanings. Thus, if the consumer has choices to consume, he or she will consume things that hold particular symbolic meanings. The role of brands in construction of social identity and group membership was highlighted by many of the children.

Maffesoli (1996) noted that fashion victims are typical examples of what he refers to as *tribus*. Linked to their interest in sporting paraphernalia it was perhaps to be expected that some of the children would demonstrate a deep involvement with sports clothes brands. 'Nike', 'Adidas', 'Umbro', 'Puma', 'Reebok', and numerous other sports brand names enjoyed pride of place in the children's wardrobes (see Plates 9.5 and 9.6). The children displayed their new Velcro-strip Adidas trousers,

and pointed out their endless pairs of Nike trainers and various multi-coloured branded sports tops. That these brands seemed to play an important role in providing the children with a sense of belonging sits comfortably with existing research. Recent studies have revealed the emergence of brand awareness and brand choice at very young ages. In their study of the formation of preferences and brand choice among very young children, Hite and Hite (1995) proposed that brand reliance was “firmly established in children as young as two years old”. The importance attached to brands and awareness of their symbolic and emblematic meanings is clear amongst children in the seven to ten year old age group. Indeed branded sports clothing emerges as a product category about which children have strong and clear views of the images associated with different brands (Hogg et al, 1998).



Plate 9.5 Adidas bags (Girl, S1, Corby)



Plate 9.6 Branded clothes (Boy, S1, private)

The children's discussion of brands provided some clarity on their specific symbolic appropriation to satisfy a need to belong. As one boy commented:

A: I'm a bit fussy about what I wear! I need a good make!...

I: Well tell me about that, what names do you like?

A: Well I like Adidas and Nike and everything like that. It's what

everyone likes... a lot of people, we've got pretty similar tastes at my age. You know the fake (laughs), there's like fake Adidas, ya know with the two stripes or the four stripes.... Ya really get slagged off if you've got fake Adidas, it's either two stripes or four stripes. And ya get slagged off! And you're a cheapie. (Laughs).

(Boy, S1, Corby)

Ashley's words had resonance amongst many of the children in the study. Firstly, clothing brands were very important to the children and having a "good make" was something that they were "fussy" about. The word "good" was sometimes followed up by comments about product functionality and quality but, as his following words reveal, in reality "good" seemed most closely linked to social symbolism. Secondly, reflecting the notion that the need to belong is served by conformity (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), wearing branded clothing allowed the children to be like those around them and to belong to the social group. Thus, Ashley seemed impelled to support his liking for Adidas and Nike with the comment that "it's what everyone likes" and to highlight that "we've got pretty similar tastes at my age". Similarly, when a P7 boy from Wetheral was asked how he felt when he wore "good makes" he replied "just like the others, the other people". Finally, only certain brands had social approval. Thus, wearing the wrong name, or worse still wearing a "fake" with the wrong number of stripes, led to social isolation and the humiliation of being "slagged off" and called a "cheapie". As another boy commented:

I: And what names would you never wear?

W: Just like names that nay body else would wear anyway put it that way. Like if they call them like, if it's a scaffy name, or like a smaller make, like you've got Adidas which is the three stripes, but another make just takes two stripes and calls it another name, and folk dunnae like that....folk dunnae like it so nay body ever wears it.

(Boy, S1, Wetheral)

William's dislike of brands which are "smaller" and have a "scaffy name" suggests the need to go along with what is popular within the tribus (Maffesoli, 1996) and the need to avoid what "folk dunnae like". This reflects recent research suggesting that young people and their families, particularly in disadvantaged areas, are under pressure to conform to expensive clothing norms (Milligan and Smith, 2000).

One of the most illuminating areas of conformity in brand use came in the discussion of own label products. While there was agreement across a number of groups that own label items were often “just as good”, these products were fiercely rejected most notably by the children from Wetheral. One group of boys admitted making fun of people who brought own label snacks, especially crisps, into school. Another group highlighted Ashley’s earlier concern with appearing to be a “cheapie”:

W: Ya know ya get Tesco Value. Well Tesco Value’s just as good as the normal stuff. Well it is but ya have ta slag it anyway....cos if ya get Tesco Value ya SAD (laughs)!

B: No CHEAP!

W: I ken like the whole mecky department, they cannae afford the normal stuff so they always get Tesco Value.

K: It’s like 6p for a can of beans....

I: So how important is it to have a “big” name on them?

W: No really but people notice and folk take the Mickey....

I: How important is it what other people think in terms of how much you pay for something?

W: Quite important.

B: Quite important cos if someone looks in ya cupboard they’re gonna think you’re a scuff buying all the cheap stuff.

(Boys, S1, Wetheral)

Despite regarding it as “just as good as the normal stuff” the boys would not consider buying supermarket own brands because of how others might perceive them. In this way the desire to fit in and the fear of humiliation in terms of being called “a scuff” led to considerable conformity in the brands used by the children. The powerful symbolism of socially endorsed brand names provided an important means of maintaining membership in the group, even if some were willing to admit that such conformism was a basic affront to the desire for autonomy:

I think they’re a bit like sheep! One person wears it, then the next person wears it and then they all start wearing it.

(Girl, S1, Corby)

3.1.3 Collecting communities

“they think they’re like the IN group, they think they’re quite popular cos they’ve got LOADS of make-up”.

(Girl, P7, Corby)

While popularity was not specifically explored by Kamptner (1991), she did consider the role of social ties as a reason given for considering possessions to be special. Further the importance of this social connectivity was seen to increase as children moved from middle childhood into adolescence. The previous sections have suggested that the preadolescent children in the present study were already well attuned to the socially symbolic role of possessions. The children’s collections were particularly illuminating in this respect, partially due to the largely gendered nature of this activity. Dittmar (1992) highlighted the importance of relational reasons in women’s accounts of why possessions were considered special. Similar relational aspects, alongside Cova’s (1997) search for community through consumption, were stressed in the girls’ accounts of their collections.

For many of the girls collections started through connections with adults, particularly parents, who had given an object to their child for a birthday or Christmas present. For some the linking value of collections with parents was taken further. Thus, one girl at private school remarked that her father often added to her collection of model houses when he came back with presents from work-related trips abroad. These houses acted as a reminder of her father and appeared to form a symbolic link, as she herself suggested:

I: So can you tell me why they are important to you?

F: I think they just remind me of where my dad’s been, so when I look at them I remember my Dad, cos he’s away half the time.

(Girl, P7, private)

Conversely, alongside their initiation role, parents often ended or curtailed collections which were seen as becoming increasingly “wasteful” purchases. Although such restrictions can be viewed as an aspect of parental control, they also

indicate the way in which collections were shaped and formed by affiliations with parents.

I: OK, what's this (in photo).

A: That's just my nail polish collection... I think I've got about thirty or something or something, but um, I just keep collecting them over the years. But I'm not allowed to buy any more because my Mum says I've got enough, and I'll never use it all!

(Girl, S1, private)



Plate 9.7 Nail polish collection (Girl, S1, private)



Plate 9.8 Beanie collection (Girl, P7, private)

In keeping with the developmental transition from parental to peer allegiances in middle childhood, collections acted as an increasingly important connection with friends, and a symbol of their membership and inclusion within the “in group”. Many of the children started collecting in order to emulate or keep up with their friends. As one girl S1 girl from Corby replied to the question of why she collected cuddly toys, “I think it's people collecting them.... I think ‘they’re sort of cool so I’ll collect some of those’....”. Collecting was thus a popular activity revolving around socially approved items “that just all of us really like” (see Plates 9.7 and 9.8). Although as Olmsted (1991) has observed collecting itself tends to go out of fashion as children enter adolescence, amongst the girls it was seen as something that

“everyone” was doing and allowed the individual to be accepted and at least temporarily “in fashion”:

J: I used to collect Pogs. I got a big Pog holder, and then I stopped collecting them, cos they were going out of fashion! (Says with embarrassed voice).

I: So what does that mean something being in fashion and out of fashion?

J: Well like people say to you “oh that’s uncoool and things” and it gets annoying, so you just stop it (giggles). Sometimes you just collect them cos your friends collect them and stuff like that.

(Girl, P7, Corby)

People’s opinion was clearly important to Jessica, but just as peer talk might terminate a collection so too collections were often initiated through social interactions. For example a number of the girls spoke about how they would take favourite objects from their collections into school. Within this classroom context objects were observed and assessed, and if group approval was gained then collecting was seen to “spread” throughout the class. Importantly initiating a collection seemed to act as a mechanism for confirming and bolstering the individual’s position in, and linkages with, the peer group:

I: OK. So why was it Beanies (that she decided to collect) and not something else?

C: Well, it all started with Sara. She just brought them in and we’re like “OK. We’re gonna start collecting them”, so it all started with S. bringing them in, and then we sort of carried on. Cos every time, if we like something, we just sort of spread it around the class, spread it around the girls, and we just ALL do it, you know, with the nail polishes and stuff, you know.

I: So, have you started off any collections that people have copied or caught on to?

C: Tamagoches in P5, no P6, sorry. I brought one in and then all the girls and even some of the boys brought Tamagoches in, so really I started that. And in P5, I started the nail polish collection.

(Girl, P7, private)

Just as starting a collection established social status and confirmed membership in the group, acquisition of the most “unique”, “different” and numerous items provided

similar benefits. However, even the children were able to recognise that collecting could go too far:

L: There's a girl called Nicky she's got like a DESKFUL like that (demonstrates with hands) and she's got like from there to there it'd be full of lipsticks and nail polishes, and EVERYTHING. She's got like nearly FIFTY nail polishes! And I think "wwwwoooow!". But I've only got a couple of nail polishes, I don't want ta overload!

(Girl, P7, Corby)

Whilst they were outnumbered by the girls, those boys who did collect were likewise influenced and moulded in their collecting activities by friends. The causality between an individual starting a collection and its popularity amongst friends was clearly apparent:

I: So tell me a bit about Warhammer?

C: Well all my friends collected it before the summer, so I thought I would start collecting it, but I never got round to it cos I had other things to spend my money on, so I didn't get anything. But after Gary got me something for my birthday, he got me a paint set with some paints and some Guys (the little model figures in Warhammer), and so I decided to start collecting Space Marines. So now I've got loads of them, I've got 22 men and some bikes.

(Boy, P7, Corby)

However, all collections were not as "valuable" in the social milieu, and some had less linking value. Although Helen an S1 girl in Corby revealed that she collected pencil sharpenings (a curious mass of wooden fragments which she kept crammed into a large jar in her bedroom) she was keen to stress their functional role. Reflecting Dittmar's (1992) differentiation between instrumental and symbolic uses of possessions, Helen explained that gathering pencil sharpenings was merely a way of gaining another badge for Guides. She had been told about the 'Collectors' badge and immediately thought to add to the convenient mass of pencil sharpenings she had stored in a spare pencil case. In another case a girl from private school quickly corrected her present tense reference to her bus ticket collection, noting that her friends considered it to be somewhat "strange":

I: OK. Is there anything else that you collect?

A: Well, I collect, I used to collect bus tickets ... (smiles).... All my friends think it's really strange, but (smiles)... it's just like whenever I go on the bus I just collect them and I've got a big purse filled with them, but well I've kind of just stopped them now because my friends keep like, it's a bit weird and all that.

(Girl, S1, private)

This last example illustrates the linking power of objects and the drive for conformity through peer approval. If possessions are to form a social link then they must be mutually accepted and appreciated by other group members. In this case bus tickets, although providing a convenient resource for collecting purposes (Gentry and Baker, 1996), did not hold the necessary social cache of the highly regarded Beanie Baby or the popular toy pigs, and were therefore being reconsidered.

3.2 Media and technology connections

Referring to the trend towards media socialisation, Livingstone and Bovill (1999) have noted that not only does young people's social life frame their actual use of media, but it is also, in part, constituted through their talk about media. They found that the great majority of children and young people, some 93%, said that they talked about media at least sometimes to their friends. This linking value of the media was reflected in the children's discussion of screen, music and communication media.

3.2.1 Screen media

Despite the emergence of new media, Livingstone and Bovill's (1999) research has proposed that overall television is still the most popular medium amongst children and young people with viewing levels increasing as they progress through childhood years. Nine to eleven year olds watch 142 minutes of television per day while twelve to fourteen year olds view some 165 minutes (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999). Certainly the interviews would support the importance of the television to this age

group. Many of the children proudly mentioned that they had televisions in their bedroom, and television was the medium discussed most regularly by the children as a whole. During the individual interviews they eagerly discussed liked and disliked programmes, and spoke about the process of watching television both at home and with peers. According to Lull (1990) the television may play an important affiliatory role being variously used within the family to allow physical and verbal contact, solidarity and conflict reduction, and relationship maintenance. Buckingham (1993) also suggests that talk about television is used as a way of establishing relationships and asserting subject positions. In this light television talk emerges as a means of defining oneself and others. The children in the study also used television and video for purposes of affiliation and to define themselves as group members.

Firstly, in some cases the children interacted with and regarded the television like a member of the peer group. Greenberg (1974) found that children used television for vicarious companionship. In the present study some of the children similarly referred to the television as a “friend”, as something they “loved” and something that was “always there”:

I: And these are ones (photos) of the TV?

A: My TV is my best friend. One of my best friends....I love my TV. I never go a day without watching my TV.... It's just like you can always switch it on and it's there (laughs). Like you're bored or something you'll always watch the TV but it's something to do and, it's always there I suppose, unless it's not working. And, stuff like all the programmes are on it, so like you always, always watch it, whatever you want on it, it's always there to be watched.

(Girl, S1, Corby)

Andrea refers to the television as her “best friend”. Reflecting the earlier discussion of friends and friendships under ‘bonding’, the television is similarly seen to provide continuity and security of presence (see Plate 9.9). Thus, “you can always switch it on and it's there”.

Secondly, the children also provided evidence that the television was used as a social link. The conflict surrounding the television screen, particularly channel choice, has

been highlighted by Morley (1986) and Lull (1990) and the evidence concerning children has been discussed in terms of autonomy. However, the television also served as a device for confirming social connections and social differences, particularly with peers. Thus, many of the children used the individual and group interviews as a forum for establishing their love of “similar” programmes, for example *Friends*, *South Park*, *The Simpsons*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Pet Rescue*, *Eastenders*, *Neighbours*, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, *Keenan and Kel*, *Sister Sister*, *The Box*, and the *Jerry Springer Show*. Comments such as “we like the same things” were used to confirm the similarity of their tastes and reinforce friendships.

Thirdly, Lull (1990) found that the television acted as a verbal connection with other family members, while Livingstone and Bovill (1999) revealed that 71% of children in the 12 to 14 year old age bracket said they talked about television. In the present study the children’s favourite programmes were not only keenly discussed during the interviews, but were depicted as popular subjects of discussion at school and with friends. For example they spoke about the plots, action and relationships in soaps like *Eastenders*, *Neighbours* and *Brookside*, in dramas such as ITV’s *Bad Girls*, and in popular films screened either on terrestrial TV or on cable like *The Mask*, *Big Burger* and *Cool Runnings*. Notably the preponderance of comedies allowed the children to “laugh about” amusing scenes or relive embarrassing incidences.

Fourthly, there was a sense that television viewing was not only useful as a means of generating verbal interaction but also a necessary component for general inclusion in group dialogue. This finding echoed Livingstone and Bovill’s (1999) research in which 22% of children overall were found to watch television in order “not to feel left out”. The children indicated a sense of exclusion from social interaction through missing or being banned from watching films and programmes. This feeling was palpable in the case of Helen who admitted to bending the truth about her viewing seemingly to feel part of the group and to be included in peer discourse:

I: You’ve got South Park posters. Is that something you like to watch?

H: Well, I’ve never watched it before cos my Mum says like, she

heard the tape and she said 'Right, that's going back to the shop' and so she's not letting me watch that....

I: Do some people at school watch it?

H: Um, yeah. And they talk about it and I'm like "yes, I've seen that one"....I end up saying "Yes, I've seen that" and I haven't.

(Girl, S1, Corby)



Plate 9.9 TV as friend (Girl, P7, Wetheral)



Plate 9.10 'Sleepover' horror (Girl, S1, Corby)

In order to provide a clearer picture of the importance of 'media connections' and the sense of membership they provided, one particular film genre, horror, can be highlighted. The subject of horror films emerged with surprising regularity during the children's discussions of television material. One boy noted "we all watch scary movies" and for many of the children horror was mentioned as a favourite genre. Although television programmes, films and dramas in general were found to provide social links the emotional intensity of horror films seemed to exacerbate such effects:

J: I love horror... every time I go to a sleepover we always get like *Scream* and stuff like that.... I love them those films and my friends do too, I really like them... And like, it was my friend's birthday, I think it was quite a few weeks ago, and we got *Halloween*. And none of us had seen it so we were sitting in and we were like really SCREAMING at bits!...

(Girl, P7, Corby)

Watching “scary” films emerged as a participation event. The children appeared to derive a sense of emotional togetherness from viewing the films in a group and “really SCREAMING at bits”. In this way horror films seemed to provide the opportunity to engineer socially satisfying situations.

Buckingham (1996) has noted that the social context of viewing is a key factor in the pleasure of horror. As Jessica comments above, for the children in the current study most of the instances of horror viewing took place during “sleepovers” or as an S1 boy from Corby noted the time for viewing was “when all my friends come over”. Some of the photographs depicted groups of the children cosily snuggled in sleeping bags, or duvets while they watched horror films at a friend’s house (see Plate 9.10). In this way the intimacy and pleasure of the situation was demonstrated and firmly linked with the social nature of the experience. Further, reflecting Lull’s (1990) discussion of television being used for physical contact and Buckingham’s (1996) emphasis on the children’s sadistic pleasure of viewing other people’s fear, a number of the children discussed the pleasure of watching others getting “freaked out” when they jumped on them or rubbed wet hands over their faces.

Turning round Livingstone and Bovill’s (1999) notion of the television being used to avoid feeling ‘left out’, a number of the children in the study referred to the sense of inclusion provided through participation in horror related talk. Thus, one girl stressed that the real value of horror films was their memorability and the ability to tell others about them in school the next day:

I: What is it that you enjoy about horror films?

M: I dinnae really like being scared but it’s good to watch cos ya can sorta like remember it easier than a normal film and ya can go in and tell everybody about it.

(Girl, S1, Wetheral)

3.2.2 Music

I cannae stop playing music....

(Boy, P7, Wetheral)

Willis (1990) considers popular music to be young people's central cultural interest and that pop stars are, to some extent, symbolic vehicles with which the young learn to understand themselves more fully. Without doubt it would have been difficult to ignore the symbolic importance of pop stars and their music for both girls and boys. Even on an initial visual level the importance of popular music in children's lives was apparent. From *All Saints* to *Adam Rickett*, from *Britney Spears* to *Boyzone*, from *Steps* to *S Club Seven*, from *Westlife* to *Will Smith*, the children's interest in popular music dominated many of their bedroom photographs. In a large number of cases posters of favourite bands and pop stars encased their rooms like wallpaper, leaving no space uncovered (see Plate 9.12). Likewise when asked about their important possessions in their bedroom photos many of the children highlighted their "stereo", "CD player", "radio" or "discman". Some of the children talked about their treasured compact discs that they had collected. Others, applied 'symbolic creativity' (Willis, 1990) by meticulously compiling their own cassette tapes from the radio, particularly Radio One's long running Sunday night run down of the Top 40.

Music was important in their everyday life. It not only provided a background and framework to the day, but as in Lull's (1990) study of the social uses of television it served important affiliatory purposes. Music assisted membership in the peer group on a number of levels. Firstly, it provided a verbal connection or conversational resource between members of the peer group. Willis (1990:69) noted that the knowledge of lyrics, styles and genres was often used as coins of exchange in casual talk between young adults. Similarly Livingstone and Bovill (1999) found that 51% of 12 to 14 year olds talked about music tapes and CDs. For the children in this study who referred to themselves as "all like talking about new songs", chart music

also had exchange value. Thus, some of the boys discussed learning the lyrics of favourite songs while a number of the girls admitted to “learning” about pop stars and their lives through pop magazines.



Plate 9.11 Dance routines (Girl, S1, Corby)



Plate 9.12 Pop idols (Girl, S1, Wetheral)

Secondly, music provided a social resource and shared experience. Lull (1992) has noted that music may be gratifying not only through the provision of excitement, but also in serving as a means of demonstrating creativity. Reflecting this notion, the children regarded music as something to exchange, and play with friends often accompanied by the creation of individual dance routines (see Plate 9.11):

When my friends come over that's what I normally do, just sort of listen to music and dance to music.

(Girl, P7, Corby)

Thirdly, music provided shared interests and allegiances by which the children could establish links with other peers and confirm their group membership. Willis (1990:69) described popular music as the principal means by which young people define themselves through listening to music together, using it as a backdrop to their

lives and by expressing affiliation to particular taste groups. Certainly shared experiences and preferences for particular pop artists and groups provided social definition to the children in the present study. The children were, thus, able to establish their social status and ensure their group acceptance by joining in with their friends in their adoration of bands and solo artists. Thus, one girl below admitted that she had gone as far as putting up a poster of the pop star *Kavanagh* just for the benefit of her friends.

D: And I put Kavanagh up on my wall because Caroline loves him eh (smiles). And she was like “you have to get that poster up, you have to.” I was like “why?”. “Cos I’m always up here all the time so I want to see him on your wall”.

I: Is that part of it, having things on your wall that your friends like as well?

D: Aye because if they dunnae like it they will just go “aye Diane, you dunnae like him, and you said you liked him”....

(Girl, S1, Wetheral)

At the same time as conforming with peers’ tastes generally they were also able to express a degree of individuality by selecting their own favourite member within a pop band. This practice has been highlighted in advertising agency research (Matthews, 1995) and illustrates the essential dialectic between autonomy and affiliation in which children used music as a means of conforming to popular tastes but at the same time expressed their differentiation in claiming allegiance to a particular band member:

I like Five. I don’t like them all I just like Scott... Scott is the nicest.... I like him the best.

(Girl, P7, Corby)

Finally, it was noticeable that music served as a more poignant and meaningful social link for girls than boys in this age group. Although many of the boys expressed a high degree of interest in music and made comments such as “I listen to a lot of music”, in general they seemed less caught up in the fast moving fashions of the music arena and were more diverse in their music tastes. Thus, as well as

mentioning modern pop music, they were as likely to mention older bands in their lists of favourites, even long deceased musicians such as Bob Marley and John Lennon. They did not appear as intense or in some cases as indiscriminate about music as their female counterparts. Whereas one boy noted “I’m not into pop groups like my raging sister”, a more typical comment from the girls was likely to take an all encompassing form:

I like anything that’s in the charts. I’ve got everything that’s been in the charts!

(Girl, P7, private)

Comments such as this reflect the partially gendered nature of music experiences amongst children. At this age at least, music and pop stars themselves appear more central to the lives of girls and hence seemed to provide a more meaningful social link with peers.

3.2.3 Communication media and technologies

In keeping with the rapid rise of mobile handsets amongst 7-16 years olds to some 52% of girls and 44% of boys (Coates, 2001) the telephone emerged as a topic of extensive conversation. The girls, in particular those at private school, talked endlessly about keeping in touch through the use of mobile phones, pagers and e-mail. As in Livingstone and Bovill’s (1999) study such items were considered highly attractive signifiers of status, even as potent symbols of group membership. They discussed the growing elite who had telephones at school and mentioned their negotiations with parents to acquire their own handsets. Beyond the discussion of mobile phones, the humble land line telephone was also the subject of much discussion. The few who had a telephone in their bedroom mentioned it as one of their most important possessions, whilst less fortunate children remarked that the family phone was an integral part of their existence.

Livingstone and Bovill (1999) have noted that the pattern of telephone use changes and develops as children grow older. First they use it occasionally to talk to family. Then they begin to use it more often, and increasingly talk to friends rather than relatives. Then from simple calls to make arrangements they progress to chat. The children in the study, especially the girls, seemed to be using the telephone increasingly for these more advanced relational purposes. The telephone was closely associated with interactions amongst the peer group. The boys tended to use the phone to make arrangements to meet up with friends while the girls extended its use to simply “chat” to best friends and members of the opposite sex. Thus, although follow-up recriminations from parents about the level of telephone bills often tinged their enjoyment, a number of the girls boasted about the time they spent on the telephone speaking to friends:

She’s always on the phone ta me and I’m always on the phone ta her. Once we spent an hour on the phone! Just (about) school and everything.

(Girl, S1, Wetheral)

Another P7 girl from private school, when asked about her fears in life, commented “I couldn’t go on without my friends, and my telephone. No I’m just kidding about that!” Although she stressed that she was “just kidding”, the centrality of the telephone was more than just a joke. It acted as her link to the peer group, provided her with the admiration of friends, and emerged as a symbol of her social acceptance. Thus, the telephone itself seemed to serve relational functions on a number of levels. As the following quotation illustrates the telephone in her bedroom provided not only a unifying activity with friends, but also served as a symbol of her popularity, a facilitator of interactions with the opposite sex, and a means of emphasising close ties with her father:

I: Anything else that’s important to you in your room?

C: My telephone.... when people come over and they always use the phone in my bedroom. I ask my dad and I just say “I’m phoning somebody else”... My dad lets me use the telephone cos he always used to do it when he was young. He was just like me, he was mellow, he was really popular. When he was six he used to

have girls coming round to his house giving him chutneys and stuff. But we always phone from my bedroom, yeah...All the babes in the year! (Laughs). There's this boy called Neil who's really, really nice. You know we never phone our boyfriends because it just wouldn't be right and we'd feel uncomfortable talking to them so we just phone people who are like in other classes.

(Girl, P7, private)

Interestingly, despite the role of the telephone in easing more awkward interactions (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999), it seems that connectivity with others has its limits. Although engagement in conversation with the opposite sex was possible, even highly desirable, discussion with "boyfriends" was often avoided. The problem of talking to boyfriends in general was a fact highlighted by a number of the girls' when they noted the difficulty and embarrassment of these interactions. Such discussions seemed to be enjoyed more in theory than in practice making telephonic dialogue "uncomfortable".

We have seen how the theme of 'belonging' runs through children's lives. Possessions, including sports goods, brands and collections, and the media, including screen entertainment, music and communication media, allowed the children to concretise connections with others and to maintain their membership in the group. The next section turns to the subject of relationships and social roles in times of transition.

4. Becoming

The last section on 'belonging' considered the role of products, brands, media and activities in providing children with a sense of membership within the peer group. We now turn to the nature of affiliations in times of educational, social and sexual transition. One of the reasons for selecting children in Primary 7 and Secondary 1 was because it is a time of profound change. Children of this age are about to, or have just moved schools, they are moving towards the end of middle childhood and are about to enter the tumultuous teenage years, and they are facing or already

undergoing developments as they move into puberty. Physically, emotionally and cognitively they are facing a variety of changes and transitions. Psychological research has highlighted the volatility and uncertainty of these years as children move towards adolescence. According to Erikson's (1987) observations and clinical practice, children moving into adolescence face an 'identity crisis'. He considered that adolescents tended to go through a psychological or psychosocial 'moratorium', in which they were able to test out and experiment with different aspects of identity without finally committing themselves. However, in the search for identity problems and insecurities may arise through role confusion. This section highlights children's concern with establishing and developing new social roles, or as one girl termed it "what I was BECOMING to be".

4.1 Transitions

The volatility of this period of a child's life has been recognised by marketing practitioners and educational authorities alike. From a marketing perspective, Hobson (1999) has considered the implications of the transition from primary to secondary school in terms of the children's change in status and social environment as they move from being "king of the castle" to "one of the babies again". Similarly, a recent educational report has drawn attention to problems concerning the "physical and emotional changes" as children reach puberty and their coincidence with the move from primary to secondary school (HM Inspectors of Schools, 1997).

Procedures have been adopted by educational establishments in order to cope with children's "emotional changes" and, despite the lack of formal council policies on 'transition', cluster schools tend to negotiate arrangements for assisting pupils in the move to senior school. The schools entered during the fieldwork were certainly cognisant of the anxieties and fears of children at this stage and employed various strategies including basic liaison and transfer of information on pupils to their senior school, and visits to primaries by senior school staff to speak to new pupils. Also induction camps and extended visits were organised. Once the transition had taken place some schools used S2 'guides' to prevent new S1 classes getting 'lost' and

'buddy' systems were in place whereby more vulnerable children were linked with S5 or S6 pupils.

Aside from the schools' interest in such matters, the children themselves were highly cognisant of transitional issues. Many of the primary sevens spoke fearfully of the move into senior school, as one primary seven boy from Corby noted "High School's what we're most scared of". The girls were especially fearful of entering the new world of senior school and referred to the transition as "scary, scary". However, their concerns were similar to the boys in that they were worried about being bullied by "the big ones", being "flushed down the toilet", having "so much work to do", "getting lost" and "being split up from all my friends". The Secondary Ones also reflected on the dramatic changes they had faced over the last year referring to it as "a big sort of jump" and "it was a bit scary at the start". Indeed some informants echoed the sentiments of Hobson (1999) in regarding the enormity of the move from king of the castle to being one of the babies again:

I: What's it like coming to secondary school?

A: It's like going back to primary one. Um, like you think you're so big in primary seven and you go to first year and then it's like 'Oh, down the bottom of the school again', so you've got to like work back up to sixth year. It's quite weird - go to the top of the school, to the bottom again. It's strange.... like older people getting like, they bully you, all the young ones... and they go 'we're gonna do this to you' and that.... but in primary seven you could say that to all the younger people, but you can't do it any more.

(Girl, S1, Corby)

The wind of change was evident in the children's life world discussions as they talked about moving schools and adolescent issues. While these changes were not always welcomed by the children, there was nevertheless a sense of urgency and a need to 'become' quickly. This desire for maturity will be discussed in the next section.

4.2 Aspirational maturity

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.

(1 Corinthians 13: 11)

The move between childhood and adulthood in this biblical quotation highlights the need to put away childish ways. In so doing it also stresses the tendency of young people to focus on the future rather than the past (Bergadaa, 1990). Presented with the inevitability of becoming the children in the study reinforced their desire to ‘become’ older by also putting childish ways behind them and anticipating the future.



Plate 9.13 Jack Ryder Shrine (Girl, S1, Wetheral)



Plate 9.14 Drinking shandy (Boy, P7, Corby)

It was seen in chapter four that children appeared to be “getting older younger”. This section considers the way in which children were concerned to accelerate this process of ‘becoming’. They considered age differences, even being “two months older” as a matter of great importance. They eagerly looked forward to undertaking more mature roles, and their heroes and heroines were particularly illuminating in this regard. These admired figures, drawn mainly from the ranks of popular music,

sport, television and cinema were the subject of considerable identification and encompassed a very specific, aspirational age “between like 18 and 20 or 25 or something, young people”. Discussing the life stage of adolescence, Erikson (1987) notes that many adolescents overidentify with the heroes of cliques and crowds. This he views as an attempt to arrive at a definition of one’s identity by projecting one’s diffused ego-image on another and, thus, seeing it reflected and gradually clarified. The children in the current study demonstrated similar tendencies towards their heroes. They admired their heroes’ appearance, commented on their skills, and occasionally, as in the case of Monica’s “Jack Ryder Shrine” (see Plate 9.13), created areas in their rooms dedicated to the ‘worship’ of their heroes.

This identification with heroes stretched to the imaginative sharing of a character’s experience (Appleyard, 1991). Indeed there was considerable evidence of the wishful sentiment: “I’d like to be like them”. The great majority of the boys talked about the role of famous sportsman, particularly a footballer, as their ideal future occupation. They talked about young stars such as footballer Michael Owen, and golfer Tiger Woods, and a number imagined what it would be like when they were aged 18 and able to compete against them. For girls the overriding aim was to join a pop band and become one of the teenage stars currently riding high in the charts.

A: I like people like some of the younger singers. They’re quite good, like Billy and Britney Spears and people that are like TEENAGERS now. Younger singers are quite a good inspiration to people....when you’re girls, when you’re young as well.

(Girl, S1, Corby)

Looking beyond heroes and heroines aspirational maturity was also expressed through other interactions with the world around them. In relation to the ‘things’ in their lives there was an evident concern with ‘ageing up’. For example, many of the girls spoke about their interest in “teenage” items such as make-up and jewellery, while the boys highlighted the appeal of alcohol (see Plate 9.14), motorbikes (see Plate 9.15), cars and even ranges of deodorant for “going out”. Andrea was keen to emphasise the change in her shopping behaviour:

I used to do shopping in Kylie but I don't anymore, so I go into more like teenager shops like Bay Trading and Logo, Miss Selfridge, River Island, places like that.

(Girl, S1, Corby)

Brands themselves were seen to play a role in the desire to be older even in the preliminary step of moving into secondary school. As one S1 girl from Wetheral noted "it was only in Primary School that I never really wore brand names and that... a lot of people didn't wear brand names in Primary School... But at (senior school) like everyone wears it". Sometimes the steps taken in ageing up were quite tentative, as Kirsty suggests in explaining her love for certain sports clothing brands:

I: Is there a particular appeal of let's say Nike?

K: Well, um, I think, well it really kinda started when I got, I think it was just a plain white shirt cos we had to wear them at my old school, but I had a little Adidas sign on. And I hadn't been like very sporty, I'd been like Barbie and all that, and THEN my sister like went mental about football and I kinda joined on with her and then I got this white shirt and it had the Adidas sign and I thought that it looked quite nice. And then like my sister was going to sports shops looking at the new strips and stuff and I saw these shirts and thought "Oh it would be quite nice, they are a change from Minnie Mouse pink ones" and, I mean, OK, it was probably a PINK Adidas one that I saw at the time but it was kinda what, partly what I was BECOMING to be and partly what I WAS....

(Girl, P7, private)

Thus, for Kirsty, the pink Adidas shirt represented a combination of what she "was" and what she was "becoming". The "little Adidas sign" emerged as her guiding star in times of uncertainty and change. For others brand names were directly linked with the desire to take on more mature roles. Many of the boys and girls entering S1 had begun to reject brands which they associated with younger children and started to choose brands they considered more grown-up and desirable. In this way 'becoming' a teenager encouraged a new relationship with brand names and certain brands emerged as tickets of entry into a more mature social world.



Plate 9.15 Motorbikes (Boy, S1, Wetheral)



Plate 9.16 Magazines (Girl, S1, Wetheral)

Looking beyond possessions the children's interactions with, and uses of, the media also emphasised their desire to be older. Their interest in horror, as in Buckingham's (1993) analysis, seemed to be linked to adult aspirations. Other programmes also served more mature needs with boys and girls deliberating upon the need to move from child associated material to more mature offerings: "I used to always watch the cartoon channel but now I normally watch the sport and the film channels, so I've kind of grown out of that". The notion of 'growing out of' media material was also evident in the selection of magazines (see Plate 9.16). As one girl noted:

F: Sometimes I get *Smash Hits*... *Mizz*, yeah, I like that..... I don't like *Shout* cos that's just for like ten year olds, and I'm eleven.

(Girl, P7, private)

In addition, interactive media like the internet provided an intriguing opportunity to test out 'being older'. In this light one boy referred to his internet alter ego as a blond haired nineteen year old:

B: We go into the chatroom and say we're 'nineteen', blond curtains, we're in like say we're in college and all. It's funny though, on the net, cos you can just say anything you want and they can never find out.

(Boy, S1, Corby)

The idea "just saying anything you want" and effectively being anyone you want was very appealing to internet users. Indeed the boy's internet experiences reflect Erikson's (1987) adolescent concern with the search for psychosocial identity and the passage through a psychosocial moratorium. Through becoming a nineteen year old with "blond curtains" he is able to test out and try on different identities without commitment.

Perhaps surprisingly aspirational maturity was also accompanied by a less expected concern with the past. For the girls in particular "becoming" was not only a matter of looking forward but also of thinking back on their own history. For example, the girls actively revisited childhood artefacts in their contemplation of important possessions. Planners within the advertising agency J Walter Thompson have described the way German girls' return to Barbie in a spirit of self-knowing kitsch (Eden, 2000). Similarly reflective, if more violent, experiences were discussed by a number of the girls who related the elaborate destruction and dismembering of their once favourite toys.

C: I don't buy Barbies anymore. They're all dead....

S: I torture mine.

C: I hung them at Halloween. All their hair's cut as well. They're all GI Janes.

(Girls, P7, private)

While such dismemberment no doubt entailed a considerable amount of humour, it also suggests an intimate concern with the self and personal history. This consideration of things from the past was found to be a significant aspect of the children's engagement with the world around them. In essence a number of the children were emotionally reflective about their lives, and the objects that reminded them about the past. Studies into the meaning of 'things' have noted the importance

of possessions in reflecting on the past. For example Dittmar's (1992) exploration of the meaning of favourite possessions amongst adults noted the category of "personal history". However, whilst an interest in personal history fits well with life span developmental theories relating to older adults and senior citizens (Erikson, 1987), its relevance for children does not seem to have been fully explored.

Nevertheless some girls, and a few boys, placed considerable importance on the past. A number of girls avidly wrote entries in "fluffy" diaries and journals. Other children placed considerable importance on possessions in their bedrooms "from years and years ago" and even from when they were "first born" or still "a baby". In this way a variety of objects including old photographs, toys, and soft toys were at the top of the list of important possessions emerging as both symbols of self continuity and mementoes of past events, including holidays, trips to the fair, and what it was like to be a baby:

My photos from my time in Australia "they remind me of the past... looking at them you just remember stuff".

(Boy, P7, Wetheral)

It (teddy) makes me think what it was like when I was a baby cos I like don't really remember. My mum and dad say I was crying all the time and I don't know how cos I'm normally a happy person.

(Boy, P7, private)

E: That (teddy) I've had all my life.... he's the main one really. He's upstairs and falling apart a bit, he's got I think it's his right ear, it's sort of chewed.... they just sort of mean a lot cos I've had them for so long.

(Girl, S1, private)

This, and other images, of old teddies, chewed and dilapidated, but still high in the affections of their owners, was reflected in many of the girls' bedroom photographs and their discussion of them. One of the S1 girls from Corby, Helen, had even gone so far as to keep a personal chest of old treasures under her bed. Claiming proudly "I've done it all my life", the box housed a variety of objects including "the stuff I do like if I go somewhere... I've got my first ever marble in it... shells from Majorca...".

In this way the children's, particularly the girls', engagement with their world had a decidedly reflective nature in that they held on to and sentimentally looked back on their personal history.

The desire to be older, even if this involved reflecting back on the past, was an important part of the children's lives. We saw in this section how one boy associated being older with appearance and having 'blond curtains'. In addition the girls used make-up, and wore jewellery to appear older. Matters of appearance in times of transition will be discussed in the following section.

4.3 Appearance: "Looking goood!"

The children revealed an increasing interest in what they were becoming physically. Many of the boys and girls referred to their appearance, as well as their desire to be attractive to the opposite sex. One S1 boy from Corby pointed out that he had written the catch phrase "Looking Gooood!" on his mirror so that he could be reminded of his physical attributes. While there was an element of humour in his actions, his interest in physical appearance, particularly muscular development (see Plate 9.17), had serious undertones. He later revealed that he had a secret weapon in his strivings for body enhancement:

B: I've got a secret of what I'm getting for my birthday.... I'm not to tell the other boys. It's er I might be getting one of those muscle tensor things. You know, the pads. They're like a circle of pads and you put them around and they tense your muscles up!

I: Is that an ambition to have muscles?

B: Six pack and muscles, yeah!

(Boy, S1, Corby)



Plate 9.17 'Six-Pack' (Boy, S1, Corby)



Plate 9.18 Appearance (Girl, S1, Corby)

In general the girls were even more concerned with matters of appearance (see Plate 9.18). They spoke about the need to be “thin” and “look good” rather than “fat and yukky”. As one S1 girl from Corby stressed “I don’t want to turn out a big fat blob”. This desire to be attractive suffused many aspects of their lives, in some cases even their dreams:

D: I had a dream.... I was FAT and I was walking along... and then I pricked myself by accident and it burst ma stomach. And I go on and everything I have to walk across this wee strand of line, and I’m not fat anymore.... that’s why I want to go on a diet cos since I’ve had that dream I’ve always been like trying to lose weight. Cos when I was a baby I was the heaviest out of ma wee sister and brother eh when I was a baby. And I was like always fat, and I was chubby on ma cheeks... I realised that if I grow fat I’m gonna be hoorible and everything. And that’s why I try to keep thin...

(Girl, S1, Wetheral)

Aside from being a rather disturbing dream for a girl of this age, it also highlights a major concern in her life with appearance and particularly her weight. These

concerns about appearance seemed to be related to the children's growing awareness and interest in the opposite sex. The specific means by which the children scanned members of the opposite sex will be discussed next.

4.4 Scanning the opposite sex

The children's interest in the opposite sex, even if hesitant amongst some of the younger boys who claimed "I don't like girls" or "I'm not really interested in girls", was undoubtedly blooming amongst many of the informants. Both the girls and the boys were becoming increasingly aware of emerging gender roles, and displayed an augmenting interest in finding out about and exploring the opposite sex. In particular it is possible to highlight two rather different roles undertaken by the children. Firstly the children indicated an interest in sexual exploration, and, secondly, they highlighted the importance of romantic or "lovey dovey" connections with members of the opposite sex.

4.4.1 Sexual exploration

Recent media offerings aiming to tap into girls' interest in the opposite sex at this age (McCann, 2001) have been accused of sexualising children. However, there was ample evidence in the study that many of the children were already interested in sexual roles. Certainly there were innumerable examples of the girls discussing their admiration of "good looking", "gorgeous", "tidy" pop stars and sporting heroes. As the following example illustrates, this interest sometimes took a more practical line:

I: Tell me about the disco?

F: ... Gary was there, I was dancing with him. Yeah, his hand was there, it was sweating, like his hands were horrible and he had them there (indicates). I had those bits there against his neck. Oh God it was horrible! And then I got dared to kiss him by the couple beside us so I did and his cheek was horrible. It was like slid down straight away!.....

(Girl, P7, private)



Plate 9.19 The female body 1 (Boy, S1, Corby)



Plate 9.20 The female body 2 (Boy, S1, Corby)

The girl's "horrible" interaction with a member of the opposite sex at a school disco was in fact one of the few descriptions of sexual experience. However, in general, discussion with the boys tended to have a more sexual edge largely due to prompts provided in the boys' bedroom photographs. In a number of cases posters in their bedrooms seemed to indicate a more advanced appreciation of the (often semi-naked) female body (see Plates 9.19 and 9.20) although further details about the appearance of "Jenny McCarthy" and the character Lara Croft in the video game Tombrailer were rarely provided. The boys' evident though largely unspoken interest in sexual matters was overshadowed by the girls' readiness to speak about their romantic affiliations.

4.4.2 Falling in love: Being "lovey dovey"

Erikson (1987) considers that the tendency to overidentify in adolescence initiates the stage of 'falling in love'. As with the strong feelings of identification with heroes and opinion leaders, falling in love emerges as a means of concretising one's identity. According to Erikson adolescents project their uncertain ego-image on

another in order to see it reflected and gradually clarified. For the children in the study, particularly the girls, falling in love was not so much a concern of future adolescence but a very tangible aspect of their pre-adolescent lives.

The girls' interest in the opposite sex was generally framed within a concern for love, relationships and romance which often played a very prominent role in their lives. The term "lovey dovey" initially emerged from one of the early focus groups. However, the notion was found to have relevance for many of the girls in the study and manifested itself in a number of ways. Firstly, while Dittmar (1992), Kamptner (1991) and Csikszentimihaly and Rochberg Halton (1981) found that females tended to focus on possessions symbolising relational ties, the girls in the current study went further in focusing on the specific love links symbolised by possessions. Many of the girls spoke about the importance of possessions in their rooms which symbolically attached them to their "boyfriends". Some of the girls pointed out photographs of 'boyfriends' or admired males. In a few other cases girls proudly showed the researcher treasured gifts that they had been given by boyfriends such as teddy bears, perfumes, Easter Eggs and chocolates:

J. disappeared upstairs to retrieve her latest 'important possession' that she wanted to show me. She returned looking flushed and excited holding in one hand a small framed photo of a dark haired boy which she passed to me explaining that it was her 'boyfriend'. In the other hand she was grasping a transparent gift box holding little boxes of scent and two small teddy bears. She seemed unwilling to pass it round for inspection and carefully held it in her hands whilst blushing revealing that it was a gift from Jake for Valentine's Day. The others had obviously seen the items before but cooed in unison exclaiming that it was such a "lovely" present.

(Field notes, girls, P7, Corby)

Secondly, beyond symbolic objects representing loved ones, the girls revealed that they spent much time thinking and talking about people who they "fancied". Several of the girls took part in secretive creative acts in which "fancied" people were considered, established and finally displaced. Of particular note is the love ritual played by two of the P7 girls in Wetheral. An initial inspection of their bedroom photos revealed an intricate array of pieces of paper stuck to the walls. These pieces of paper were covered with artistically written names, decorative swirls

and flashes of colour. In interview the girls described how they ceremoniously wrote their own names and those of admired individuals on pieces of paper. These were then coloured, decorated and pinned to the walls by their beds. They were highly protective over these written declarations of love and talked about the embarrassment of parents or siblings coming into their rooms and reading the names they had written. Perhaps not surprisingly then the girls were initially unwilling to divulge the details about this ritual, but their eventual descriptions, alongside blushing accounts of “sweet” boys and “boys that you fancy”, indicated an emotional depth and intensity concerning the opposite sex which the researcher had not expected amongst this age group.

Finally, some of the girls seemed to be absorbed in the expansive subject of love and romance. They talked persistently about the concrete particulars of love mentioned above, including hearts, roses, cuddly toys and gifts. In this light one of the P7 girls in Corby coined the term “lovey dovey” in respect of her best friend who was currently besotted with one of the boys at school and could talk and think about nothing else but love:

J: She’s a lovey-dovey person.

L: Ever since she met you know who....

(Girls, P7, Corby)

In this case and others, the girls seemed immersed in almost an aura of romance, and this emotional response seemed to frame their interaction with friends and their consumption of the media generally. In one poignant example the same “lovey-dovey” girl, supported by her friends, explained the seemingly large divide between her enthusiasm for ‘scary’ horror films and the theme of romance she had built into her life:

I: It seems very different from kind of love hearts and roses that you’re also into horror. How can you explain that it’s such a big contrast to your love of cuddly toys, hearts and things?

A: Well it’s just sort of cool... Like they somehow go together in a way because...

J: Because if you’re scared then you can turn to him and he can sit there and go “it’s OK, it’ll be OK”.

A: It just sort of goes together.

I: Well tell me a bit more about that?

A: Cos like if you're watching a horror movie and you're at the cinema with your boyfriend. And then like you can...

J: Sort of go "oooooh".

A: You can still be really nice and you can still enjoy the movie. They just sort of go really well together.

(Girl, P7, Corby)

As can be seen the experience of horror was framed within the romantic notion of togetherness and reassurance. Even though it is highly unlikely that any of girls would have watched an 18 rated horror film in a cinema, they were able to imagine and vicariously experience what it would be like to watch a film in this way. Perhaps here it is possible to highlight the use of oppositional readings (Hall, 1993) seen most prominently in cultural studies research. Although Amber is describing a genre intended by the producers to shock and induce fear, she has applied to the experience an oppositional response focusing on romance. The experience of horror through her "lovey dovey" eyes, thus, becomes not about fear but about love.

4.5 Gender identity

'Gender identity' can be seen to refer primarily to an individual's awareness of self as male or female. Many writers, however, use the term 'sex-role identity' to refer to the acquisition of a set of standards for appropriate masculine or feminine behaviour (Smith, Cowie and Blades, 1998). According to cognitive development theory, and particularly the work of Kohlberg (1966; 1969), children's growing sense of gender identity is vital to sex-role identification. Children observe and imitate same-sex models and follow activities known to be sex-appropriate, because they realise that this is what a child of their own sex generally does. This section will consider how children's awareness of themselves as male or female was apparent in their interactions with possessions and the media.

4.5.1 Gender identity and Possessions

In line with findings amongst both adult and child samples carried out by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg Halton (1981), Dittmar (1992) and Kamptner (1991), the children's selection of important possessions appeared to be closely tied in with traditional gender differences. Dittmar (1992) notes that men and women share concerns with functional and use related features of possessions but men refer more strongly to instrumental and activity related features whereas women focus more on emotional, relational and symbolic aspects of possessions. In the present study the boys' discussion of important possessions placed considerable, and often complete, emphasis on active and functional possessions through the selection of sports related items, televisions, stereos, games consoles and creative projects. The girls, while still noting the importance of functional and activity related items, such as stereos and televisions, also referred to cuddly toys, ornaments, dolls (see Plate 9.21) and other possessions reflecting emotional attachments and links with other people. As one girl revealed in her discussion of favourite toys:

I love cuddling them ... when it's horrible and raining and stuff and you can't go out and play I just sit there with my big cuddly toys and I cuddle them and I go to sleep.

(Girl, P7, Corby)

In addition establishing gender identity seemed to play some role in the collection of themed possessions. Olmsted (1991) has noted the decline in collecting as children enter adolescence. In the current study the boys' tendency to collect already appeared to be a dwindling activity. Many of the boys spoke mockingly about collecting using the past tense, and referred to it as something they "used" to do. Part of the reason for this lessening interest may have been the perception of collecting as an essentially feminine activity at this age. Certainly the girls noted the female orientation of collecting as a hobby:

I: You said it's all the girls in your class collect things?

C: Some of the boys, but not really, cos they're more interested in football and boring stuff like that.

I: Why do you think the girls collect things?

C: I dunno. It's just a girls thing I think... it's just like that.

(Girl, P7, private)

The perception of collecting as a gendered activity may explain why the boys were less likely to talk about the activity of collecting, it may also shed light on why those boys who did collect seemed concerned to highlight the masculinity of their gathered goods, whether sports, media, or toy related. In the case of his Warhammer collection one boy noted:

G: This is my Warhammer board which has advanced since I took this picture cos it's now got a bit of wood underneath it. So it doesn't flop, as much. This is kinda like ma main hobby, minus ma flute. And, well this is kinda, everybody does this, this is kinda like the number one, it's like Barbies for girls, that kinda thing... But this is what, everybody I know does this, so I decided to start collecting. And I find it really, really good fun.

(Boy, P7, Corby)

In emphasising the popularity of his collection amongst what we take to be his male friends, and saying that it is "like Barbies for girls", Graham seems to imply that Warhammer (see Plate 9.22) is essentially masculine.

Beyond their focus on the acquisition and ownership of items in their bedrooms, the means by which the children, especially the boys, interacted with traditionally male and female possessions reflected a deeper need to demonstrate and even ritualise their expected gender roles. Thus, the boys in particular seemed concerned to condemn 'feminine' toys such as *My Little Pony*, *Cindy* or *Barbie* to a series of gruesome demises, involving by turns "razors", "butchers knives", or as in the following example, the hangman's noose:

A: (I) set up this wee torture thing. It was like my sister's got a Barbie houseand she's got this wee thing on the roof. So I put a Barbie doll on a chair, then I put a bike on the roof with rope

attached to the seat of the bike, then I put the other end of the rope round the Barbie doll's neck. (Laughs). And then I rode the bike down the roof. (Laughs so much he almost chokes).

P: Pull all their hairs out!

A: And there goes the Barbie doll and then my sister comes in and she goes "STOP IT!"....

B: I've got them hanging from my roof, wee Barbie dolls going "urrrrgh" (laughs).

(Boys, S1, Corby)



Plate 9.21 Dolls (Girl, P7, Corby)



Plate 9.22 Warhammer (Boy, P7, Corby)

Finally the significant role played by possessions in assisting the establishment of gender identity was reflected in their relationship with branded goods, especially clothes. The use or avoidance of certain brands emerged as a useful means of enhancing gender identity. Thus, one informant reflected on the social meanings of different brand names highlighting one particular name he chose to avoid:

B: Kappa's getting a bit slagged, well it was.... And anybody that wore that used to get like totally slagged... I think there was some story there, the person who made Kappa was gay or something so they all think the whole thing's gay or something.

(Boy, S1, Corby)

Clearly 'Kappa' was tainted in the eyes of Boris by its associations with the gay community. It was no longer a label which symbolised his traditional view of masculinity. Indeed it had become an item of avoidance and ridicule within his peer group. Interestingly his shift to the past tense, "well it was" in reference to the name being ridiculed, suggests the rapid movement of meaning in this highly symbolic category of goods. It could well be the case that just a few weeks later this same brand might have held very different symbolic meanings.

4.5.2 Gender Identity and the Media

The media, like possessions, served as an important means of demonstrating appropriate gender behaviour. In keeping with Livingstone and Bovill's (1999) examination of media within children's bedrooms, the boys and girls in the current study both had high ownership levels of televisions and stereos. However, their bedroom photographs also highlighted the ownership and enjoyment of gendered media. For example while only one girl emphasised the importance of her Gameboy, almost a third of the boys stressed the significance of their games console. For a number of the boys this action-centred toy emerged as their most highly regarded possession of all.

Further gender roles were highlighted through their use of the media, particularly the television. The boys spoke most enthusiastically about entertainment and action related material such as action and horror films, sport, and comedy shows. While the girls shared their enjoyment of some similar material they also discussed programmes with a more emotional and relational emphasis, particularly dramas and soap operas. This interaction with the media reflects a range of research within Cultural Studies exploring gendered consumption of the media (Radway, 1987; Ang, 1985). Further patterns of gendered media consumption seemed to be firmly engrained into the children's psyche. At times men and women were even described first and foremost in terms of their media habits, as the following example indicates:

I: Tell me a bit about your family?

P: Ma mum works at Tesco and ma dad's a joiner. And ma dad's always just sitting on the couch watching telly. Ma mum's always cleaning the dishes and that and watching Coronation Street and Eastenders. Dad always watches football and horse racing and golf, and that's about it.

(Boy, P7, Wetheral)

Within the media generally there was also some illuminating discussion concerning the sexuality of celebrities. Cathy announced her affection for chat show host Graham Norton in dramatic format:

C: I'm in love with him! And he's GAY! (Does a pretend cry). And now his series has finished ages ago as well and I can't survive!

(Girls, P7, private)

Although her distress takes a humorous format, the boys' discussion of such matters seemed to have more serious undertones. Indeed the discussion of gay celebrities seemed to play an important role in underlining their desired masculinity. For example, one boy highlighted a ritual whereby his friends would identify and humiliate gay celebrities:

I: What makes you laugh when you're with your mates?

W: Jokes, telling jokes. Oh and another thing, taking the mickey out of folk on the TV. Like you'll pick a celebrity and we'll just sit and take the mickey out of them. Like we just found out Steven Gately is you ken gay, so we sat and ripped him one day to pieces. And how we all wished it was Ronan Keating and no him. We just sat and took the mickey outta him....

I: So can you think of the last occasion when that happened, when you were all sitting together doing that?

W: At school when K. got the idea and that we took a pen and paper and wrote down every single celebrity that we knew was like gay. And we sat and wrote down a list and it was like this size (stretches his hands out as wide as he can).

(Boys, S1, Wetheral)

This concern with issues of sexuality has similarly been noted amongst 11-15 year old boys' in their consumption of music (Hogg and Bannister, 2000). The dedication

with which the boys undertook such rituals seemed to underline the importance of sexuality matters and gender defence amongst the children, and particularly the boys.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the children exhibited a second existential concern for affiliation which often opposed the more individualistic drive for autonomy. Three dimensions were described including bonding, belonging and becoming. Firstly, the theme of bonding was reflected in the children's concern with connections and relationships with friends. While friendships were comparable across the schooling locations indicating, for example, a shared interest in humour, there were obvious gender differences. These variations related to the boys' interaction in larger groups and the girls' concentration on a best friend. There was evidence that the boys focused more on 'doing', shared activity in a competitive setting and friendship continuity. The girls spoke about friendship in a more emotional light. While they also discussed shared activities their attention was more concentrated on aspects of sharing and togetherness. Their relationships were more volatile with a greater focus on the intensity and intimacy through communication and sharing secrets.

Secondly, the children were described in terms of their expressed need to belong to groups. Social links and group membership were sought and demonstrated through interactions with the concrete particulars of their lives. Children's central consumption concerns were highlighted in this regard. In terms of possessions football related materials were especially popular amongst the boys and played an important role in their affiliations with other members of the peer group. Brands, particularly those relating to sports fashion, played a role in social identity and group membership and allowed the children to conform to social tastes and to be like the 'others'. "Fake" sports brands, and even some own label brands, served to differentiate the user as an outsider. Collections likewise played an important role in constructing social ties, especially for girls with the 'right' collections securing membership within the peer group.

The media also played an important role in belonging. In terms of screen media many regarded the television as a friend which acted to confirm connections and differences according to socially endorsed viewing tastes and habits. Many children referred to discussions of favourite screen material with friends, while others spoke of being 'left out' when they had missed a socially important programme. In addition music was ingrained into many of the children's social lives. For girls it was a central cultural interest and link with the wider peer group emerging as a conversational resource, a shared creative experience and a means of expressing similar tastes. Finally communication media were again especially important in the girls' lives. Mobile phones were aspirational possessions for many of the children, and telephones in general emerged as important relational resources.

Thirdly, the children highlighted the importance of becoming and taking up new social roles in a time of their lives characterised by educational, social and sexual transition. Becoming was emphasised through their aspirations for maturity and 'ageing-up' seen in their identification with media stars, and their move to 'mature' brands and media genres. In some cases it took a reflective form, thus, for girls in particular, transitions were characterised by a concern with the past and personal history. Further, the children expressed their growing interest and sometimes apprehension relating to physical changes and attraction to others. They highlighted issues related to appearance and scanned members of the opposite sex through sexual exploration and romantic involvement. Finally the children established their gender identity through the interactions with possessions and the media. The boys demonstrated stronger links with active and functional items while the girls' important possessions emphasised emotional attachments and social links. In addition the boys highlighted their gender roles through the rejection of feminine toys and certain branded goods. Similarly gender roles were established through the enjoyment and discussion of particular media genres and celebrities.

Following on from the exploration of affiliation, the next chapter considers the role of this existential concern in children's advertising experiences.

CHAPTER TEN

AFFILIATION AND ADVERTISING EXPERIENCES

1. Introduction

The discussion of children's existential concerns highlighted the importance of affiliation to them and considered the meta-theme in terms of three main elements: bonding, belonging and becoming. This focus on affiliation has echoes in the marketing and advertising literature. Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) have highlighted the role of brands in the construction of social identity. Similarly Ritson and Elliott (1999) have described sixth formers' social uses of advertising and the discursive elaboration occurring in the form of literacy events. This chapter will return to the three dimensions of affiliation, and consider their relationship to children's advertising experiences.

2. Bonders

Chapter eight discussed the children's perception of advertising as omnipresent and sometimes intrusive. Some of the children even put their fingers in their ears and buried their heads in the sitting room furniture in order to avoid reception. However, as Ritson and Elliott (1999) have noted, it is the ubiquitous presence of the genre within the culture as a whole which forms the essential grounding for the social uses of advertising. Advertising has both vertical and horizontal ubiquity in that an individual often sees an ad numerous times, and advertising is experienced across a wide number of individuals and groups. It is this shared experiential basis that makes advertising accessible as a social resource and applicable in terms of bonding, belonging and becoming. On a basic level then advertising was at least in a position

to function as a linkage or shared experience between the children and the other people in their lives.

To what extent did the children's interactions with advertising reflect their need to bond? The 'bonding' section in the last chapter discussed the changing form and nature of children's bonds and relationships with others. It considered the gradual move from parental to peer ties, and described the developing relationship of children with their friends, highlighting the importance of "fun", shared interests, and intimacy. The following section will discuss the relevance of these 'bonding' themes in terms of children's advertising experiences in the group discussions.

2.1 The move from parents to peers

In line with the apparent growth in importance of the peer group the children admitted to making very few ad based interactions with their parents. When these interactions were referred to they generally centred round the reception of ads during family television viewing. O' Donohoe's (1994b) differentiation between marketing and non-marketing uses is useful in this respect as, in general, advertising interaction with parents centred around marketing uses. In particular parents seemed concerned that children should be able to use advertising to derive meaningful information about products. Girls mentioned this type of interaction more often than boys, perhaps reflecting their greater emphasis on talking about the media in general, or even greater parental concern about the influence of advertising on them. Thus, Elly, an S1 girl in private school revealed how her mother would explain to her how insurance ads were a "load of sprack". Cathy revealed that she had conversations with her parents concerning the relevance of ads to the product being advertised. For example her mother had recently explained the relevance of Dennis Hopper's past performance in the film *Easy Rider* to his appearance on a motorbike in a Ford ad.

Buckingham (1993) discussed the reversed causality of children's advertising viewing in which children actively watch ads in order to generate product requests for parents. In the current study ads in magazines and catalogues were particularly

popular in this respect in the run up to Christmas and birthdays. Television ads seemed to serve as more public prompting devices to inform or remind parents about desired products. Thus, one senior girl in private school referred to the heated family conferences which occurred every time a mobile phone ad appeared during shared television viewing. The ad served as a prompt for Lisa to remind her parents that she desperately wanted a phone but the resulting arguments and disagreements reflected Lull's (1990) findings concerning the conflict surrounding the television.

Ad based interactions with parents were presented as infrequent events. While the children may simply have been unwilling to discuss such interactions during the focus groups, the greater focus on ad based bonding with friends seems consistent with developing peer bonds discussed in the last chapter. During the focus groups it was possible to examine these friendship ad discussions in practice. Interactions appeared to reflect joint concerns with "fun" and humour, as well as the gendered nature of bonding. These types of bonding interactions will be addressed in terms of the relevant roles adopted by the children as Ad Players, Storytellers and Experiencers.

2.2 Ad Players

The importance of "fun" in children's relationships with peers was highlighted earlier. Friends were described as people who you laugh with and were "fun" to be with, and who enjoyed similar activities and interests. Further their interactions with the media in general suggested a keen involvement with humorous material which could be laughed over with friends. For the children in the study advertising also seemed to provide "fun" material for concretising bonds with friends in terms of three main aspects.

Firstly, Mathews (1995) has noted that children often use advertising for pure entertainment. Many of the children in the present study expressed that advertising provided considerable enjoyment, some even suggesting than ads were superior to other programming:

E: My favourite programmes really are adverts actually! (Laughs).
Cos they're just like, most of them are just so unique and different
and things.

(Girls, S1, private)

Interestingly the most enthusiastic expressions of ad enjoyment tended to come from the private school children, and some from Corby. Indeed it seemed that while the level of critical ad discourse may have been higher in these schools, the desire to tap into advertising enjoyment was also stronger than for the children in Wetheral. Thus, the S1 girls from private school, who were some of the most ardent critics of advertising, were later keen to express that ads provided an entertaining social resource. They discussed evenings spent with friends avoiding boring programmes by "flicking through the channels watching all the ads". Although these critical and entertainment focused dispositions towards advertising may seem contrary, their descriptions of advertising enjoyment provided further illumination. Enjoyment seemed to comprise both elements of pure hedonism and fun alongside the already noted desire for autonomy. In this way when the children spoke about having fun with ads within the peer groups they were most often referring to a form of critical, playful enjoyment conveyed through words such as "stupid", "scaffy" and "dumb". Thus, in keeping with Buckingham's (1993) finding that pleasure was often conveyed in tones of parody or mockery, the children in the current study regularly regarded advertising as something to laugh at rather than with.

Secondly, the social application of advertising for entertainment purposes was highlighted by the fact that the majority of the ads written on the children's ad lists, and raised for discussion during the group sessions, were selected because they were "funny". In addition their distinction as humorous was provided as the main reason for liking both individuals executions and ads in general. Such findings are consistent with findings by academics (Goldstein, 1993) and within advertising agencies (Mathews, 1995) where it has been shown that humour is cited by children and adolescents as the most desirable characteristic of favourite television commercials.

Thirdly, as already touched upon in the emergence of children as 'Performance Masters' and to be highlighted further in the discussion of 'belonging', advertising was often seen to provide a variety of forms of 'fun' and playful interaction (Reid and Fraser, 1980a, b; Buckingham, 1993). During the focus groups the children imitated scenes and characters in advertisements through physical re-enactments, application of accents and voices, recreation of ad dialogue, and singing of jingles and theme tunes. This division of advertising into its semantic parts is congruent with Ritson and Elliott's (1999) findings. However, the sense of 'fun' derived from this interaction with elements of ads has received little attention in the literature. The level of enthusiasm and accomplishment with which these reenactments were performed suggested two things. Firstly, that similar social enjoyment and play with ads took place on a regular basis, a fact confirmed by their discussion of ad play and performances outside the focus groups. Secondly, that these social activities fulfilled a very real bonding need for the children. In essence, through ad play and the ensuing laughter the children seemed to strengthen friendship relationships.

2.3 Gendered ad bonding: Storytellers and Experiencers

Certainly ads, like television, music and even real life situations, provided endless material for hedonistic activity and entertainment, however, they further allowed the children to demonstrate other dimensions of their social relationships. Attention was given in the last chapter to the nature of friendships for children of ten to twelve. It was found that friendships amongst boys and girls differed. In particular boys were seen to associate in larger groups focusing on skills such as competition and leadership, while the girls associated in pairs and smaller groups emphasising exclusiveness and intimacy. This gendered bonding with friends seemed to have implications for the children's advertising experiences.

Firstly, the boys emerged as Storytellers. Their advertising interaction reflected the broader social context of friendship groups and their experiences seemed to be bound up with Stern's (2000) consideration of gendered styles of reading and interacting

with advertising. In particular the boys were keen to emphasise the informational elements of the text and the intent of the teller as central elements of group interaction. In this way they were more likely to speak about the ad as a story or humorous anecdote to be accurately retold and shared with other members of the group using introductory phrases such as “It goes like this right...”. There was much focus on plot lines and the structure of the advertising text leading up to the climax of the story. Thus, when discussing ads there was regular reference to discrete sections within the plot and the chronological sequence of events. For example, one boy spoke about a favoured ad for Smirnoff Vodka as follows:

G: At the beginning the guy jumps through a door and he gets shot and then the camera like goes behind a Smirnoff bottle and then he's really climbing out of like a hole in the ground on a ship. And then it goes round it again and he's like underneath a train going along. And then at the end it goes back to the same picture and the bullet's really like a bee just flying about. And it's quite it's quite clever.

(Boy, S1, private)

The emphasis on story and structure is seen in Geoff's use of terms such as “at the beginning” and “at the end”, and the focus on chronology is provided through the repetitive application of “and then...”. In addition Greg refers to the ad as “quite clever”. The application of this evaluative comment suggests an emphasis on the ability of the author to convey a message to the audience. Certainly the boys as a whole were keen to judge and assess authorial intent. Thus, while a disliked execution might be referred to as having “nay point in it”, a favourite ad was likely to be described as being “well thought out”, containing a “strong message” which “gets the point through quite well”.

Throughout their interaction with friends in the focus groups, the boys highlighted not only their use of ads as purposeful stories to be retold, but also their focus on entertaining others. This form of group based interaction was apparent across a wide range of products. For example the following retelling of an ad focuses on Mercurial football boots:

S: Well there's the bucktooth bunny Ronaldo (others giggle as he bares his teeth) and he's in the woods and he's got his boots and his ball. And he puts the ball down and he steps on the ball. And then these goal nets, the goals start running out of the bush and he starts chasing them. And then he shoots and gets it in the goals. And then at the end of the advert he's sitting there like this (imitates him with big Bugs Bunny teeth, others smile). And then the goals are on the wall!

(Boys, P7, private)

Stuart's description of the ad emphasises chronological detail but also seems designed to amuse his friends through the use of imitation. Indeed in many of their retellings of ads the boys emerged as both purposeful and humorous raconteurs. In this sense there are consistencies with gendered reading styles highlighted in literary theory and research (Appleyard, 1991).

For the girls, advertising interaction in friendship groups seemed to reflect the closer context of ad talk with a best friend. They emerged as Experiencers. Although they were also able to retell the plot lines of ads, for them advertising seemed to be a more intimate and exclusive experience focusing less on authorial intent and more on their personal involvement with the text and observation of detail. This more intimate interaction with the text seems to reflect Stern's (2000) observations concerning gendered readings of ads. A number of dimensions of this social interaction with the text can be highlighted. Firstly the girls were more likely to express an emotional connection with the text. Although they, like the boys, expressed a dislike even "hate" for some ads, they also were more likely to declare a close connection with, even a "love" for, favourite ads. Secondly, their retellings of ads often took an intense interest in minutiae and obscure intricacies. While the boys focused on plot lines, the girls often emphasised details removed from the central story. The following example demonstrates one group of girls' concern with the minutiae of one part of an anti-smoking ad by the Health Education Board for Scotland:

K: ... And then you see one of them, he's walking round the corner with his friends with a football, and then the other guy's out on the streets like shaking with his hat over his head.... "Spare change pal?" And then the screen unsplit and then the guy with the football (cut off by C.)

C: He's not got a football.

K: He does have a football.

C: He's got a bag.

K: He does not.

S: He has a baaaag!

C: And he's walking with this girl.

K: No he's walking with a group of people.

C: Uhuh, and there's a girl beside him as well....

(Girls, P7, private)

Although the example may partly reflect the desire for control in discourse with friends, it nevertheless also highlights the keen interest in exposing, discussing and experiencing the minutiae of ads. Thirdly, and related to this last point, in discussing their connectivity with certain ads the girls tended to concentrate on particular elements including characters and music. They referred to "the Diet Coke man", the "tidy guy" in a Lynx ad and other "gorgeous" actors but also seemed eager to share their intimate experience of screen characters, as the following girl reveals in her discussion of an *Eastenders* ad:

M: I like the *Eastenders* website adverts.... I like the one where Jack ooooooh (goes into spasm of ecstasy and they all giggle)... There's all these lasses and they're saying "When's he gonna get a girlfriend?".... And he's standing there in the garage and he's got sweat dripping from him and everything and he goes "Maybe I'm just waiting for the right time or moment" or something....

(Girl, S1, Wetheral)

There is a very personal and revelatory feeling about this girl's discussion of the ad as the others giggle in shared anticipation and she continues wistfully through the dialogue observing that "he's got sweat dripping from him". This intimacy both in relation to the character and the act of telling seems in keeping with the nature of girls' friendships and is further supported by their discussion of other elements

within ads. In this light the intensity of their experience with theme tunes and songs was also illuminating:

L: No the best one for the Peugeot 203 with all the sharks and I know the song off by heart (giggles) and it's really good..... it's just really addictive I just can't stop singing it..... "See your true colours shining through. That's why I love you. So don't be afraid to your true colours shining through like a rainbow" (sings). It's like, it's just like (voice tails off).

E: Yeah the first time I heard it I thought it was awful, and then I kept on hearing it. I kept on playing it and playing it and playing it, cos it was like one of the beginning tracks on my CD and so I'm just about to fall asleep. And as I fell asleep to it I decided I liked it.

(Girls, S1, private)

In this way much of the girls' experience of ads emerged as a very personal style of interaction. Advertisements were not just stories to retell, but personal experiences to relive and share with close friends.

3. Belongers

The role of advertising in group bonding and interaction has been outlined. Advertising experiences seemed to reflect the style of relationships and gendered bonding of the children. It was seen earlier how possessions, branded products, and the media provided the children with a sense of social identity and belonging within the peer group and wider population. This section will address the ways in which advertising was used to fulfil the children's expressed concern with belonging as they assumed the roles of Ad Talkers, Membership Maintainers and Status Seekers.

3.1 Ad Talkers

In chapter nine possessions and the media emerged as important social lubricants. Existing research amongst older consumers suggests advertising's ability to take on this mantle. Willis (1990) considered advertisements as tokens of social exchange.

For the informants in Alperstein's (1990) study advertising served as a social integrator through its provision of common referents. Likewise O'Donohoe (1994b) referred to young adults' use of advertising as a facilitator for conversation amongst peers and family members. Amongst younger informants, Ritson and Elliott (1999) have highlighted the "phatic role" of advertising meaning. The sixth formers in their research employed advertising as a ticket of entry into the group's social exchanges. The importance of advertising as a social lubricant was also apparent amongst this study's child informants. Advertising discussions emerged as part of the children's daily interactions and the focus groups highlighted innumerable events during which such dialogue took place.

Although limited discussion with family members was apparent, in keeping with the identified move from parental to peer affiliations at this developmental stage, most of the children's advertising discussions centred around peers and took place outside the immediate viewing context. Advertising took the form of social currency and was used to facilitate interaction at various times of the day, for example during classes, in the school playground, while eating meals, and during 'sleepovers'. Thus, one group of girls revealed that the friendship group had been speaking about an ad for Galaxy when they were "bored" during registration:

I: Do you talk about favourite ads at all at school or when you're together?

E: Well sometimes Amanda wants some ready discussion of the Galaxy ad which I've actually written down ...and she just enjoyed the Galaxy on the back of a truck.

I: So in what situation were you talking about it?

E: When we're bored! In registration... Well yeah cos we're not allowed to play cards in registration and you've got to put the marbles away. You're not allowed to do anything.

A: You just sit there. You're not allowed to talk that's the only thing.

E: So there's nothing really to do.

A: We just have to talk about anything.

(Girls, S1, private)

According to the girls in this example advertising served as a convenient subject to turn to at times when the structure and direction of dialogue had not yet been set and you “just have to talk about anything”. However, the stress on the restricted environment where “you’re not allowed to do anything.... you’re not allowed to talk” suggests that advertising talk in this context may also be a subversive activity.

Nevertheless despite the evidence that such talk “sometimes” took place through comments like “we just talk about them” and “we always say it at school”, many of the children were initially unwilling to admit to such commercial dialogue. One boy in S1 from Wetheral adamantly stated “I dinnae talk about ads at all” while a girl in P7 from private school stressed the product focus of their discussions by declaring “we just talk about the actual things, we don’t talk about advertising”. Thus in keeping with Pollay’s (1986) ‘myth of personal immunity’, advertising was sometimes seen as a somewhat embarrassing and “sad” subject, usually initiated by “other people”:

I: What other type of ads have you been talking about at school then lately?

G: Most of them. I don’t know. Just someone comes into school and always seems to say something about them and then they just get stuck in your head and you talk about them for ages.

I: What do you think about it when people talk about ads at school?

G: Sometimes it’s really sad.....

N: ... Like Ben.

T: Ben!

G: He just knows them word for word

N: ... He just goes on and on.

T: It’s strange cos there are so many things to talk about and he talks about adverts.

(Boys, S1, private)

Their classmate Ben, with his propensity to discuss ads, was held up as an example of the effects of advertising which, as explained in the autonomy chapter, they did not wish to be connected with. It is notable that despite admitting to advertising

conversations, Tim stressed the strangeness of such interactions when “there are so many things to talk about”. This comment goes some way to explaining Ritson and Elliott’s (1999) description of advertising as a ‘precursor’ to other more important social interactions. It also reflects research by the Advertising Association which indicates the low salience of advertising relative to other aspects of people’s lives (Advertising Association, 2000). However, while conversations about advertising may have at times been denied, they did exist and like advertising itself seemed to seep into many aspects of their everyday lives, allowing peers to connect with each other in quiet periods or ‘break the ice’ for more meaningful discussions.

3.2 Membership Maintainers

Rook (1984) has highlighted ritual behaviour as a useful conceptual vehicle for interpreting consumers’ psychosocial symbolic behaviour. Rituals, in Rook’s analysis, are defined as formal behaviour systems comprising actor-participants, an audience, scripted episodic behaviour, and ritual artefacts. McCracken (1988a) showed how meaning is transferred from goods to individuals by ritual processes. Focusing on advertising, Ritson and Elliott (1999) empirically demonstrated how meaning was transferred through the scripted, repeated ritualistic interactions of the sixth formers. For the younger children in the current study, scripted behaviour episodes characterised many of their advertising experiences. These seemed to be related to the desire to achieve, demonstrate and concretise a sense of belonging in the peer group. That these interactions had become ritualised was emphasised by phrases like “we always go...”. Further their unified group participation indicated the regularity with which these advertising interactions were played and replayed. Before turning to the specific ritual practices of membership mantras, melodies and mimics attention will be given to two examples of membership maintenance involving group definition and experiential togetherness.

3.2.1 Group definition

The children performed excerpts from ads to establish associations with particular groups. This application of ads was most clearly illustrated when ads were used to delineate ‘us versus them’ roles. Brand names such as Bullboys, Actif and “Two Stripe” which were considered “uncool” by the group were actively derided. Through singing the song used in the Bullboys ad, for example, the children seemed to be highlighting the unity of the ‘us’ group versus the Bullboys shoes wearing ‘them’. In other cases ad renditions were used to indicate the unity of one group versus another. Sometimes this led to conflict, as an S1 girl from Wetheral revealed when describing her defiant application of a Toasted Poppets jingle:

I: OK does anyone else want to bring up another ad for discussion?

L: The Toasted Poppets one.....

All: “Chooo choooo”

I: You know I just don’t believe you when you say you never imitate or talk about ads in school. (They all laugh).

D: We didnae I swear (laughs loudly).

M: The only bit we do is the “Whoooo whoooo Thomas Chooooo Chooooo Thomas”. We do that all the time!

D: Natalie just sits behind in one of the classes and we go “Choooo choooo Thomas Whooo Whoooo Thomas”. And then everyone just starts gettin’ into it. And then if anyone makes a mistake he (the teacher) goes “Yous have made a mistake now STOP doing it”....

I: So adverts actually get you into trouble then?

D: Yeah.

(Girls, S1, Wetheral)

This example illustrates a number of points seen throughout the interviews with both boys and girls. Firstly, the girls’ ability and eagerness to take part in jingle singing, even during school classes. Secondly, their unwillingness to admit to imitating ads despite later revealing that it is something that they do “all the time”. Thirdly, the means by which they use only certain elements of ads, thereby exploding them into their semantic parts (Ritson and Elliott, 1999) and highlighting their independent

consumption of the ad and the brand. Fourthly, and most importantly in this respect, their use of advertising to define ‘us’ versus ‘them’ groupings and situations. Thus, we see the unity of the class versus the authority figure, as Diane coerces her classmates into an act of rebellion versus the teacher and employs an advertising jingle as the armoury in her attack.

3.2.2 Experiential togetherness

In other cases scripted interactions heightened more personal feelings of togetherness when they were used to provide associations with, and to add meaning to, shared experiences. Thus, the P7 girls at Corby discussed their applied use of the song from an ad for the dessert ‘Ambrosia’. One of the ads they referred to starred a farmer sitting on top of a cow singing a revamped version of the Pet Shop Boys song “Go West”. The ad, and particularly the song, provided the group with much enjoyment. The following dialogue amongst the girls demonstrates this pleasure:

I: A. you’ve got ‘Ambrosia’ written down, could you tell me about that one?

J: Oh it’s funny that one!

L: Aye that’s funny when the guy’s riding the cow!

All: “Ooooo aaaaah it’s Ambrosiaaaaa, ooooh aaaaah it’s Ambrosia....”

L: What is it again “Gooo weeeest where the grass is green, goooo weeeest”....

J: And then all the people come over the hill going.....

All: “Oooooooh aaaaaah it’s Ambrosia...”

J: It’s really funny!

(Girl, P7, Corby)

The example has salience when one of the girls goes on to reveal the means by which the group actually applied the ad to make sense of, and add meaning to, particular social experiences:

I: Do you actually sing along?

L: Yeah yeah!...At school when we're having tests and that, I'm sort of singing "oooh ahhhh" (sings more quietly and pulls a fearful face). I remember we were going up the hill in the playground and we kept on going "Goooo weeeest where the grass in greeeen, gooo weeeest where the sheep go baaaaaaa...." (sings) and everything.

(Girl, P7, Corby)

Interestingly it is possible to see that the same ad is used to transfer different meanings to different social situations. As Grafton-Small Linstead (1989), Buttle (1991), O' Donohoe (1994b) and Ritson and Elliott (1999) have observed, advertising meaning is not fixed, but may be continually revised and adapted as it is introduced and included into people's everyday lives. Certainly, this last example highlights the fluidity of ad meaning to these youngsters and their active reworking of advertising texts in their own daily existence. From Linda's description it appears that singing "oooooh aaaaaah" acts as a form of security blanket or talisman to protect her from the fear and trepidation of taking school tests. However, at the same time, she sings the song with her friends, seemingly to add a sense of togetherness to the routine activity of "going up the hill in the playground".

The emerging themes of group definition and experiential togetherness indicate the importance of advertising in membership maintenance. They also highlight the importance of performance aspects of ads in membership matters. The different forms of performance in this respect will be explained as we turn to membership mantras, melodies and mimicry.

3.2.3 Membership mantras, melodies and mimicry

"If ya like a lotta chocolate on ya biscuit JOIN OUR CLUB...."

(All singing)

(Boys, S1, Wetheral)

The children used a wide variety of advertising dialogue in their discourse. These scripted reenactments have been termed 'membership mantras' as their regular

repetition seemed to confirm, reinforce and even celebrate the shared identity and membership of the children in particular peer groups. Sometimes these reenacted segments of ads were well known endlines, but more often they were arbitrary elements and snippets of dialogue dissected from the larger ad text. For example, the S1 boys at Corby had managed to integrate enthusiastic renditions of “Joy Machine” from a Honda ad into their daily dialogue. A number of the boys, including those in S1 from private school and the P7s from Wetheral, took delight in interspersing imitation of the cockney voices from the Walkers crisps ads, including “He’s the geeeeezer!” and “Quaver Gary”, with their everyday conversation. The S1 girls from Wetheral laughed together at their continual repetition of the cry “lights oooooot” from a Supernoodles advertisement. Numerous examples of these membership mantras could be raised as they were continually applied both in describing liked and disliked ads and in their general discussion of advertising. Such renditions and imitations were seen to relate to the children’s theme of belonging through providing a sense of togetherness and unification with the peer group. Indeed many of the ‘membership mantras’ were so familiar and entertaining to the children that often initiation by one child led to the other group members’ seamless participation.

In a similar vein reenactments of theme tunes from ads have been termed ‘membership melodies’. The boys readily partook in this activity, for example, the S1 males from Wetheral provided enthusiastic cries of “I say oooh la la...” taken from a recent Budweiser ad. However, it was the girls who were the main theme tune and jingle enthusiasts, a finding which may be connected to their expressed interest and involvement in music during the lifeworld talks, alongside their greater use of music for affiliation purposes. For example, the P7 girls from private school, Corby and Wetheral indulged in group renditions of “I’ll be working my way back to you babe” from a British Telecom ad, “Staying Alive” from a Colman’s ad, and “Referee” (an adapted version of the Bee Gees song ‘Tragedy’) from a recent ad for Weetabix.

Further, physical actions and expressions in advertisements were often applied in ritual behaviour by the children, an activity that can be termed ‘membership

mimicry'. Thus, the P7 boys in Corby enthusiastically copied the arm flapping movements used in a Chicken Tonight ad, while the same aged girls eagerly aped the head banging movements of the Flat Eric character in the Levi's Jean ads. In addition many of the children copied the characters in the Pringles crisps ads by rhythmically drumming on the top of the crisp packets. Similarly, Stuart, a P7 boy from private school, copied another execution in the same campaign by encouraging his friends to imitate the "duck face" (a feat attained by placing two Pringle crisps between his lips). This focus on 'doing' the ad seemed to be more common among the boys, reflecting their concern in the last chapter with shared physical activities.

Overall their enthusiastic joint participation in mantras, melodies and mimicry suggested that elements of advertising were being used for more than just purposes of mastery. The unison renditions seemed to confirm their similar tastes and interests with other group members and appeared as highly engaged celebrations of togetherness. However, interactions with advertising extended beyond membership maintenance and helped to play an organising role in the establishment of group hierarchies. The next section will consider the children's emerging role as Status Seekers.

3.3 Status Seekers

The chapter on affiliation demonstrated the way in which possessions formed a social link between friends. Such possessions, including branded products, also helped to organise peer groups according to social status. Similarly the children's advertising experiences seemed to play a role in establishing hierarchies within peer groups. Willis (1990) has described advertising as a form of cultural capital. According to O'Donohoe (1994b) advertising emerges as a topic of conversation at three levels: instrumental, interesting subject matter, and advertising as discourse. On this third level talking about advertising was regarded as a distinct social skill providing dividends in terms of social status and self esteem. More recently Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) have considered that advertising literacy is not only the skill to understand and transfer meanings from an ad, but by applying those

meanings in the social context of existence, advertising literacy becomes an important means of locating and relocating social groups and identities within those groups. Lastly, and pertinent to children, Ritson and Elliott's (1999) research has described how sixth formers use advertising to position themselves in the social hierarchy. In the current study the status of the children was also adjusted through social positioning uses of ads and through ad acquisition.

3.3.1 Social positioning

The children were keen to display their interpretive power as a means of enhancing their social status in the group. Often this took place through displays of advertising skill as outlined in chapter eight. Perhaps the most pronounced use of advertising for the purposes of social positioning came in the public derision of ads referred to as "sad", "tacky" or "bad". O' Donohoe (1994b :342) described how young adults' demonstrated perverse enjoyment of 'bad' ads. She noted that "in what amounts to knowing subversiveness, informants seem to be like film buffs in their enjoyment of B movies". The children's use of what they considered to be "scaffy" advertising also indicated a form of contrary discernment. However, it seemed to go beyond ego enhancement, and served an important purpose in climbing the social ladder. Thus, critical evaluation of ads served to position children as 'wise consumers' (Buckingham, 1993) worthy of an elevated position in the peer hierarchy.

One advertising campaign for Bullboys football boots was discussed across a number of the groups and can be used to highlight this particular use of advertising material. The Bullboys' campaign was both reviled and joyfully reenacted by boys and girls, initiated by eager shouts of "I've got the Bullboys one...". For example one of the P7 girls at private school spontaneously burst into an ironic Bullboys ad rendition:

K: "Bullboys shoes is what you need. Get the power..." (sings).
And there's this stupid kid that can't kick a ball going (imitates).
And in the shop window it's like "Bullboys" and they go "I wanna
play with those".

(Girls, P7, private)

Further, some of the boys took similar positions in openly mocking the ad:

I: Can you remember the advert for that one?

A: "Bullboy shoes are what you need. Get the power on your feet!" (Sings mockingly).

P: "Get the power on your feet!"

A: Yeah. Cool (sarcastic tone)....

B: I think it's just quite sad. You get a free football with a pair of trainers. Nike don't give free things! They don't need to.

A: Like if you found someone wearing them (chuckles) like everyone would just be singing it!

(Boys, S1, Corby)

While this last example elicits pangs of sympathy for the poor child unfortunate enough to be wearing the offending shoes, it also highlights an applied form of ad rendition in which some children were ridiculed through purposeful singing of the jingle. In this case the rendition was used, firstly, to demonstrate the individual's social competence and discernment in being able to ridicule an ad. Secondly, the singing of the jingle served to deride members of the peer group considered less culturally adept in terms of either their personal choice of footwear brands, or lack of control over parental purchases. In this way ads emerged as somewhat cruel social markers with the power to enhance, adjust or confirm the social status of group members.

The use of advertising for social positioning was often more subtle than the playground incident mentioned above. Derision of peer group members was usually less aggressive and more closely resembled mild teasing or 'banter' amongst close friends. Thus, the S1 boys from private school revealed how they imitated the "embarrassing" jingle in a Toasted Poppets ad crying "Chooooo chooooo Thomas" for the expressed purpose of teasing their friend with the same Christian name. Likewise the P7 boys at Wetheral teasingly referred to a close friend who had been to Australia as "Skippy" because of the similarly named kangaroo in a Rolo advertisement. In another more explicit example some of the boys adapted the words

in an ad for an aspirational motor car to make fun of their friends and verbally joust for their own status in the friendship group. The ad appeared to provide the perfect cultural material to negotiate, and fantasise about, their own peer group status.

I: Roger's saying about the Mercedes one.

W: "Oh LORD won't ya buuuuy me a Mercedes Benz" (sings theme tune).

K: "William drives a...." (sings).

W: "Porsche" (sings).

K: "Roger drives WHEELIE BINS!" (sings)

W: He drives a three wheeled mini!

R: Get away! You drive....

W: I drive an E-Type.

R: You drive that car from "Only Fools and Horses" (laughs).

W: So it's better that a bus pass!

(Boys, S1, Wetheral)

Buckingham (1993) described much of children's advertising discourse as a "competitive display of cynical wit at the expense of products and advertisements". In this case the cynical wit is largely directed at other members of the friendship group. The theme song for the Mercedes brand was clearly familiar to all the boys and provided succinct material with which to degrade others through playful reconstruction of the lyrics. Thus, while William was quick enough to place himself as a Porsche driver, Roger is attributed with the dubious pleasure of driving "wheelie bins" or "a three wheeled mini".

3.3.2 Ad Acquisition

The children's uses of advertising reflected their social concerns with building collections and owning new and distinctive possessions for the purpose of establishing social status. The role of ownership of possessions in providing a sense of power has been described by Belk (1988). For the children in the present study, advertisements were sometimes seen as socially enhancing experiences to collect,

gather, reject, display and discuss. In this way some informants were concerned to claim ownership of the ads they raised in the focus groups, seemingly viewing them as representations of the extended self (Belk, 1988). Thus, in their discussion of ads on which they held strong opinions, personal connectivity was often implied through the widespread use of “I” and “my”:

I still like my Mars bar advert when the man gets left by the woman.... Ooooooh and MY one, Lloyds errr TSB Bank thing....
“Anniversary University...” (sings)

(Girls, S1, Corby)

This desire to ‘own’ certain ads was highlighted by the negative feelings associated with missing out on socially valuable ads. We saw examples in the last chapter of the children feeling excluded as a result of missing or not being allowed to watch particular programmes or films. In relation to advertising Ritson and Elliott (1999) have noted incidences of sixth formers being “left out”, “talked around” or “blanked” when they had not experienced ads. The children in this study also indicated a sense of exclusion when they had not seen ads that were perceived to be socially required texts. As noted in the discussion of ad mastery, admissions of limited experience or lack of understanding in popular texts, for example the Levi’s ad starring Flat Eric, were generally made quietly or in embarrassed tones. As one girl noted after extended discussion of a humorous ad by her friends:

K: Do you have to see it? Is it an advert where you have to see it to find it amusing?... Cos like I’ve never seen that one (giggles, slightly embarrassed).

(Girl, P7, private)

However, as not all ads were perceived to hold social value, group members were also willing to exclude themselves from the discussion of ads which they deemed to be worthless. Thus, the words “I’ve never seen that one” could be applied in a very different tone to express distaste with the discursive elaboration taking place. In this way Andrea disassociated herself from a conversation about a confectionery ad and effectively limited further discussion by disdainfully announcing to the others:

I haven't got a clue what you're talking about!

(Girl, S1, Corby)

Through this expressed desire to own or disown advertising executions the children could be seen as having built up their own personal "portfolio" of ads (Ritson and Elliott, 1999). Sometimes their ad discussion reflected the activities of an auction house with the children bidding to introduce their ad into the discussion with shouts of "I've got two of these Irn Bru ones" and "I've got the Bullboys ones!". If other parties indicated an interest in the ad through supporting comments such as "yeah, that's a funny one" then they were encouraged to further describe their offering and gain payment in the form of social endorsement. In this way their antics reflected the process of bringing collected items into school to show-off to their friends. Certainly the children's relationship with ads reflected Clare's comment that "all the girls in my class have collections of things". From the children's discussions it appeared that both the girls and the boys had well-defined, specially crafted 'collections' of advertisements which were socially endorsed by the wider peer group.

The children's sense of ownership of ads was further reflected in the manner in which they described and retold their favourite executions. For many of the children the process of telling the ad reflected their own viewpoint. Thus, Cathy fiercely protected herself from the suggestion from one friend that she was talking about another less socially esteemed ad with the cry "NO, its not that one you twit...". Likewise interruptions to ad descriptions were seemingly considered as insults and, thus, received angry stares and exasperated retorts like "I'm not finished yet!" and "oh will you shooosh!".

As in the case of possessions, socially valuable ads emerged as something to get first. The need to have experience of new inventive advertisements resonated throughout all the groups. In this way the discussion of ads centred on executions that were "new", "original", and "clever". When ads were not new some clarification of this was generally used to introduce the ad such as "I like that old, that old Maltesers one" or "It's an old one and Gary Lineker's sitting...". As one girl noted:

I: OK the Daz advert. Who wrote that one down?

K: Yeah me... It's not the newest one. Right there's newer ones where there's a man and the kids are in like sports day and they get their shirts dirty. But this one was like Shane Ritchie went down and he dinged on their doors. I HATE the advert...

(Girls, P7, private)

The girl in this case seems driven to justify that she did not choose the “newest one” and goes on to provide evidence of her knowledge of the latest executions. As Kirsty indicates when “old” ads were discussed they were generally accompanied by evaluative comments. Thus, the S1 boys from Corby discussed “an ancient advert” for Wrigley’s chewing gum which “everyone remembers... cos it’s scaffy”. Further an intentionally “old fashioned” 1970s style ad for McDonalds completely missed the mark with the S1 boys from private school who commented “maybe they just couldn’t afford one cos like business is bad (all laugh)” and “I think it’s quite sad when they use old adverts because all the people’s fashions have changed...”.

This section has explored the many ways in which belonging was integrated into children’s advertising experiences as they played out the roles of Ad Talkers, Membership Maintainers, and Status Seekers. We move now to a consideration of the theme of ‘becoming’ in the children’s interactions with the advertising genre.

4. Becomers

The last section on ‘belonging’ considered the role of advertising in providing children with a sense of membership and status within the peer group. This section will consider advertising experiences derived from the children’s concern with establishing and developing their social roles in times of transition.

4.1 Sensitive shifters

Although the children were clearly aware of the transitions they were undergoing as they moved into senior school and teenage years there was little direct reference to

advertising in this context. When comments were made in this light they focused on the appreciation of ad content which recognised their changing self. For example:

And what kind of things have you found really funny on TV lately then?

R: ...The guy in the Hula Hoops ad and everything. There's one wi' a guy wi' ginger hair. He keeps on complaining, like he's just about ta turn into a teenager and that, and he's like "goody goody I want the computer game and that". Waiting for 12 o'clock so he can open the present. And he ends up turning into a teenager soon as 12 o'clock comes, and he opens his present and starts shouting "WHAT'S THIS!". Pure going radge at the computer game, when he really wanted it when he was younger.

(Boy, S1, Wetheral)

The humour derived from someone "just about ta turn into a teenager" is palpable in Roger's description. However, the significance of the changing self did seem to be indirectly evident in the importance children placed on knowing, speaking about and displaying socially accepted ads. We saw earlier how children who had no experience or understanding of 'socially required' ads felt excluded from the social group. It seems likely that the sensitivity and uncertainty of transitional periods may be at least partially stabilised through the adherence to socially endorsed ads. For example the children raised ads for discussion whose subject matter reflected the interests, values and concerns of the broader social group. The boys seemed to be particularly sensitive to this issue, for example the S1 boys from Wetheral were adamant that they did not speak about ads apart from their favourites which were "the football ones". Indeed the boys' ad dialogue generally centred very tightly on key peer group interests such as football, cars and the opposite sex. In addition certain ad styles including humour and "rude" content were particularly popular. Ritson and Elliott (1999) have suggested that advertising meaning serves as an eisegetic token or means of expressing one's viewpoint. If this is the case then it is perhaps fitting that the selection of ads for children at a transitional age is particularly sensitive to and compliant with issues of social conformity. Thus, the children's discussions of ads appear to reflect similar concerns to those involved in brand purchase, to emerge as someone who is moving with the crowd, rather than a "scaff" or a "cheapie" who selects socially worthless items.

4.2 Adult Aspirers

The desire to become was demonstrated through the children's emergence as Adult Aspirers. This role was played out through the selection and discussion of particular types of advertisements. The original Ad Lists required the children to write down at least eight ads they could remember. Although many of the ads selected were for typically youth oriented products such as soft drinks, football boots, toys, confectionery and crisps, there appeared to be a concern to discuss more traditionally adult targeted goods and services. There was widespread selection of ads for cars, lager, insurance companies, banks, domestic cleaning products, and household goods. Further these ads were subject to their extensive and seemingly engaged interpretations. This interest in 'reading' ads outside the traditional confines of children's advertising is salient in the consideration of 'becoming'. In discussing certain 'adult' ads which might normally be considered irrelevant and uninteresting to children, the informants appeared to emphasise their desire for adult status. Thus, one group gave detailed consideration to an ad for an insurance company and the split screen technique it had employed:

B: This guy phones up Direct Line... And it's quite smart the way it looks like they're standing right next to each other... Because it's a white background. But then she goes "well get your builder to fix it and we'll pay for it". And then it separates and you see the phone line... Cos they're friendly and it sounds like they're just chatting to a friend. So they are kinda saying like "we are your friend".

(Boys, S1, Corby)

Commenting on the same ad and its use of a split screen effect, a group of girls interpreted it as follows:

E: At the beginning it will make you think "oh no that's really gonna be really inconvenient, you've got to go to them and speak to them about it. But at the end you sort of realise oh you don't need to you just use the phone.

L: It also shows like how close they can be to their customers I suppose... cos they have to get their customers to trust them first.

(Girls, S1, private)

This engagement with adult ads was further emphasised by the children's style of interaction with ads aimed at younger children. As in Buckingham's (1993) study advertising aimed at younger children, was often discussed derisively. In this respect ads for young children's toys were openly mocked, most notably the advertising for Action Man, Barbie, and My Little Pony. After ridiculing Barbie advertising by singing high pitched versions of two theme tunes, one group of girls commented:

K: Yeah well I find them such a joke!

S: Yeah they're so funny! I laugh at them!

(Girls, P7, private)

The derision of 'children's' advertising and focus on adult ads is pertinent in two respects. Firstly it confirms the belief held by advertising practitioners that executions need to be "aged-up" (Mathews, 1995) in terms of targeting slightly older children and avoiding condescending approaches. Secondly, it may have implications regarding children's consumption of 'adult' products such as cigarettes and alcohol. Hastings et al (1994) found in their investigation of Regal cigarette advertising that children enjoyed ads supposedly aimed at adults. While the gratification lying behind such ads may be related to the concern to 'become' through achieving aspirational adult status, the children's involvement in and enjoyment of these ads may raise concerns for policy figures. As one boy boastfully added to a discussion about beer advertising:

C: I don't think beer tastes nice, I just drink it... I just drink it cos it's a man's drink.

(Boys, P7, Corby)

4.3 Social Scanners

O' Donohoe (1994b) describes the use of advertising for surveillance purposes amongst young adults. The informants in her study talked about using ads to scan and assess the attractiveness of the actors within them. Although much younger the

children in this study used ads in a similar way to survey and even fantasise about “the man in the Diet Coke ad”, or model Claudia Shiffer’s “naked” performance in a Citroen advertisement.

Certainly, in the discussion of the existential concern for affiliation in chapter nine, the children’s interest in the opposite sex, even if hesitant amongst some of the younger boys, was burgeoning amongst most of the informants. They were becoming increasingly aware of their gender identity, and displayed an augmenting interest in finding out about and exploring the opposite sex. Advertising seemed to fulfil this emerging need for many of the children through their close observation, and detailed memory for the people in ads. Children’s memory for detail in ads is supported by both academic (Dubow, 1995) and practitioner research (Mathews, 1995) although the focus on physical minutiae has been given little consideration. The girls were most vocally involved in this surveillance activity. General comments were made that some of the men in ads were “tidy”, “fit” or “smart”. Some of the women were more precisely congratulated on having “beautiful” or “shiny” hair, while men were admired for their physiques including well defined “six packs”. Other comments were even more detailed and occasionally bizarre, including references to an actor with a “funny nose” or one “with hair like Ross in *Friends*”.

At times the girls’ interactions with advertising suggested a more exploratory and sexual tone. They laughed about a couple “painting naked” in a washing powder ad and fantasised about the character Jamie in an ad for the popular soap opera *Eastenders*. However, there was more evidence suggesting that advertising was used in this way by boys. For example, the Herbal Essences shampoo ad, which replayed the famous diner scene in the film *When Harry Met Sally*, was much copied by both the boys and girls across the different schools:

I: So what about health and beauty ads?

A: Herbal Essences, yeah! Herbal Essences. When she’s on the plane. And she goes in an’ she washes her hair on the plane and, ya can hear it on the speaker, an’ she’s suddenly going, “YEEES, YEEEEES, YEEEEES” (imitates). An’ she comes out and the woman goes “I want the shampoo SHE’S using” (imitates, putting

on Liverpudlian accent)...

G: She was doing it today, she was in the shower and “YEES, YEEEEES”

A: “YEES, YEEEEES”.... I was in the shower and I had my Herbal Essences. An’ the boys always, they say “have you got Herbal Essences?”, an’ they go “YEEEEES”. So I thought, HEY I’ve got Herbal Essences, so I was sitting there going “YEEEEES” and washing my hair.

I: ...The boys comment on that Herbal Essences one as well?

A: Yeah they think it’s a funny advert. THEY think OTHER things about it though! About what she’s saying!

(Girls, S1, Corby)

That Andrea gained considerable pleasure from the text is evident in her vigorous reenactment. However, while there may have been an element of sexual pleasure in her reliving of the ad, she is keen to stress her relatively innocent involvement compared to the boys who “think OTHER things about it”.

The notion that the boys thought “OTHER things” about ads, even gaining vicarious sexual experience from them was reflected in other comments. Thus, there was considerable interest across a number of groups about the “naked” woman (the model Claudia Schiffer) in a Citroen car ad:

C: Now Graham’s favourite advert, he told me about this, it’s this one for Citroen. There’s this woman and she (Graham cuts him off).

G: When she’s walking down the stairs STRIPPING!

C: And she’s taking her clothes off and then off with her bra!

G: And she’s walking naked, you see her naked....

(Boys, P7, Corby)

Likewise the S1 boys from Corby keenly described Lara Croft, the computerised star of the video game Tomb Raider, in the new Lucozade ads. Their discussion of an ad depicting Lara with the strapline “it just gets better and better” merged with tales of their experiences with the video game itself. Thus, Boris noted that “some people just buy the game cos they think she’s good looking”. This was followed by the revelation that:

B: Yeah Tomb Raider 3's really good. It's one of the best games out!

A: Yeah but not much people have completed it cos they're too busy getting close-ups. (Laughs).

P: You can choose to get her clothes off.

I: Tell me about that, how do you get close-ups?

B: Well when you're swimming you turn upside down and you can see the bum!

P: Backshots!

(Boys, S1, Corby)

It would seem that these boys were gaining a degree of exploratory titillation from the Lucozade advertising, and were eager to make the intertextual link with the attractive lead character in the Tomb Raider 3 video game. In a similar vein advertisements for the deodorant Lynx provided vicarious sexual experience to boys across a number of different groups. The popularity of these ads centred on the central theme of women unable to resist men wearing Lynx. The most regularly mentioned execution involved a man who encouraged the female inhabitants of a stone age land to fend off invading dinosaurs using pieces of their underwear as slings. There was considerable enjoyment evident in their descriptions of how he found "one of the bras drying on a clothes line" and "all the wifies took their bras off!". Indeed they took particular delight in copying the physical actions of the women in the ad who "take their bras off and go 'whoooo whooooo'...". While the idea of a powerful, desirable man obviously appealed to the boys' need for autonomy, the excitement with which they retold the storyline suggested an element of vicarious sexual experience through the ad.

Finally, within their role as Social Scanners, advertising also provided a means for more practical forms of interaction between boys and girls. There was considerable creativity in their use of ad jingles in order to comment on the world around them. Boy/ girl relations were the subject of a number of these applied uses. For example, one P7 girl from Corby recounted the storyline of a Superdrug ad in which a group of girls in a taxi were "waving at some boy that they find sexy". She admitted that she

now sang the tune from the ad when she saw someone she thought was “sexy”. In another example two girls made fun of a diminutive friend who was going out with a much taller boy through a revamped version of a theme song used in a pizza ad:

I: Do you notice music in ads?

E: The Christopher Columbus one, remember. (All start singing).
We made up a song. Me and F. made up a song about my old pal
Linda....

F: “We all laughed at Christopher Columbus”, no what is it?

E: No “they all laughed at Linda Melinda when she went out with
Scott”, cos that was her boyfriend. That made us laugh...

F: Cos Linda’s that (holds hand near ground to indicate height)
and Scott’s a way up here (indicates).

(Girls, P7, Wetheral)

We saw earlier how advertising was used to facilitate conversation with the peer group generally. In some cases ads were employed to make more specific communication with the opposite sex. In this light the most pertinent example was raised by the S1 girls from Corby who spoke about an anti-drinking campaign by the Health Education Board for Scotland. In the ad a teenage boy is filmed practising a ‘chat-up’ line for a girl at school. He is later seen drinking heavily at a party. When he finally approaches the girl, she is less than impressed by his drunken drawl, “Saaaarah, I really fancy yooooo...”. They explained how the boys used this same dialogue when talking to the girls at school. While such application of advertising text may partially reflect the appeal of alcohol, particularly to the boys in this age group, its employment also seemed to serve as an ice-breaker and light-hearted introduction to members of the opposite sex. Perhaps more importantly it allowed them to try on and test out the role of ‘boy chatting up girl’.

4.4 Gender Defenders

The children’s interactions with advertising suggested a further role that of Gender Defenders. Ritson and Elliott (1999) observed that sixth formers’ interactions with advertising served to aid gender construction. Some of the males in their study

portrayed themselves as unable to interpret 'female' ads and even applied 'aberrant' readings to these texts. Similar findings emerged amongst the males in the current study. In some cases ads were used to enhance and define gender identities.

I: OK A.'s got quite an array of health, beauty and cleanliness kind of ads.

P: You need them Allan, you NEED them!

I: OK tell me about some of those?

B: Smelly boy!

A: Well there's the Le Grand Curl it was like these little eyelash things! They're meant to curl your eyelashes (others burst out in laughter).

B: Oh my God!

A: It's off Watchdog!

B: You're not supposed to be saying these things! (uses exasperated voice)

(Boys, S1, Corby)

As the example above illustrates, ads for feminine products were not seen as part of the relevant repertoire of ad discourse amongst boys. Despite the boy's vain defence that he had seen the ad on the consumer programme, 'Watchdog', his friend is outraged by his discussion of a make-up ad and exclaims that he is "not supposed to be saying these things". From this example it is possible to surmise that only ads which support and enhance sex role identity have a valid place in discursive elaboration.

However, there was an exception to this rule. At times otherwise socially unacceptable ads were discussed with the expressed purpose of ridiculing them. Critically annihilating executions targeted at the opposite sex emerged as a technique to support sex role identity. Thus, the same group of boys were particularly critical of ads for girls' toys:

A: The Barbie ones are stupid “you can cut my hair”.

P: “I’ve got longer hair!” Whooo hooo!

A: “You can tie it in knots!” Yeaaaaah! And like you see all the wee girls going “yeaaaaah” and all this stupid stuff.

P: “Your swimming Barbie!”

(Boys, S1, Corby)

Such jubilant derision may be partially related to the children’s desire to be older and more mature as discussed in a previous section. However, their mockery of other ads aimed at older female audiences further supported the use of ads in gender definition. In this light even the boys from Wetheral who were negative about advertising in general became especially critical and derisive when considering ads for products which were considered feminine:

I: So it sounds like you are being quite critical about that ad. What kind of ads do you criticise....?

B: Loreal adverts are the worst!

W: “Cas I’m woorth it” (imitates pathetic female voice). No your not! (B. laughs). Oh there’s this wifey and she’s pushing fifty and she’s had about 40 face lifts. And she’s advertising a wrinkle cream. But she’s got wrinkles herself! She’s like “Look how much of a good job it’s done on me” and I’m going, well no one’s gonna buy it cos you’ve got wrinkles. Wrinkles under her eyes and BAGS and round here and that.

(Boys, S1, Wetheral)

Such discussions among the informants seemed to reflect Ritson and Elliott’s (1999) observation of ‘aberrant’ readings of gendered texts amongst sixth formers. Although the girls in the study also referred to some male oriented “for boys” ads as “boring” and made dismissive comments like “I can’t be bothered with them”, this gendered reading of advertising was much more apparent amongst the males in the study.

For the girls perhaps the most salient and expressive example of gender definition came in the form of discussion about advertising for feminine hygiene products. With the average age of menarche being around 13 years (Smith, Cowie and Blades,

1998) the subject had actual or expected relevance for all of the girls in study. There was a significant difference in the way the subject was discussed by children in primary seven and secondary one. The children in P7 were less keen to discuss the subject even if they had included such ads on their Ad Lists, and the embarrassment of the girls in the next quotation is clearly evident:

I: Another of the ones that came up that Linda mentioned was “Always and tampon ads”?

L: Ooooh no do not talk about that! (Laughs)....

I: So what happens when you see them then?

L: I thought I hated the one where there’s all these women in bras and pants and they’re all in front of the mirror and I think it’s horrible.

(There’s a creaking on the leather sofa as the other two slide to the back of the seat, visibly recoiling from the conversation).

J: I hate talking about things like this, it really gets embarrassing (all giggle).

(Girls, P7, Corby)

The girls in this example seem to view such advertising as an intrusive reminder or even a foretaste of their femininity. Two of the girls physically recoil from the conversation, while the other appears disgusted by the vision of “all these women in bras and pants”.

Despite their embarrassment many of the girls deliberately raised the subject of feminine hygiene ads in discussion during the groups. They noted that “they should be more discrete” and mentioned the particular embarrassment of watching such ads when male family or friends were present and “you’re eating your tea or something and you hear it from the other room, and its like ahhhhhh”. Further some of them were keen to perform the associated songs and music. One girl spontaneously screamed out the lyrics:

K: Can I just mention one please? I was gonna put down the errr “Ahhhhhhhhhhh Bodyform” (screams it out) but I didn’t cos I’d be too embarrassed.

(Girls, P7, private)

However embarrassing, many of the girls seemed almost impelled to discuss these intimate advertising experiences seemingly to confirm their female identity. In the case of one S1 girl from Wetheral this particular use of advertising was made quite explicit. Diane was a girl who seemed to be struggling to define her gender identity. Having spent her life up until the end of P7 as a tomboy “hanging out with the laddies” she was evidently trying to reposition herself within the social group. Consequently she was giving more consideration to issues involving her femininity, body image and clothing. In this light the discussion of her applied use of advertising for the feminine hygiene product, Bodyform, is particularly pertinent:

M: I like the Tampax advert....The one where all the women are doing the work. There's this woman fixing the water and under the ground. And the one where the song, I can't remember the song.
D. you ken the song?....

D: “Bodyform for yooooooooo” (laughs wildly)...“Bodyform for yooooooooo”, I sung that in class all day once right. I wouldnae stop singing it (giggles). And they were telling me ta “Shut up Diane shut up! We're trying ta do our work!”.

(Girls, S1, Wetheral)

The fact that Diane should want to sing the ‘Bodyform’ theme all day in class is interesting. As a character who enjoyed “fighting with the laddies” her prolonged outburst seems to form an applied, even aggressive, dialogue with the rest of the class. By choosing an advertising theme song from a socially sensitive and undoubtedly feminine product, she seems to be defining herself as a woman, and one who is brave enough to say so.

The emergence and apparent salience of these gendered revelations may have been linked to the female status of the group moderator. It was evident that the girls were generally more comfortable in speaking about gender issues. Perhaps in this case the girls’ willingness to share their experiences of such ads illustrates not only their drive to define their gender identity within the friendship group but also to address the wider gender resonance with other females.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the children's existential concern for affiliation was manifested in their advertising experiences. The children undertook specific roles in their advertising interactions which were linked to the three dimensions of bonding, belonging and becoming.

In their position as Bonders the children's ad experiences generally focused on friendships rather than interactions with parents. Consistent with the concentration on 'fun' as an integral part of friend relationships the children emerged as Ad Players concerned with entertainment, humour, and playful interaction with ads. Further their experiences of advertising reflected gender differences in styles and forms of friendships. The boys emerged as Storytellers due to their interest in information elements, ad structure and chronological sequence, and authorial intent. Ads were regarded as plot lines or humorous episodes to be accurately retold. The girls were described as Experiencers. They were more likely to express emotional attachments to advertisements, demonstrated a keen interest in the observation of detail and concentrated on elements in ads, particularly characters and music. Such gender differences suggested that girls were often more intimately involved with advertising.

As Belongers many of the children adopted the role of Ad Talker. Although some were initially cautious about admitting to this role, advertising emerged as a common referent serving to lubricate and facilitate social interactions at various times of the day. In addition they emerged as Membership Maintainers in their strivings for group definition and experiential togetherness. The sense of inclusion in the group was maintained through ritualised membership practices involving the use of advertising dialogue, music, and physical actions with peers. The importance of belonging was further highlighted in the adoption of the role of Status Seeker. In this way advertising was used to establish positioning within the social group through demonstrations of interpretive power and advertising related witticisms directed at other group members. Further status was enhanced through the acquisition of ads which were socially valued, for example due to their newness or cleverness.

Finally, as Becomers the children assumed four roles. They appeared as Sensitive Shifters through the appreciation of ad content which recognised the changing self and through moving with the crowd and conforming to group advertising tastes. In their role as Adult Aspirers they focused on adult oriented ads and ridiculed advertising for young children. In addition they emerged as Social Scanners using advertising to survey the attractiveness of boys and girls, to take part in sexual exploration and at times to interact with members of the opposite sex. Lastly they took on the mantle of Gender Defenders. The girls and boys were found to elaborate on ads which highlighted or enhanced their sex role identity while the boys were particularly keen to deride ads aimed at female audiences.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CONCLUSIONS

Come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out.

(William Makepeace Thackeray: *Vanity Fair*, 1847-8)

1. Introduction

This thesis has explored 10-12 year olds' experience of advertising through a contextual, child centred study which looked beyond the previous concentration on effects and questioned the presumption of vulnerability. The advertising experiences which emerged were rich, complex, and dependent on the purposes and concerns the young informants wished them to serve. Mick and Buhl (1992: 333) suggested that adults' experiences of advertising "are demonstrably significant and relatively patterned when observed against the backdrop of the individual's life history and current life world". Similar conclusions may be drawn for the children in this study whose advertising experiences reflected a range of roles which were bound up with their everyday lives and echoed their existential concerns of autonomy and affiliation. This chapter draws together the key themes emerging from the study and then considers their implications for advertising practitioners, educators and public policy makers. It concludes with a consideration of future research in the area of children and advertising.

2. Contribution of research

This thesis proposes that children can not only be conceived as passive, vulnerable receivers of advertising. The informants in the study emerged as active and engaged consumers eager to ‘play along’ with the advertising genre and able to assume many roles. Whilst there was much enjoyment to be garnered from this process it also had serious dimensions being bound up with complex and deep rooted existential concerns. The identification of autonomy and affiliation as pervasive themes which influence and shape children’s advertising experiences, and the delineation and exploration of specific advertising roles that children play, form significant contributions to existing work.

Further the study represents an important methodological contribution to the field. It has shown that research can be contextualised through entering into the lifeworlds of children and utilising child-centred methods and techniques. In particular the value of visual research with children has been demonstrated and the possibilities for its use have been extended. Children’s photographs, alongside the application of autodiving techniques, provided an effective and innovative means of eliciting rich material on children’s lives.

3. The many roles of children’s advertising experience

All the world’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages.
(William Shakespeare: *As you like it*, 1599)

Shakespeare’s words had resonance for the children in the study for whom advertising, like life, involved playing out and trying on numerous parts. This focus on the numerous ways in which children interact with advertising draws on Lannon’s

(1992) concern with what people actually 'do' with advertising. It also has resonance with the theory of children's "multiple intelligences" (Gardner, 1983) whereby the question is not 'how intelligent is the child?' but rather 'in what ways is the child intelligent?'. While most of the past research into children and advertising can be conceptualised in terms of a narrow consideration of effects or 'how effected is the child?' this thesis has turned towards a consideration of 'in what ways is the child effective?'. The findings suggest that children are 'effective' in their interactions with advertising in many ways through their ability to adopt a range of roles. Gardner argues for an educational system that values all the different aspects of intelligence (Shaw and Hawes, 1998). Similarly it appears that in conceiving of children and advertising we must take account of the multiple roles they play and the motivations underlying those roles.

We have seen that children's advertising roles were integrally linked to their lifeworld concerns of autonomy and affiliation. Taking the theme of autonomy first, the need for self governance and empowerment characterised the children's discussion of their lifeworlds. Dimensions of this concern were found to comprise 'mastering', 'controlling' and 'criticising' and were played out by the children in their everyday interactions with the people, possessions and media in their lives. Advertising experiences were bound up with this broader existential concern through the adoption of various roles. They emerged as 'Masters' through the specific roles of Meaning Masters, Style Masters and Performance Masters. As 'Controllers' they adopted the roles of Empowered Viewers, Ad Avoiders and Independent Consumers. Finally, as 'Critical Onlookers' they assumed the roles of Precocious Planners, Reality Questioners and Tactical Technicians.

Such role playing suggested that the children were complex, literate and critical consumers of advertising. For example the parts assumed by the children within the theme of autonomy indicated that they were not only actively engaged with advertising but also concerned to demonstrate their mastery and power over the genre. They were enthusiastic participants in ad interpretation and performance, they

were involved in avoidance strategies, consumed the ad separately from the brand, and were critically involved in the strategic aims and techniques of advertisers. While they may have lacked the subtlety or depth of knowledge of older groups, their abilities compared favourably with studies of sixth formers (Ritson and Elliott, 1999) and young adults (O'Donohoe and Tynan, 1998). Their ability to take on different roles, at different times, in different contexts suggested that they were often highly active and adaptable consumers of advertising. Indeed their capacity to assume these roles associated with adolescents and young adults suggested that in advertising terms, like life itself, these children may be 'getting older younger'.

The existential concern for autonomy was balanced by the pervasive theme of affiliation in the children's lives. This was expressed in the children's discussion of their everyday lives through three dimensions comprising 'bonding', 'belonging', and 'becoming'. The theme of bonding was reflected in the children's concern with relationships with friends. 'Belonging' related to building group based social links and establishing group membership. Finally 'becoming' was emphasised through their concern with social roles in times of transition as they moved school and entered puberty.

Affiliation in the lifeworld was manifested in children's advertising experiences through the adoption of specific roles. They appeared as 'Bonders' through undertaking the various roles of Ad Players, Storytellers and Experiencers. As 'Belongers' they assumed the roles of Ad Talkers, Membership Maintainers and Status Seekers. Finally, as 'Becomers' they took on the roles of Sensitive Shifters, Adult Aspirers, Social Scanners and Gender Defenders. Such roles were integrally linked to the search for identity in the social environment (Erikson, 1987). For example the roles of ad 'Storyteller' and 'Experiencer' were connected to the drive for friendship and the differences in peer relations between boys and girls. The boys, thus, shared stories with friends focusing on aspects of authorial intent and humour. The girls were more concerned to experience the intimacy of the text and to share the feelings involved with best friends. The roles involved in 'belonging' were more

integrally linked to issues of social acceptance and conformity within the peer group. Thus, a sense of inclusion and togetherness in the group was maintained through ritualised practices of membership mantras, melodies and mimicry with peers. Finally 'becoming' forefronted children's evolving social identity, for example as they looked to the future in the aspirational consumption of adult ads and defended their developing sex role identity through consuming gender appropriate executions and mocking those aimed at the opposite sex.

We have seen how Erikson's (1987) conception of life span development has provided a useful means of understanding the children's existential concerns and their related advertising experiences. A number of points are worth highlighting in terms of autonomy and affiliation's positioning within this framework. Firstly the term 'autonomy' has been used rather differently from Erikson. Whereas he refers to children in early childhood progressing through the normative crisis of 'autonomy versus shame and doubt' his reference to autonomy seems to be more narrowly related to issues regarding muscular maturation, locomotion and verbalisation. Autonomy in the current analysis was applied with a particular focus on the condition of being self governing incorporating issues such as empowerment, independence and self determination. Secondly, in keeping with the notion of getting older younger, the children's existential concerns seemed to have relevance in terms of three of Erikson's life stages. Through their concern with mastering, controlling and criticising the children were closely aligned with the middle childhood crisis of 'industry versus inferiority' and the particular psychosocial strength of competence. However, the existential concern of affiliation seemed to draw on two later stages that might not be expected to appear in children of this age: the adolescent crisis of identity, and at times young adult issues of intimacy versus isolation. For example the children's strivings for solidarity and membership within the peer group, alongside identification with media heroes suggested the relevance of psychosocial identity issues. Further the focus on intimacy and togetherness within girls' relationships with best friends reflected concerns of much older individuals.

Finally Erikson's framework highlights dialectical conflict as the basic mechanism of development. As the description of roles illustrates, a dialectic tension seemed to characterise the children's experiences both of life and of advertising with the core existential concerns of autonomy and affiliation appearing to be in conflictual dialogue. They emerged as often opposing forces concerned with themes such as the individual versus the social, self determination versus conformity, and independence versus reliance. For example, this tension was tangibly expressed by one boy for whom reaching the age of 12 symbolised the conflictual marriage of autonomy and affiliation:

S: My friends round the corner, they wear it (Tommy Hillfiger) all the time, so I just thought, well, they're like sixteen, cos they're the only boys that are around here to play with, so I just thought "well, it's designer clothes and I'm getting to just about twelve" and that's when you decide to wear it.

I: Why do you think it is when you're about twelve that you decide to wear it?

S: Cos you're just about a teenager and you want to be yourself.

(Boy, P7, private)

Stuart desperately wanted to be like the older boys and to conform to the clothing code of the teenager. However his reasoning was based on a desire to be an individual and to demonstrate autonomy. Advertising experiences echoed similar dialectical tensions. For example many of the children claimed to dislike all advertising and to make active attempts to avoid it, and yet they would later admit to looking out for new or clever ads in order to talk about them within the social group. Similarly, others would criticise the reality and authenticity of ads and yet these same executions emerged as resources they gleefully played with, reenacted or sang within the peer group to confirm their membership.

So far attention has been given to the similarities amongst the children. However, the socially situated, contextualised nature of the research provided a means of exploring experiences across age, gender and schooling defined social groups. It is notable that age and schooling location seemed to have little influence on the

existential concerns and advertising roles adopted by the children. While it was apparent that the older group's advertising accounts were perhaps more knowledgeable and nuanced, the themes remained consistent as the children moved from P7 to S1. Similarly although some children in different schooling locations undertook more extreme positions regarding their roles as, for example, Reality Questioners or Membership Maintainers, these same roles were played out throughout the groups. However, the contextual issue which did emerge as more significant among the informants was that of gender.

The disparity between males and females was perhaps most apparent in terms of their roles as Storytellers and Experiencers. For example as Storytellers the boys demonstrated a keen interest in informational elements as well as the structure and chronological sequence of ads. Their interaction with advertising placed considerable focus on authorial intent with ads emerging as texts to be precisely and humorously retold to the peer group. The girls' emergence as Experiencers suggested that they were more emotionally involved with ad texts. They were keen to examine and share the detail and minutiae of ads. Further they experienced elements such as screen characters and music with greater intensity than the boys. Such gender differences suggested that girls' relationship with advertising was a more intimate and exclusive experience.

4. Implications for advertising practitioners

The findings of this study suggest that in 'playing along' with advertising and assuming specific roles the children were adaptable, purposeful, and literate advertising consumers. In this light the children appeared less vulnerable to advertising, and, like advertising literate adults, more demanding that their attention be earned and rewarded (Meadows, 1983). However, while this may mean that it is necessary to question the perception of advertiser omnipotence it can not be assumed that the children's advertising roles represent impenetrable armour against the effects of advertising. While the children adopted and tried on these roles, often with

considerable enthusiasm, this is not to say that they could not be induced by advertising.

Nevertheless the evidence of the range and depth of advertising roles tried on by the children seems to have implications for advertising practitioners. As Lannon (1992) has indicated, with the recognition that the consumer is both active and reward seeking comes a need to rethink the account planning process. Firstly, the findings in the current study support the value of more creative research methods and techniques which allow consideration of the child's contextual and role based relationship with advertising. Photoelicitation based on children's lifeworlds represents just one avenue for entering children's lives which may be usefully supplemented by other child-centred techniques including participant observation. Research approaches will also need to account for the apparent mastery of many children by exploring not only their limitations but also their competency with advertising texts.

Secondly, the identification of autonomy and affiliation as existential concerns for the children highlights their potential thematic application in the design and creation of ads. Indeed there was evidence in the children's discourse of considerable enjoyment of existing ads which utilised dimensions of these themes. For example the creative exercise demonstrated an emphasis on ads focusing on issues of social acceptance. In addition there was much animated discussion of ads featuring scenarios of child empowerment and independence.

Thirdly, children's adoption of various roles, for example as Meaning Masters and Adult Aspirers indicates that practitioners will need to avoid condescending 'for children' approaches when developing ads. Marquis (1994) has suggested that children are complex consumers who require grown up marketing strategies. This has certainly been supported by the findings of the current study. The active role undertaken by children and the desire to demonstrate their autonomy through mastering, controlling and criticising ads suggests that they are able and willing to demonstrate advertising literacy and demand executions which recognise this. As the

children's interactions with advertising were closely comparable with those of older teenagers (Ritson and Elliott, 1999) there may even be a need to 'age-up' ads to suit this apparently mature and independence focused audience. In addition if children's readings and experiences of ads reflect their personal and social needs and purposes, then practitioners should acknowledge that they not only require more sophisticated ads but that practitioners have less control over their readings. This lack of control is further exacerbated by the pervasive consumption of brand and advertising as separate entities. The evidence of separate consumption demands the attention of advertisers. It suggests a more complex and evasive child audience than that accounted for by the prevailing linear effects models.

However, children's active involvement with advertising through their autonomy and affiliation roles also indicates that there may be opportunities for practitioners. For example, Ritson and Elliott (1997) have described how members of Generation X may be encouraged to actively interpret advertising by using 'weak' texts. These deliberately 'open' ads empower the consumer to derive very personal interpretations of ad meaning which can then be discussed and confirmed with other members of the interpretive community. This and other encouragements of empowered interpretations and social interactions may be offered to child audiences. Although advertisers can only invite such responses, child acceptance of such offers would represent an invaluable extension of advertising beyond initial reception into the social networks of the peer group.

Fourthly, evaluation methods could profitably look beyond the simplistic notion of advertising effects towards the wider implications of children's advertising roles. Advertisers need to consider not only what they want children to get out of advertising but also the ways in which ads are being used and applied in children's daily existence. Does the execution have relevance for children's roles as Ad Players, as Precocious Planners, as Meaning Masters or even as Gender Defenders? By contemplating these issues it may be possible to examine whether there are

existing or potential linkages between children's uses of advertising and brand values.

5. Implications for educators and policy makers

In terms of educational matters it is pertinent to note that children's play with advertising may itself be a productive means of learning about the genre. Vygotsky (1978) argues that the child learns by jointly constructing his or her understanding of issues and events. His notion of the zone of proximal development suggests that interaction with peers within the classroom or the playground could form a useful means of learning about advertising. Collaborating and playing with a peer who is more knowledgeable may provide the child with new information but also confirm those aspects which he or she does not understand. Certainly there was evidence of such interactions amongst the children in the study with more competent peers explaining and analysing ads to less well-informed friends.

Nevertheless, despite the role of education through play, it is surprising that media, and specifically advertising, education does not have a structured role within primary education. Given that children appear to be 'getting older younger' it would seem pertinent to address such issues in the curriculum before children reach secondary school. Teachers approaching the subject of advertising might consider the diversity of roles that the children exhibited in the study. Gardner (1983) argues that education needs to take account of all aspects of intelligence and perhaps advertising should be considered similarly within the classroom.

For those involved in the consideration of policy issues there may be some comfort to be gained from the notion that children are concerned to interact with advertising for personally derived autonomy and affiliation purposes. For example the children's ability to try on the various roles subsumed by Masters, Controllers and Critical Onlookers indicated that they were literate and competent consumers. Indeed for the majority of the children ad mastery was not only apparent but prominently and

enthusiastically displayed. Their abilities and knowledge drew comparisons with recent studies of teenagers (Ritson and Elliott, 1999) and even young adults (O'Donohoe and Tynan, 1998). In addition evidence of the separate consumption of ad and brand suggests that the link between advertising and brand purchase is less concrete than it is often presented. Children's involved interaction with particular ads generally had little or no connection with intended ad messages or commercial functions. Further the adoption of the critical observer position indicated a desire to establish distance between the self and the ad text. On the basis of these findings it would seem that children under the age of twelve are not uniformly passive. Certainly these children in P7 and S1 were not as helpless as the call for a European wide ad ban would suggest.

Nevertheless the children's interest in trying on some of the advertising roles did indicate some more worrying aspects concerning the child/ advertising relationship. Firstly, although they were adept at undertaking the role of Ad Avoider, at times taking extreme measures to evade ad reception, there was evidence that advertising was ubiquitous in children's lives. This pervasiveness was further enhanced by the children's willingness to invite advertising into their social world as a resource for play and serious interaction.

Secondly, it has already been noted that children's advertising experiences highlighted notable gender differences. We have seen how the girls tended to display a stronger emotional and empathic connection with ads and the boys undertook a more distanced position based on authorial intent. The girls' greater involvement and more intimate relations with the ad text may engender fears that they are more vulnerable to the genre's powers. Although they too were able to critically analyse ad texts there seems to be potential, as Stern (2000) suggests, for girls to be more easily influenced by advertising.

Thirdly, while the children generally seemed to have little to fear from advertising in terms of their understanding of the genre or its direct influence on product purchases,

it was apparent that concerns might still exist in terms of advertising's power of social communication (Leiss et al, 1990). For example advertising's communication over and above the product seemed to play a part in the children's interest in adult oriented advertising. While there was evidence that this was applicable to less problematic product and service categories such as financial services and household cleaning products, there were also indications of considerable attraction to ads for products such as alcohol and tobacco. Hastings and Aitken (1995) have argued that under-age smokers enhance the symbolic appeal of smoking by paying attention to the imagery used in cigarette advertising. Although we have seen that children often consume advertising separately from the brand there remains a concern that children's interaction with advertising's symbolic raw material may make them more receptive to ads.

6. Lessons and future directions

This study has provided a richer, more contextualised understanding of children's advertising experiences, however, it inevitably only provides one part of the picture and there is considerable scope for further research in the area.

Firstly, while only one researcher carried out the fieldwork stage of this study, future explorations might usefully employ a range of researchers of different gender and background for the purpose of interviewing children. Although the children appeared to be at very much at ease with the researcher it is possible that a male researcher, or someone with a different cultural or social background, could access different perspectives and further insights.

Secondly, while the study took a broadly ethnographic approach and employed child-centred methods, the integration of advertising into everyday life indicates the potential value of entering still deeper into the context of children's lives. The use of participant observation more closely reflecting Opie's (1993) research into children's

folklore in school playgrounds, or Palmer's (1988) observations of children's television play, may represent productive avenues for future studies.

Thirdly, given the importance of sociocultural context in the current study, and the dominance of American research, particularly in relation to children's understanding of advertising, it might be interesting to compare American and British children's contextually based advertising experiences. The more commercialised culture in America may impact upon both children's existential concerns and their advertising roles providing a rather different picture of children at the same age. In addition, given this study's limited focus on white Scottish children, research with other cultural and ethnic groups within the UK, such as the Asian population, might provide valuable insights.

Fourthly, the study's implementation of innovative qualitative methods could be productively applied in future advertising research with other age groups. The use of photoelicitation seemed to be particularly appropriate for the children in the study and similar techniques could be applied in future work. Nevertheless there may be opportunities for expanding the range of child-centred methods and techniques. Other visual and creative tasks involving sorting exercises, the creation of collages, or getting children to video a week in their life may provide access to additional insights. Further, given the informants' enjoyment in talking about advertising and its significant role in social interactions, it might be illuminating to ask children to interview each other about their advertising experiences.

Finally, Marquis (1994: 23) has noted that "If today's children are marketing sophisticates, we may wonder what sort of adult consumers they will make. Finding out will not be child's play....". In this light the tantalising yet uncertain future roles of the children come to the forefront. Given the depth and complexity of the children's advertising experiences it would certainly be interesting to carry out a longitudinal exploration of the life and advertising experiences of children, as they

move from their pre-teenage years, progress through adolescence and enter adulthood.

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APPENDIX A

Overview of guidelines regulating advertising in the UK

- Advertisements should not contain anything that might cause physical, mental or moral harm to children. They should not be shown in hazardous places or situations, or conversing with strangers (ITC and ASA).
- Advertisements should not exploit the credulity, immaturity or inexperience of children. Children should not be misled about the size, quality or capabilities of a product or service and neither should they be made to feel disloyal or inferior if they do not purchase a product or service (all codes).
- Advertisements should not exhort children to purchase or ask parents or others to purchase for them. Neither should they invite children to make a direct purchase by mail or telephone (ITC and RA). Advertisements should not encourage children to be a nuisance to parents or others, and there should be no direct appeal to purchase unless the product is likely to be of interest to children and one that they could reasonably afford. Parental permission should be sought before they are committed to purchasing costly goods (ASA).
- Advertisements should not encourage children to eat frequently throughout the day or to eat or drink near bedtime (all codes), or suggest that confectionery and snacks should replace balanced meals (ASA and RA codes), or condone excessive consumption of any food (which includes, for example, showing someone eating two or more chocolate bars in succession), or discourage good dietary practice (ITC).
- Advertisements for alcoholic drinks (all codes), and for cigarettes, medicines and slimming regimes should not be directed to those under eighteen or contain anything likely to be of particular appeal to those under eighteen.
- Prices should not be minimised by using words such as 'only' or 'just' (ITC and RA). Advertisements for expensive toys, games or other services must include an indication of their retail price - a product is not 'expensive' if it is widely available at a retail price below £22 (correct as of December 1998, ITC).
- Children may not give a personal testimonial about a product or service, but they can make spontaneous comments on matters in which they would have an obvious interest. Nor may they be used to present advertisements for products or services that they normally would not buy or have an interest in, or display knowledge of such products (ITC and RA).
- Advertisements with references to competitions should not exaggerate the value of prizes and the chances of winning (all codes). The published rules must be sent in advance to the licensee (ITC and RA codes). Promotions addressed to children should not encourage excessive purchases in order to participate, make clear that parental permission is required if prizes might cause conflict between children and parents (for example, holidays or bicycles), contain a prominent closing date, and clearly explain the number and type of any additional proofs of purchase needed to participate (ASA).

Source: Bas, J. (1998) 'Parent power 2: A practical guide to children, shopping and advertisements', London: Advertising Association, 8 (<http://www.fau.org.uk/parentp2.html>)

APPENDIX B

Overview of codes specific to broadcast media regulators

The Independent Television Commission code incorporates the following restrictions:

- Advertisements for alcoholic drinks, liqueur chocolates, matches, medicines, vitamins or other dietary supplements, 15 and 18 rated film trailers, lotteries or pools must not be transmitted during children's programmes or in the advertisement breaks immediately before or after them.
- Advertisements in which children are shown to be administered or self-administering any medicine, vitamin or other dietary supplement, or advertisements for such products which use techniques that are likely to appeal to children, are only acceptable after 9pm except in circumstances approved by the ITC.
- Advertisements in which personalities or other characters (including puppets) who appear regularly in children's programmes present or positively endorse products or services of particular interest to children must not be transmitted before 9pm.
- Advertisements for merchandise based on children's programmes must not be broadcast in any of the two hours preceding or succeeding transmission of the relevant programme.

The Radio Authority code incorporates the following restrictions:

- Licensees must exercise responsible judgements when scheduling categories of advertisements which may be unsuitable for children. Particular care should be taken in categories such as sanitary protection, contraceptives, and anti-drug messages.
- Advertisements for cigars and pipe tobacco, alcohol, and violent or sexually explicit films should not be broadcast in or around features directed particularly at people under 18.

Source: Bas, J. (1998) 'Parent power 2: A practical guide to children, shopping and advertisements', London: Advertising Association, 9 (<http://www.fau.org.uk/parentp2.html>)

APPENDIX C

Dear Parent/ Guardian

The Photo and Advertising Project

I have spoken to *(name of headteacher)* and *(name of form teacher)* and have gained their support in carrying out part of my photo and advertising project at *(name of school)*. Your child's class has been selected for the study and I am keen to find out whether you would be willing for your child to participate. The project will take place *(give dates)*.

I am a PhD student in the Business Studies Department at Edinburgh University and my research concentrates on children in P7 and S1. In particular I aim to understand the role of advertising in children's everyday lives through a fun and informative project.

In the first stage of the project each child will be given a single-use camera and an instruction sheet (a copy is enclosed with this letter). They will be asked to make up a week-long photo diary and also to take photos of the possessions, toys, posters etc. in their bedrooms. These photos will be used as the basis for a relaxed discussion with the child about the people, activities and interests that make up their everyday lives.

In the second stage of the project each child will take part in a group discussion about advertising with 2 of their friends. At the end of the project the children will be given their own set of photos to keep.

It is obviously very important that parents/ guardians are happy for their children to be involved. I would be grateful if you would tear off the permission slip below and return it to *(name of form teacher)*, indicating "yes" or "no" in response to questions A and B.

N.B. The question "Are you willing for Alice Bartholomew to arrange a home visit?" relates to my preference (in keeping with the informal nature of the project) to carry out my talks with the children in their own home environment.

I hope you will be happy to support the project. Many thanks.

Ms Alice Bartholomew

.....

THE PHOTO AND ADVERTISING PROJECT

Please return this form to *(name of form teacher)* after filling in the name of your child and indicating "yes" or "no" to questions A and B.

Name of child

A) Are you willing for your child to take part in the photo and advertising project? **YES/ NO**

B) Are you willing for Alice Bartholomew to visit your child at home? **YES/ NO**



“WELCOME TO YOUR PHOTO AND ADVERTISING PROJECT”

If you haven't taken part in a research project before, don't worry. All the information you need is on this page. Read points 1 to 4 carefully and follow the instructions. Remember you're in charge, you take the photos. So, have fun!

1. The Camera



You have been given a camera to use for the project. The idea is for you to take photos which tell me about your life and who you are. I would like you to do this by taking photos of your bedroom and by making a photo diary.

3. Photo Diary



Use the rest of the film to create a photo Diary. Form a picture record of who you are by including the people, interests, and activities in your everyday life. Ask a friend to take some photos so you are included.

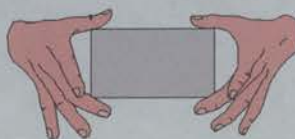


2. Bedroom Photos



Start by taking some photos of your bedroom. Include any pictures, toys, clothes and objects. Take a photo from each corner of your room plus 2 or 3 extra shots to include all the contents.

4. Return of the photos



When you reach the end of the film DO NOT rewind it. I will collect the camera from you and arrange 2 chats to talk about the photos and advertising. You will be given your own copy of the photos to keep.

**THANK YOU FOR
TAKING PART!**

