

# **Consumption in the everyday imagination:**

## **How consumer culture gives shape to everyday thinking**

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# **Abstract**

**Rebecca Jenkins**

## **Consumption in the everyday imagination:**

### **How consumer culture gives shape to everyday thinking**

This research focuses on consumption in the everyday imagination in order to develop a contextualised understanding of how different aspects of consumption sit in relation to other concerns of everyday life. I consider how the imagination has been approached in consumer research in comparison to other fields concerned with its study and note a rather narrow approach that conceptualises and studies the imagination in terms of pleasurable, future orientated, desire-based daydreams created around consumer goods and experiences, where such goods are considered central to, and key resources in, the creation of imagined scenarios. I argue that the methodological framing of this dominant approach may restrict a broader understanding of the imagination and the role of consumption within it. Drawing from phenomenological interviews with 20 individuals about their everyday experiences of imagining I suggest a reframing of the imagination in consumer research, in which I present a taxonomy of imagination that helps to define and distinguish forms of imagining according to a number of characteristics, specifically the; degree of abstraction; temporal location; level of elaboration; and emotion. It also accounts for different levels of presence for consumption practices, consumer goods and services, and consumer culture, as well as a number of precursors and outcomes for imagining. I further note a number of complexities with regard to imaginative practices and the relationship between the imagination and material reality, including the journey of dream pursuit and actualisation. I consider the imagination as a place where we manage our emotions and outcomes for material reality, but that is also managed *by* material reality as we think about and imagine in-line with what is likely to transpire so as to prevent disappointment in material reality. And far from a private and individualised sphere, the imagination emerges as a highly social domain.

In developing this contextualised understanding I argue that in the imagination we are able to avoid the prominence of consumption practices and consumer goods and services in daily life as we experience a transient autonomy that is conditional on

imagining remaining ideal. This autonomy enables us to focus on more warmly human scripts and concerns, yet the pervasiveness of the broader consumer culture continues to provide a compelling narrative to our imagined scenarios, and once attempts at actualisation are made this autonomy is lost.

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## Author's Declaration

### Previously presented work

An earlier version of part of the literature review was presented in a conference paper at the 2010 AMA Winter Educator's Conference, New Orleans and appeared in the conference proceedings:

Jenkins, R., Molesworth, M., and Eccles, S., 2010. Alternative hedonism, digital virtual consumption and structures of the imagination. *AMA Winter Educators Conference Proceedings*. New Orleans, February 2010.

Part of the data set and literature was used as the basis for a paper presented at the 5<sup>th</sup> Consumer Culture Theory Conference, 2010, University of Wisconsin, Madison. The paper was co-authored with Elizabeth Nixon as second author and Mike Molesworth as third author. This paper was subsequently reworked and will be published in a forthcoming special edition of the *Journal of Consumer Culture* (July 2011). The revised paper focuses on the analysis of consumption in the imagination specifically regarding the concepts of presence, absence and othering (from Law 2004).

Jenkins, R., Nixon, L., and Molesworth, M., 2011 (July 2011) 'Just normal and homely': the presence, absence and othering of consumer culture in everyday imagining. *Journal of Consumer Culture* 11 (2): 261-281.

## List of Terms

The following list of terms is intended in the interests of clarification, to indicate how certain terms are used within the thesis.

**Consumption** is used as an umbrella term that includes the different aspects of consumption, including the acts, process or practices of consumption, consumer goods, services and experiences, and consumer culture. For instance, ‘consumption in the imagination’ incorporates all or any of the aspects. Elsewhere I use more specific language when referring to particular aspects of consumption, particularly when discussing the role of each of these aspects in the imagination.

**Acts of consumption, process of consumption, consumption practices** refer to the activities or practices involved in the process or of consumption – researching, acquisition, purchase, use and divestment/dispossession of goods.

**Consumer goods, services and experiences, or simply ‘goods’** refer to (particular) commodities, services and experiences – the ‘things’ we consume.

**Consumer culture** is used to refer to the dominant culture in the west, the way we come to understand certain things. This is used in the same way that Gabriel and Lang (1995) refer to consumerism; ‘as a moral doctrine, proclaiming that the good life is to be found in more consumer choice and ever-increasing standards of living’ (Gabriel 2008, p51).

**Material reality** is the term I use to refer to what Shields (2002) refers to as the concrete or actual – our actual reality that we live everyday. I have shied away from using ‘reality’ alone because of the association of reality with what is ‘real’. Because the imagination is not concrete this implies that what happens in the imagination is not ‘real’. Yet what occurs in the imagination *is* real because we experience it (Shields 2002).

At times I refer to specifically to ‘one’s material reality’ or ‘current material reality’ and this refers to the specific individual’s actual life, complete with all manner of circumstances, conditions and constraints. In its broader use, material reality refers to the circumstances, conditions and constraints of the wider environment and world.

**Everyday life** and **daily life** are both used to refer to material reality.

**Imagination** – ‘**imagination**’; ‘**the imagination**’ are used to refer to our ability to imagine and the domain where imagining takes place.

**Imagining** refers to the act of imagining and incorporates a range of activities that occur in the imagination and may be used in conjunction with another term to refer to a particular category of imagining, e.g. ‘ideal imagining’. **Imaginative experience** and **imaginative activity** are also used in this way.

**Dream** is used an inclusive and general umbrella term to refer to any and all kinds of conscious imagining. It may be used to refer to a specific ideal, aspiration, desire, hope, goal or fear that is imagined in some form, and may be being pursued/in the process of actualisation, or to the notion of dreams (ideals, aspirations, desires, hopes, goals, fears) in general – it does not include or refer to night/sleeping dreams.

## Chapter One: Introduction

This is a study about consumption in the imagination, more specifically it is about consumption as it features in the everyday imagination, that is, imagining as it takes place in the context of our everyday lives and consumption as it sits with other concerns of everyday life. My intention is to develop a contextualised understanding of consumption in the imagination.

In developing this contextualised understanding I argue that in the imagination we are able to avoid the prominence of consumption practices and consumer goods and services in daily life as we experience a transient autonomy that is conditional on imagining remaining ideal. This autonomy enables us to focus on more warmly human scripts and concerns, yet the pervasiveness of the broader consumer culture continues to provide a compelling narrative to our imagined scenarios, and once attempts at actualisation are made this autonomy is lost. I present a taxonomy of imagination that helps to characterise and distinguish forms of imagining and that acknowledges a varied narrative of consumption in the imagination, one that accounts for a range of emotional and temporal possibilities and that recognises different levels of presence for consumption practices, consumer goods and services, and consumer culture, as well as a number of precursors and outcomes for imagining. I further note a number of complexities with regard to imaginative practices and the relationship between the imagination and material reality, including the journey of dream pursuit and actualisation, which suggests a managed quality to the imagination – all of which come together to reveal the significance of the imagination in material reality.

The imagination has been identified as a significant area for investigation in consumer research and potentially an important one for contemporary experiential consumption (Campbell 1987, McCracken 1988, Belk et al 2003). Consumers are said to be extensively preoccupied with imagination-engaging goods and services (Rook 1988) and the market widely acknowledges and capitalises on the use of the imagination in consumption in a variety of ways (Leonard 2005).

Beyond ‘fantasy-orientated, lifestyle advertising’ (Kozinets et al 2002), which provides scripts for people’s daydreams (Klinger 1990), there is evidence of more ambitious projects by marketers and individuals to engage the imagination. More and more brands are offering retail experiences and spectacular environments that capture and engage the imagination (Pine and Gilmore 1999, Schmitt 1999). Themed entertainment brands like Planet Hollywood, The Rainforest Café and elaborate Las Vegas hotels offer unique brand experiences (Kozinets et al 2002). Countless websites invite us to design our own dream kitchen, bathroom, or car – we may not be able to buy a sports car but on the Porsche website we can design one to our own specification and revel in a daydream about possible ownership. Websites offer us the opportunity to create wishlists. Products and entire fashion trends are built on nostalgia (think of the ‘new’ VW Beetle and Mini Cooper, ‘Smeg’ refrigerators and the trend for Vintage clothing). eBay is based on anticipating the win of the auction and the arrival of a purchase as well as collecting and recapturing things from the past. On social networking sites we may hype up ‘ordinary’ events making them highly anticipated through Facebook groups, events and status updates about related thoughts, feelings, plans and even purchases, and afterwards the site becomes a place to reminisce and memorialise these events by sharing photographs and stories. In the activity of *unboxing* we witness the memorialising of anticipation and the culmination of consumer desire; some 370,000 videos on *YouTube* show individuals ritually ‘unboxing’ goods they have coveted and bought and invite others to share in their experience. While video and online games, such as *The Sims* or *Second Life* invite us to escape the ‘real’ world and get lost in creating our own virtual self, family, world, utopia (Molesworth and Denegri-Knott 2006). This variety of imaginative engagement leads us to consider whether the heightened role of imagination in the ‘experience economy’ (Pine and Gilmore 1999), engages us so much that what it becomes is an ‘imaginative economy’. Has consumption moved beyond the recognition of hedonic experiential aspects of consumption as complementary (as put forward by Hirschman and Holbrook 1982), to the point where these aspects dominate?

Despite such vast recognition and engagement in the marketplace, an acceptance of the imagination as an integral part of the consumption experience (Arnould et al 2004), and numerous calls for research (e.g. Rook 1988, Bettman 1993), in the field of consumer behaviour, research is considered to be ‘a rather piecemeal affair’ (Christensen et al

2004, p130). Although research has existed for the best part of thirty years and there is an established theorising of the consumer imagination, largely based on daydreaming and desire, this remains incomplete and in particular there is little empirical work to support it. Campbell (1987) and McCracken (1988) for example are key academics associated with imaginative aspects of consumption, yet neither supports their theories with fieldwork.

Theory and research in the area tends to have a limited focus on the pleasurable aspects of future orientated, pre-consumption daydreaming grounded in desire for consumer goods and services (for example Campbell 1987, McCracken 1988, Fournier and Guiry 1993, Belk 2001, Belk et al 2003, d'Astous and Deschênes 2005). While the concept of consumer desire may help to explain the process of endless needs and wants (Campbell 1992) and may even be regarded as a driver of contemporary consumption (Campbell 1987, Belk et al 2003, Levy 1978; 1986, Rook 1985), it fails to fully account for the full range of imaginings in which aspects of consumption may feature, particularly with regard to other temporal and emotional possibilities, as well as their relationships to each other, the market and everyday life – desire is after all only one emotion that is argued does not sufficiently account for the variety of emotions that we feel in relation to consumer imagining (Boujbel 2008, Illouz 2009).

In addition to the explicit recognition of the desire-based imagination, there is also more implicit recognition of the role of the imagination in other consumer research. Studies of nostalgia, for instance, are based on memories and attitudes towards, or even a desire for, the past (Holbrook 1993), while concepts such as dissonance and buyer's remorse (Festinger 1957, Bell 1982) are related to post-consumption negative thoughts and feelings. Yet rather than study these as (alternative) forms of imagination, they tend to be rationalised and detached, studied as individual phenomena. Consequently, there remains a need to conduct empirical studies that will produce a more complete description of the consumer imagination, accounting for a variety of imaginative experiences and a range of roles for consumption. More possibilities for imagining and its relationship to everyday life are acknowledged in other academic fields and I draw on theory and research from psychology, sociology and philosophy in order to better theorise the consumer imagination in terms of its various characteristics, content and

purpose in order to broaden the perspective and open up the study of imagination in consumer research.

Existing theory and empirical work focuses specifically on consumer goods and experiences. Studies of ‘pre-consumption daydreaming’ (Fournier and Guiry 1993), ‘consumption visions’ (Christensen 2002), ‘consumption dreams’ (d’Astous and Deschênes 2005) and ‘consumer fantasies’ (Leonard 2005) place consumption and consumer goods or services at the centre of imaginative activity. They focus on the ‘consumption, acquisition, or experience of products, services or activities’ (Leonard 2005, p1). While these, and other studies and theorisations (e.g. Campbell 1987, McCracken 1988, Belk et al 2003) acknowledge a range of issues that construct and underlie consumption based daydreams, such as personal transformation or desire for improved social relations (Belk et al 2003) consumer goods remain at the heart of these dreams, the dream is built around a particular good that represents and acts as a bridge to these desires (McCracken 1988). Yet there is value in situating consumption within everyday imagining and indeed everyday life, so as to understand how it is experienced, its complexities and relationship to other aspects of our lives (de Certeau 1984 [1980]) and to gain a sense of equilibrium with regard to the emphasis and importance that we place on the role of consumption in the imagination. By asking specifically about consumer desires and consumption dreams – an understandable approach given the main focus of research is indeed consumption (Shankar et al 2009) – consumer researchers may distort the role of consumption in the imagination. Just as a one dimensional view of consumers may be seen to do an injustice to the ‘whole’ person (Gabriel and Lang 1995; 2006) so too might a strong focus on one aspect of imagining.

In order to develop a more complete understanding of consumption in the imagination this study aims to contextualise consumption within the imagination by exploring the lived experience of everyday imagining, examining the role that consumption takes within it and considering the relationship between imagining and everyday life. In doing so, I seek to:

- 1) Explore a range of imaginative experiences as they occur in everyday life, the 'scripts' that occupy the everyday imagination and how consumption features in everyday imaginings – what and how do we imagine and how does consumption fit in?
- 2) Examine the situational context for imagining, specifically how current and changing personal lifeworld circumstances and external sources feed into and stimulate the imagination – where does imagining begin, how is it that we come to imagine certain things and how does the imagination relate to our material reality?
- 3) Explore the relationship between the everyday imagination and daily life, with particular attention to the way the imagination may be actualised – what consequences do imagining and dream pursuit/the actualisation process have on daily life?

To do this, I talked to individuals who were embarking on some kind of life project, such as moving home, expecting a baby, getting married, retiring, or leaving university and followed them for up to 14 months over the course of pursuit and actualisation. Such life projects, especially where transitions are concerned, are regarded as fruitful for exploring imaginative activity (Klinger 1990) but more than this, many life projects necessarily involve consumption (Campbell 1994) and are therefore especially appropriate for studying consumption in the imagination. I also spoke to people who did not have a specific life project that occupied their material reality or imagination, so as to broaden the scope of the study rather than narrow it to only be appropriate for imagining in relation to life projects.

## **Organisation of the thesis**

In chapter two I begin by reviewing philosophical, psychological and sociological literature on imagination and its associated concepts, in order to provide an historical context regarding how the imagination has emerged as an important area of study. This literature helps to provide a definitional basis of the relevant imaginative phenomena as



well as an overview of the various components and characteristics of imagination that enable us to garner an understanding of how the imagination might work and how it may be used in everyday life. I then turn my attention to the study of imagination in consumer research. I consider theory and research that explicitly studies imaginative consumption, which focuses predominantly on future orientated, pleasurable, desire based consumption daydreams, and acknowledge research that takes a more implicit approach that tends to rationalise imaginative behaviour, as in the study of dissonance, buyer's remorse and satisfaction. Finally, I bring the different areas of literature together to theorise a variety of possibilities for consumer imagining.

In chapter three I introduce the method and in particular the idea of phenomenological interviewing as a way to capture the lived experience of imagining in everyday life. Taking everyday life as the starting point, the goal of this study was to explore and understand how consumption features in broad, everyday imaginings and what this may tell us about the relationship between imagination, consumption and everyday life. I collected stories from 20 individuals over a period of 14 months. A total of 38 interviews resulted in approximately 50 hours of recorded data and 70 hours total time spent with the participants. I explain how the data was collected, analysed and organised into themes.

I then present four chapters of findings, each providing a descriptive account of different aspects of imagining, its precursors and outcomes, based on the stories of the participants. In chapter four I focus on imaginative practices, that is, the participants' experiences of everyday imagining in terms of the range of imaginative activity that we engage as well as more complex practices related to how these co-exist and may be controlled. In chapter five I consider the 'what' of imagining. Here I focus on the scripts that occupy the everyday imagination and consider the roles that consumption, consumer goods and consumer culture take on. In chapter six I consider the back-story to imagining, looking at how the imagination may be influenced and stimulated in terms of personal, social and cultural stimuli, including the marketplace. In chapter seven I move on to explore what happens after we imagine, that is, the consequences and outcomes of imagining in terms of particular behaviours that individuals engage in to help approach and actualise their imagined experiences, the lived experience of

pursuing and actualising dreams and goals, and the development of further imaginative activity.

In chapter eight I introduce a taxonomy of imagination that pulls the findings together, mapping out the consumer imagination, enabling us to better understand, define and distinguish forms of imagining according to a number of characteristics; the emotions involved, the temporal location, degree of abstraction, level of elaboration, the role of consumption, precursors and outcomes. I then consider three key areas that emerge as significant from the findings; the roles of consumption, consumer goods and consumer culture in the imagination; the managed nature of imagination that stems from the relationship between imagination and material reality; and, the social nature of imagination.

Finally, in chapter nine I propose a reframing of the imagination in consumer research that goes beyond the dominant conceptualisation of positive, desire based, future orientated daydreaming to recognise the possibility for a range of emotional and temporal imaginative experiences, as well as different degrees of abstraction and elaboration, and where consumption is not always situated at the centre. Within this I propose that the imagination is experienced as something that needs to be managed and as highly social in nature. I also note the significance of the imagination in material reality, which is made visible not only on the basis of imagining as an activity (or set of activities) but its relationship to everyday life, particularly the prolonged journey of dream pursuit and actualisation, as we negotiate and manage our emotions. I observe that the imagination is not only about small, individual cycles of desire for consumer goods and services, as put forward by Campbell (1987) and Belk et al (2003) for example, but that it becomes something much more life encompassing and something much more fundamental to our everyday lives. I then reflect on the limitations of the study and make suggestions for future research in the area.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

This chapter explores the concept of imagination in detail. I start by exploring how the imagination has emerged as an object of study and as an important aspect of our consumer society. I then explore the current understanding of what the imagination is and what it might do, drawing on literature from a variety of academic fields, including psychology, sociology, and philosophy, where a range of imaginative experiences is acknowledged and characterised, and the relationship between imagination and everyday life is considered. I then consider how the imagination has been used in consumer research, in light of the broader review, noting an apparently narrow approach that focuses on a limited range of imaginative forms and related issues, including motivational constructs and external influences, which results in a fragmented theory of imaginative consumption. Finally, based on the insights gathered, I bring the review together by theorising a range of ideas and possibilities that should be considered in broadening the study of imagination in consumer research.

### **Situating the imagination**

Imagining is a familiar experience. It is considered to be ‘an essential quality of being human – *homo fantasia*’ (Lanier and Rader 2010, p1), and is generally accepted as essential to human mental activity (Casey 2000) to the point where everyday life is considered to be unrecognisable, even inconceivable, without it (Nichols 2006, Murray 1986). Despite being a familiar experience and an important part of being human, imagination is remarkably complex and therefore not necessarily an easy concept to define. In addition, a variety of understandings, connotations, terminologies and contexts used within and across different disciplines contribute to confusion. It is therefore useful to provide an overview of imagination, in an historical context, to help clarify the concept – how it has been characterised and studied (Thomas 2004). This is not an exhaustive review of the imagination throughout history but an overview of some of the foundational aspects of the concept that help to position the imagination in a broader context and consumer behaviour.

Discussions regarding theories of imagination often begin with philosophy where the study of imagination is concerned with ‘what is humanly knowable’ (Schau 2000, p50). The concept of imagination can be traced back to Plato and Aristotle (White 1990), where *imagination* is taken from the Greek *phantasia*. Plato regarded imagination as the ‘lowest rank of mental faculties’ (Casey 2000, p15), a mere instance of supposing. Aristotle raised its rank viewing imagination as a faculty between perception and intellect that results in knowledge and is linked with memory (Schau 2000). For Aristotle, perception regards the present, memory the past and imagination the future (Casey 2000). Later still, Romantic thinkers such as Coleridge raised the rank again, recognising imagination in ‘the uppermost position in the hierarchy of mental faculties’ (Casey 2000, p17) where all knowledge is deduced from, or exists first, in the imagination (Schau 2000).

Imagery is a term that is often used in discussions of imagination. Hume regarded images as a central aspect of imagining so that ideas (thought) and images were intimately connected (Schau 2000). This association of image-based thought is widely recognised and debated (e.g. see Zaltman and Coulter 1995). Mental imagery does not only consist of visual images but imagery in any sensory mode (Thomas 1999). Through philosophy then, we come to see the imagination as a faculty; our overall ability to experience things in our mind in the absence of their material presence (Casey 2000).

The study of imagination is also prevalent in psychology and we cannot talk about the topic of imagination, and its related concepts, without addressing the psychoanalytic view – Freud in particular, who is regarded as one of the originators of a theory of imagining (Singer 1975). Freud (1911) addresses the imagination in terms of mental processes, and separates two forms of these; primary processes, that are driven by the unconscious mind and secondary processes, that are driven by the conscious mind, each of these is responsible for different kinds of fantasies. The unconscious mind is regarded as ‘unknowable’ and unconscious fantasies are those that are repressed, because they are socially unacceptable, and are often manifest in sleeping dreams (Lanier and Rader 2010). Conscious fantasies on the other hand are experiences that individuals are aware of, that are often intentional, controllable, familiar and goal

directed (Klinger 1971; 1990, Singer 1975, Lanier and Rader 2010). What Freud regards as conscious fantasies are governed by reality, they are a ‘means of dealing with the overwhelming and harsh nature of life’ (Lanier and Rader 2010, p13), hence – particularly when it comes to consumer research – they are often associated with escape (e.g. Cohen and Taylor 1976, Lanier and Rader 2010) but are also recognised as having a planning or rehearsal function (Klinger 1990, Leonard 2005). It is these conscious fantasies that are more relevant to the study of consumer behaviour, as consumption related imagining is regarded as an intentional activity (e.g. d’Astous and Deschênes 2005). While Freud’s concept of conscious fantasies may be closer to the kinds of imaginative experience that I am interested in, the primary concern of psychoanalytic theory is ‘oriented toward treatment of [patients] emotional problems’ (Singer 1975, p8) – with what causes imagining and the interpretation of these fantasies – not the experience of them (Casey 2000) in an everyday sense or on a broad scale. It is apparent then that Freud’s approach does not sit well with a phenomenological one, where the concern of the study is the lived experience of imagining – how individuals experience imagining in relation to their daily lives and how they understand their experiences. A psychoanalytic approach makes the researcher the ‘expert’ and the participants subjects, while fundamental to phenomenology is the notion that the participants are themselves experts of their own lived experiences (Thompson et al 1989).

The ordinariness of imagining, in terms of the acceptance that ‘ordinary’ people commonly engage in daydreaming and fantasy, was recognised much more recently and psychologist Jerome Singer is heralded as responsible for normalising the study of daydreaming in particular, and for making it a scientifically respectable area of study (Storr 1975). Singer (1975) conducted large scale studies on ‘normal’ people to ascertain how, what and why people daydream in everyday life. Singer uses the term ‘normal’ in opposition to psychoanalysis that focused on one-to-one patient therapy sessions. His work established that people often daydream about consumer goods, consequently, he is often cited in imagination-based consumer research, and is arguably responsible for prompting subsequent research in consumer behaviour on pre-consumption daydreaming (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982, Fournier and Guiry 1993). Most notably Holbrook and Hirschman’s (1982) *Fantasies, Feelings, and Fun* paper cited Singer’s observation that people frequently engage in fantasy as they called for attention to be paid to the ‘experiential view’ of consumption, which includes

investigating the ‘symbolic, hedonic, and esthetic nature of consumption’ (p132), and specifically, the various ‘mental events surrounding consumption’ (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982, p137), in order to better understand how consumers engage in all sorts of consumption practices.

More broadly, Castoriadis (1975) is cited as responsible for recognising the importance of the imagination for marketing in terms of how it may help us to understand society:

‘the focus of modern society upon creating new products to satisfy wants, rather than basic functional needs, reveals the extensive influence of the imaginary. The imaginary helps producers create new products; it helps consumers determine what is desirable and fashionable’ (Martin 2004, p137).

In consumer behaviour the imagination is now seen as an important aspect of the overall consumption experience (Arnould et al 2004) and may be regarded as a driver of contemporary consumption (Belk et al 2003, Campbell 1987, McCracken 1988, Levy 1978; 1986, Rook 1985; 1988). Lanier and Rader (2010, p2) make the need to understand the consumer imagination clear; ‘if we agree that we now exist in a consumer culture (Baudrillard 1988; McCracken 1988; Miller 1987) and that everyone engages in fantasy (Singer 1975), then we must ask what role fantasy plays in consumption practices’. More than this though, we should also consider what role consumption plays in fantasy. And with imagining in everyday life as the focus of this study, I now consider how the imagination has been conceptualised across a range of literature, to build a picture of what the imagination is and what imagining involves.

## **Imagination in everyday life**

There is no set of agreed upon definitions when it comes to imagination and its related concepts, in fact Singer (1975) argues that such a definition may be impossible because of the private nature of imagination. However, there is a need to review existing uses and definitions in order to provide clarity and build a consistent language and set of definitions for the present study.

A wide variety of terms are used to account for the imagination: daydream, fantasy, reverie, mind wandering, castles in the air, anticipation, nostalgia, reminisce, regret, worry – the list goes on. Such abundance suggests that the imagination has an important function and more than this, our ability to differentiate between various terms also indicates different functions and types of imaginings. Any of these terms may be used in place of imagination, but they may also help to differentiate between, albeit closely related, concepts (Valkenburg and van der Voort 1994). Thomas (2004, lines 1-4) defines imagination as:

the mental capacity for experiencing, constructing, or manipulating “mental imagery”...Imagination is also regarded as responsible for fantasy, inventiveness, idiosyncrasy, and creative, original, and insightful thought in general, and, sometimes, for a much wider range of mental activities dealing with the non-actual, such as supposing, pretending, 'seeing as', thinking of possibilities, and even being mistaken.

So the imagination is a faculty, a capacity, an ability, that we have and it is responsible for numerous mental activities. We may see the term *imagination* as an umbrella term, under which numerous forms or kinds of imagining sit, indeed this is how it is used throughout this study. To more fully understand imagination we need to consider its related terms – those that sit beneath the umbrella.

There is difficulty distinguishing some terms related to imagination. Fantasy and daydream are the most common terms used across the literature. It seems, for some, that *fantasy* may take the place of *imagination* as an umbrella term, used to refer to what is the ‘not here and not now’ or anything that is ‘not drawn from direct experience’ (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982, p93). Therefore it can incorporate a number of different forms or activities (Rook 1988, Klinger 1971; 1990) and this may account for why some regard daydreaming as a form of fantasy (e.g. Klinger 1971, Fournier and Guiry 1993). Fenichel (1945, p50) for instance, distinguishes two forms of fantasy; ‘creative fantasy’, which serves a preparatory function and ‘daydreaming fantasy’, which is a haven for unfulfilable wishes (Rook 1988). Many academics use the terms ‘fantasy’ and ‘daydream’ interchangeably (e.g. Cohen and Taylor 1976, Valkenburg and van der Voort 1994, Rook 1988), while others differentiate between them (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982, Campbell 1987), even so, the boundaries are often blurry and





or drive, I can also be imagining (or fantasising if we use Shields’ term) – perhaps I am imagining what I will cook for dinner when I get home, or what I will buy my nephew for his first birthday, or the holiday I wish I was on. These imaginings are also real. They exist because we think about them, we may talk about them, though they are not concrete, material, or actual. According to Shields (2002) the commonsense notion of reality (that is often used by consumer researchers and that Lanier and Rader (2010) represent as the continuum in Figure 1) is insufficient. What is ‘real’ is not only what is tangible or concrete, but also what is virtual (imagined). Shield’s (2002) compares the ‘real’ to the ‘possible’; that which does not exist but could to various extents. The possible is something that has the potential to be actualised, something we can have belief in becoming concrete/actual. Shields (2002) provides an ontological tetrad to distinguish between the real and the possible:

	<b>Real (existing)</b>	<b>Possible (non existing)</b>
<b>Ideal</b>	Virtual (ideally real) *	Abstract (possible ideal)
<b>Actual</b>	Concrete (actually real)	Probable (actually possible)

\*‘virtual’ is equivalent to ‘imagination’

**Figure 2: Ontological tetrad of the real and the concrete. Source: Sheilds 2002, p29.**

So we see the ‘real’ is that which exists, whether virtually (imagined e.g. a memory, dream or intention – a real idealisation) or concretely (e.g. the everyday ‘now’, our material reality – the actual). The ‘possible’ is that which doesn’t exist, but could either in an abstract or more probable way. Abstract means it may not be possible to actualise – make concrete (such as winning the lottery – similar to fantasy as it is characterised in the literature), whereas probable means it is actual possibility (such as going to work tomorrow). For clarification purposes then, when I refer to imagining or the things we imagine I am talking in terms of the possible or that which is not existing, and the scale on which these sit is one of abstraction (from abstract or ideal, to probable or actual). And rather than refer to ‘real life’ or ‘reality’ I use the term ‘material reality’ to refer to what is concrete, or actual in our daily lives.

Having established the relationship between reality and fantasy – the stuff of material reality and the stuff of imagination – I now want to review the characteristics and components of imagining, an understanding of which will help us to better distinguish between different forms of imagining.

## **Characterising the imagination**

Singer is regarded as a key foundational source for definitions and his view of what a daydream represents has been accepted by a number of researchers from different disciplines (e.g. Cohen and Taylor 1976, Klinger 1990, Holbrook and Hirschman 1982, Giambra 2000). (Singer 1975, p3) states that a daydream represents:

a shift of attention *away* from some primary physical or mental task we have set for ourselves, or *away* from directly looking at or listening to something in the external environment, *toward* an unfolding sequence of private responses made to some internal stimulus.

This conceptualisation sits with explanations offered by Giambra (2000) and Klinger (1990) who regard daydreams as spontaneous and unrelated to the task at hand and is also likely to resonate with most people’s experiences of daydreaming; drifting off and becoming occupied with what is happening in our mind rather than in our surroundings, or with what we are (supposed to be) doing. Singer (1975, p3) continues:

the inner processes usually considered are “pictures in the mind’s eye”, the unrolling of a sequence of events, memories or creatively constructed images of future events which have varying degrees of probability of taking place

Daydreaming may also involve an ‘awareness of our bodily sensations, our emotions and our *monologues interieurs*’ (Singer 1975, p3-4) – our inner voice, which can be considered a form of thought (Singer 1975, Klinger 1990). Our shift of attention then, involves a series of components; thoughts, images, emotions and bodily sensations, all of which can be experienced to different extents and in different ways. Singer (1975) also refers to several characteristics of daydreams; the temporal location, the spontaneous nature of daydreams and in stating that events have ‘varying degrees of probability of taking place’ (p3) the distance from material reality, in terms of how abstract or probable (Shields 2002) an imagined event is, as a basis for daydreaming is

referenced. Already we start to see that there are a variety of ways in which a daydream – which may be classed as one particular form of imagination – can be experienced, that there are different levels or degrees of daydream. Singer’s definition allows us to ‘unpack’ the components and characteristics of the imagination and the following discussion considers these in more detail such that a more complete theory of the imagination in relation to consumption may be produced.

### ***Mental imagery and thought***

Mental imagery is a representation of something in the mind and may incorporate sight, sound, smell, taste and touch (MacInnis and Price 1987). For example, we can picture what our living room looks like, what is in it, the colour of the walls and the fabric of the furniture. We can imagine the smell of fresh bread, the taste of strong coffee, the sound of a sports car or favourite singer, and we can imagine the softness of a leather seat or the warmth of a fire. These ‘images’ may also either be retrieved from memory – when we reconstruct an actual experience from our past – or created in the imagination when we anticipate possible future experiences (Singer 1975, Klinger 1990, Christensen 2002).

The term imagery connotes a picture or picture-like representation and the perception that visual imagery is the most common feature of daydreaming is supported by a variety of researchers (Singer 1975, Klinger 1990, Campbell 1987, Christensen 2002). Visual imagery is found to be experienced in two ways; static, like a photograph, or moving, like a film (Kosslyn et al 1990); with film-like imagery most commonly experienced (Singer 1975, Klinger 1990, Fournier and Guiry 1993, Phillips et al 1995, Campbell 1987, Christensen 2002). We also have the ability to manipulate (e.g., rotate, zoom) and imaginatively contort images (Kosslyn et al 1990, Thomas 2004, Campbell 1987), such that they become highly selective, personal creations (Sommer 1978). This confirms a concept of autonomy that has been acknowledged in relation to daydreaming and consumption dreaming (Cohen and Taylor 1976, Campbell 1987, d’Astous and Deschênes 2005) and indicates that our imagination is therefore under our voluntary control, and hence they are a location for agency (Campbell 1987, Currie and Ravenscroft 2002). Daydreams unfold as we wish them to and we can return to them

and re-imagine them – changing the course of events to make them more pleasurable (Campbell 1987). This also highlights that daydreaming is an incredibly private and personal activity, that despite its pervasiveness is seldom discussed publicly (Singer 1975; Cohen and Taylor 1976).

We might also consider that daydreams are a form of, or contain thought (Singer 1975, Klinger 1990, Giambra 2000). Whichever way thought may be regarded it is difficult to imagine daydreams and fantasies existing without it. The most common type of thought experienced in the imagination is self-talk, or ‘interior monologue’ (Klinger 1990, p68, Singer 1975). Klinger (1990, p68) asserts that we ‘silently talk to ourselves’ the majority of the time, which may range from just a few words to complete statements to full running commentaries accompanying the mental imagery we create. As a type of thought daydreaming may be distinguished from other kinds on the basis that it does not seek to achieve a ‘mental result’ (Klinger 1990, p18) such as working thought, problem solving or decision-making. Yet daydreaming and fantasising may also be intentional, the intention being pleasure and escape (Cohen and Taylor 1976, Campbell 1987). This may not be a mental result in the same way that solving a problem is, but it is an intention (with a desired end result) nonetheless. This leads to the consideration that different forms of imagining may have different intentions and this may be one of the factors that differentiate them from one another. For example, pleasure may be the intention of daydreaming (Campbell 1987) but other forms of imagining may have different intentions, Fenichel’s (1945) creative fantasy for instance is based on preparation and planning. We will return to the purposes of this apparently “directionless” way of thinking later.

### ***Emotion and bodily sensations***

The imagination is the place where emotion is experienced (Illouz 2009). Imagining causes us to feel real emotion and can arouse our bodily sensations. It is well established that: ‘imagery and perceiving (or sensing) share the same psychological machinery, and that imagery produces physiological effects that mirror perceptual processes’ (MacInnis and Price 1987, p474). Put simply; visualising an object or event, may arouse the same emotions and has much the same effect on the body as actually

seeing the object or experiencing the event in material reality so that we react subjectively as if it were 'real' (Campbell 1987, Klinger 1990, Buss 2003). To explain further, Klinger (1990) provides an example of a heart-to-heart with someone that caused you to get upset, perhaps cry. Replaying that conversation in your head at a later date can trigger the same emotions, causing you to get upset all over again. Emotions can be felt to different degrees and we may experience a variety of both positive and negative emotions as we imagine (Singer 1975, Klinger 1990, Leonard 2005).

We can also have subsequent emotional reactions that may conflict with how we felt during the daydream. For instance, you may feel happy and excited during a daydream about moving to a new city or fitting a new kitchen, but afterwards realise that it is unlikely to materialise due to various constraints (perhaps you are tied to a contract and cannot easily leave your current job to work elsewhere, or have not been accepted for a loan to purchase the kitchen) and feel negatively (depressed, upset, angry) towards it as a consequence (d'Astous and Deschênes 2005). These sorts of emotional reactions are considered part of the imaginative experience (Christensen 2002).

Mental imagery, thoughts, emotions and bodily sensations are taken to be the main components of imagining – the basic ingredients which remain the same across different types of imagining, though they may be experienced in different combinations and to different extents. The ways these are experienced will vary depending on the form of imagination, the content of what is imagined and the basis of this (underlying motivation) as well as in relation to several other characteristics that can be identified as; the temporal setting; the degree of abstraction; the degree to which it is a spontaneous or deliberate activity; and, the purposes and outcomes. These are now considered further to extend our understanding of how they feature and vary across imaginative forms.

### ***Temporal setting***

We have the ability to imagine objects and experiences from the past, present and future (Singer 1975, Klinger 1990, Giambra 2000, Sarbin and Juhasz 1970). The temporal

setting allows us to distinguish some forms of imagination, for example, nostalgia and reminisce are a longing for something from the past (Holbrook 1993). We could further differentiate the two according to the strength of emotion; the aspect of longing apparent in nostalgia points to a desire for the past and therefore a more emotional or intense form of imagining than reminiscing, which may be considered less intense but still pleasurable and based on fond memories. Alternatively, anticipation, wishing and longing are terms often used to refer to imagining the future, and similarly used to describe increasing intensity (see Campbell 1987, Belk et al 2003). Other terms, or forms of imagination, are not so easy to distinguish; a daydream for instance can be based in any of these three temporal settings and its level of intensity may vary accordingly (Singer 1975, Klinger 1990).

Klinger (1990) notes that daydreams about the present (or rather the immediate future) make up the majority of daydreams and generally occur when we react to a situation we are in and imagine how it may unfold in the next few moments; they are generally fleeting and not very memorable. This more mundane type of daydream, which Campbell (1987, p83) refers to as 'imaginative anticipation', is argued to require very little in the way of real imagination because our expectations are based on previous experience and routine (Campbell 1987, Christensen 2002).

Daydreams with greater temporal distance are considered to be more memorable than their shorter counterparts because they involve more emotion (Klinger 1990). This may account for the focus on future consumption activities in consumer research. Daydreaming about the future holds the most possibility and potential for elaboration and pleasure as there are no restrictions upon what might happen in the future; it is a haven for goals and desires that we hope to realise (Campbell 1987, McCracken 1988). The present offers much less scope (little change can occur between this morning and this afternoon, or today and tomorrow) and the past has already been, so although we may reminisce about and long to relive past experiences, it is in the future that we hope to re-experience these; the future is essentially malleable. Future based imagining requires the individual to creatively construct images about real future events that are either forthcoming or anticipated (Singer 1975, Campbell 1987); daydreaming about the future provides an opportunity to play out various scenarios without experiencing any

real consequences and without facing any of life's constraints (e.g., money, family, age). Daydreaming about the past involves recalling images from memory (Singer 1975) and is likely to revolve around a situation or event that was particularly poignant; either because the individual wishes a situation or their behaviour had been different or because they want to savour a happy experience and feeling (Klinger 1990).

The temporal location of a daydream denotes different kinds of imaginative experience, based on the level of elaboration and possibility that a temporal orientation offers. The role of consumption in these different kinds of experiences is also likely to differ. Whatever the temporal orientation, daydreams are grounded in real events (Singer 1975, Campbell 1987), which leads us to the discussion of abstraction from material reality; a key feature that differentiates daydreams from fantasy, but that also distinguishes a pleasurable daydream from imaginative anticipation (Campbell 1987).

### *Abstraction from material reality*

According to both Singer (1975) and Klinger (1990) a daydream can vary from mundane anticipation perhaps about the following day, to intense and elaborate wishes about travelling around the world some day, but in both of these cases it has a clear location in the future (Cohen and Taylor 1976, Belk 2001). Fantasy on the other hand does not require a specified temporal dimension – it is classed merely as an 'alternative' to the present reality (Cohen and Taylor 1976, Campbell 1987). It is therefore useful to distinguish between different forms of imagining according to the degree of abstraction – the degree to which a probable material reality is adhered (Shields 2002).

When we look at the literature – the definitions and characterisations of certain forms of imagination – we may note resemblances to Shields' (2002) notion of abstract and probable. For instance, earlier I noted that Fenichel (1945) distinguishes two forms of fantasy – those which are based on planning and those on wishes that cannot be fulfilled. These differences parallel Shields' (2002) notions of probable and abstract. Likewise, Campbell (1987) – a key theorist when it comes to the consumer imagination – distinguishes three forms of imagining; imaginative anticipation, daydream, and

fantasy, each of which hold a different position on a reality – fantasy continuum (Christensen 2002), or to stick with Shields' terminology, the scale of abstraction. Imaginative anticipation is imagining about near future events that are almost certain to happen; 'those things we can 'count' on' (Shields 2002, p29) – these are 'probable'. This anticipation of reality is aligned to daydreams about the present, dull and mundane, governed by what has gone before; and therefore offers little scope for embellishment (abstraction) and therefore little scope for pleasure (Klinger 1990, Campbell 1987). This category of imagining sits with a number of other terms that acknowledge a form of imagination that is probable – likely to translate into actuality such as; daydreams of current concerns (Klinger 1990), hopeful fantasy (Belk 2001), expectations (Oettingen and Mayer 2002) and anticipating reality (Christensen 2002).

Campbell's (1987) 'fantasy' on the other hand is the most abstract form of imagining, while it is possible to imagine, it is beyond possibility of actualisation in material reality. Support for this definition of fantasy comes from Cohen and Taylor (1992, p73) who regard fantasy as being 'out of this world' and 'incompatible with paramount reality'. While Campbell (1987) regards fantasy as having no sense of possibility for actualisation, for instance, imagining myself as a *Charlie's Angel* or having magical powers, others suggest a more modest form of fantasy that is still beyond the possibilities of one's material reality but is not as extreme (e.g. Christensen 2002, Oettingen et al 2001), this would be something like imagining myself as a celebrity at a red carpet event or winning the lottery. So fantasy does not have to be completely abstract (impossible), though of course it can be. Other terms and concepts that align with fantasy include, daydreaming fantasy (Fenichel 1945, Fournier and Guiry 1993), free fantasy (Oettingen et al 2001, Christensen 2002), and hopeless fantasy (Belk 2001).

In between imaginative anticipation and fantasy is the 'daydream'. Campbell's (1987) daydream is more abstract, creative and pleasurable than imaginative anticipation, but is not as abstract as fantasy. Daydreams involve abstraction but remain within the realm of possibility – even if only very slightly. This required element of possibility may vary and therefore suggests that daydreaming can occur at different levels, there may be degrees of daydreaming – just like Singer (1975) and Klinger (1990) for example, assert. Campbell (1987) states that daydreams are highly crafted, to the extent that they



play out like a movie and can feature events that are highly unlikely to occur in real life (Singer 1975, Campbell 1987, Cohen and Taylor 1976, Klinger 1990). Daydreams then may be fantastic in nature (Giambra 2000) in that they are embellished with aspects of fantasy (Campbell 1987, Christensen 2002) – that is, they feature some abstraction – yet however unlikely a daydream may be, they carry with them *some* sense of probability. It is this that Campbell argues makes them pleasurable. Keeping within the bounds of the possible offers the daydreamer something to believe in, aspire to or aim for, and the embellishment with fantasy offers great pleasure (Campbell 1987, Christensen 2002). Fantasies do not offer the same opportunities and therefore are unlikely to become goals or aspirations that one wants to realise (Klinger 1971, Oettingen et al 2001, Christensen 2002). Other terms or concepts that share this definition include consumption dreams (d’Astous and Deschenes 2005), enchanted illusions (Belk 2001), pre-consumption dreams (Fournier and Guiry 1993), creative fantasy (Fenichel 1945), planful fantasy (Fournier and Guiry 1993) and mental simulations (Christensen 2002).

The three forms of imagining identified by Campbell (1987) and empirically supported by Christensen (2002) each involve different levels of imaginative elaboration, or abstraction with implications for pleasure. While anticipation offers little or no pleasurable stimulation and fantasy offers no hope of actualisation, daydreaming can be seen to be a happy medium, an embellished realism that can be modified time and time again, consumed for pleasure and as an escape from a life that currently denies the attainment of goals and aspirations (Cohen and Taylor 1976, Campbell 1987). There may of course be other possibilities for imagining, especially given that Campbell’s (1987) three forms are all future orientated.

### ***Spontaneous Vs Intentional imaginative experiences***

Imagining may be spontaneous in nature or an intentional activity (Sartre 1940 [1991]). Cohen and Taylor’s (1976) sociological view of fantasy finds that we often consciously activate our fantasies to ‘facilitate the daily round’ (p.79). Cohen and Taylor view imagining (for which they use the term fantasy as an umbrella to incorporate daydreams and reverie) as a support for and escape from the mundane realities of everyday life. The authors state that we conjure pleasurable fantasies to help us start a task and get

through a task, and we may resort to boring or unpleasant fantasies as a means to stop or delay certain events from progressing. Cohen and Taylor (1976) stress that intentionally conjuring alternative realities for ourselves, whether these are elaborate and out of this world or ordinary and mundane, is necessary to get us through the day; imagining is not only pleasurable then, but also a coping strategy.

As well as acknowledging the important role of deliberately activated forms of imagining, Cohen and Taylor (1976) acknowledge that we also experience involuntary daydreams, which supports the majority of research in psychology that considers daydreaming to be spontaneous by nature (Singer 1975, Klinger 1990, Giambra 2000) as stipulated in Singer's (1975) earlier definition and made explicit by Klinger (1990, p32) who regards daydreams to be 'unintentional, or fanciful thoughts' that arise when our concentration and interest in our current task or external environment wavers. The assumption in psychology that daydreams are predominantly unintentional, leads us to question how something spontaneous and involuntary can be considered elaborate and involved, especially when Cohen and Taylor's (1976) research, as well as research in consumer behaviour, has found daydreaming to be an intentional and involved activity, often activated on demand (Fournier and Guiry 1993, d'Astous and Deschênes 2005, Campbell 1987), returned to on numerous occasions and modified to become more pleasurable and vivid (Campbell 1987, d'Astous and Deschênes 2005). When we consider how unintentional daydreams are triggered, however, it becomes apparent that although they may not be indulged in deliberately, 'their timing and substance...are definitely not random' (Klinger 1990, p76), because they are linked to our concerns and emotions – the things that occupy our imagination are the things we are emotionally attached to, that are important to us – consequently they can and do form elaborate daydreams (Klinger 1990).

Daydreams are based on our goals and desires 'however major or trivial it may be, whether it is to buy a donut or to win a presidency' (Klinger 1990, p32), consequently daydreams are triggered by 'goal reminders' (p35); something associated with a goal, such as words, events or thoughts. When we come into contact with a goal reminder, at a time when we are unable to meet the goal perhaps because financial, time, family or some other kind of constraint prevents it we react to it mentally, which usually causes

us to enter into a daydream (Klinger 1990). This view seems well suited to daydreams and imaginings about current concerns, that is, concerns about unmet goals and unfinished business (Klinger 1990) when daydreaming is said to help organise and remind us (Klinger 1990). For example, you see a recipe card or wine glasses while you are in the supermarket, which reminds you about a dinner party you are hosting, which then sends you into a daydream about the possible dishes you could serve, how you could theme the evening, what you might wear, how you wish you had a nicer dining room and so on. This pattern can also be extrapolated to more distant and important future goals and desires, for example the desire to buy your first house; financial constraints may prevent it until you have enough money for a deposit or until you are earning enough to get the required mortgage, until that time seeing *For Sale* signs, property papers, watching home improvement television programmes – essentially anything related to having your own home – is likely to trigger imaginings related to that desire or goal. These stimuli may also be used intentionally by individuals to make their voluntary daydreams more vivid and intensify their desire as identified in the consumer behaviour literature (Belk 2001, Belk et al 2003). This is all very well for future daydreams, but what about past orientated daydreams?

Rather than be triggered by something that relates to a future goal or aspiration, unintentional past orientated daydreams are triggered by stimuli that we have an emotional bond with because they were once related to our goals (Klinger 1990). For example you may replay pleasurable experiences from a holiday for weeks or months after your return because certain stimuli remind you of the wonderful time you had. Likewise you will be reminded of a relationship break-up by all manner of things that will trigger reminiscences and daydreams about previous times, how things might have been different or what the future now holds, for months until your emotional bond subsides (Klinger 1990).

Spontaneous and intentional forms of imagining are experienced differently, though they can both be involved productions. However, intentional daydreams are likely to be more intense especially when individuals actively seek out stimuli to cultivate desire and modify their daydreams (Belk et al 2003). This introduces the notion of purpose; intentional daydreams are purposely indulged in and cultivated and the purpose may

have a greater impact on the level of involvement and elaboration. For example one may deliberately indulge in an elaborate daydream for pleasure whereas pleasure may be considered as a by-product of unintentional daydreaming. The following discussion looks at the roles of imagining in our lives and the benefits, or outcomes, of different forms of imagining.

### ***Purposes and outcomes of imagining***

Imagining serves several roles in our lives that differ based on various characteristics such as the level of abstraction (degree to which reality is adhered to), the temporal setting and the amount of elaboration. For example, daydreams and anticipations based on current concerns (in the present) help to organise (Klinger 1990), future orientated daydreams often act as rehearsals (Klinger 1990, Christensen et al 2004) and help us to make decisions (Klinger 1990, Phillips et al 1995), while more elaborate daydreams and fantasies are indulged in for pleasure (Campbell 1987) and/or to help us get through mundane, everyday life (Cohen and Taylor 1976). It is evident that the imagination has an important role and many uses in our lives; for such a natural part of our daily life 'daydreaming carries many specific benefits for us' (Klinger 1990, p281) which will now be reviewed.

### **Pleasure and coping-based uses**

Pleasure is central to future orientated imagining (Fournier and Guiry 1993, Campbell 1987, Christensen 2002), to the extent that Campbell recognises that we experience greater pleasure in our imagination than in reality as a result of the fanciful modifications and elaboration we imbue our daydreams with. Similarly, Christensen et al (2004, p130) acknowledge that consumers consume anticipatory imaginings as an 'hedonic pursuit' because they offer such enjoyment. It is also evident that we can attain pleasure from past orientated daydreams that offer the opportunity to replay and savour enjoyable experiences and the feelings associated with them (Klinger 1990).

One particular form of pleasure yielded by anticipatory consumption dreaming is compensation (Fournier and Guiry 1993). When various constraints prevent us from obtaining and achieving the stuff of our dreams, imagining is an alternative that provides pleasure until such time as we can achieve in reality. In this way daydreaming is essentially a surrogate experience (Singer 1975, MacInnis and Price 1990); when reality cannot satisfy then we are able to turn to our imagination where we find pleasure and an opportunity to temporarily escape routine (Cohen and Taylor 1976, Leonard 2005); a mechanism for coping with a dissatisfying here and now (Christensen et al 2004). Klinger (1990) demonstrates two ways that daydreaming can be used as a coping strategy; as self-stimulation people in jobs with little stimulation, such as lifeguards or long distance drivers, may daydream in order to stay awake and combat boring tasks, which echoes Cohen and Taylor's (1976) earlier research regarding the use of fantasies in helping us to get through dull tasks. Klinger (1990) also offers that daydreaming, particularly controlled daydreaming (when someone actively encourages you to imagine), aids relaxation which can also help get us through (often unpleasant) experiences or take our mind off worrying thoughts. Past and future imaginings are likely to hold the greatest opportunities for escape when we savour good times from our past and look forward to the unrestrained possibilities of the future (McCracken 1989, Belk et al 2003).

Pleasure from imagining comes in a number of forms; as an enjoyable activity in itself, as a surrogate experience when various constraints prevent actualising a goal or desire, and as a pleasant escape from a dull material reality. Most pleasure is obtained through intentional imagining (Campbell 1987), which suggests that we have learned to actively seek pleasure through imagining (Cohen and Taylor 1976, Campbell 1987, Christensen et al 2004).

### **Rehearsal-based uses**

Daydreams about future events also provide opportunities to explore and rehearse events (Klinger 1990; Christensen et al 2004, Phillips et al 1995). There are no ramifications in the imagination, therefore it provides a valuable opportunity to play out scenarios which allows an individual to imagine the consequences of alternatives and

this feeds into the decision making process (Phillips et al 1995, Christensen 2002). Planning, whether short or long term, is also a benefit of imagining future situations and shares a likeness with Klinger's (1990) organisation function of daydreaming about current concerns; we can prepare, anticipate and organise ourselves through the use of images (Christensen et al 2004).

Unlike Campbell's (1987) 'hedonic' daydreams, the exploratory rehearsing quality of imagining lends itself to positive *and* negative events. Worried and unhappy daydreams also help us to plan, rehearse and work things out based on things that we fear and want to avoid (Klinger 1990). Past orientated daydreams can provide lessons to learn, for example, negative experiences of past events that did not turn out the way we had hoped can teach us how to behave in the future (Klinger 1990) and many past orientated daydreams are likely to be about how we would behave and what we might do differently if the situation arose again. So imagining past experiences can help prepare us for the future (Klinger 1990).

The rehearsal, planning, learning and decision-making elements of imagining may specifically motivate us into action. The notion of motivation is acknowledged by various researchers (e.g. Campbell 1987, Klinger 1990, Belk et al 2003). Future orientated daydreams may be based on desires and goals that we want to pursue and actualise in the future, or based on fear and what we wish to avoid in the course of our lives (Klinger 1990). The stuff of daydreams and of worries therefore constantly provides something for us to aim for, or aim to avoid.

What we have seen so far demonstrates that imagining is far from frivolous and peripheral to everyday life. Rather it acts as a significant and complex space in which life events, and indeed consumer experiences, may be endlessly played out. We see that there is a range of possibilities for different kinds of imagining, in terms of the kind and level of emotions experienced, the elaboration regarding mental imagery and thought, the temporal location and the degree of abstraction. Imaginative experiences may be spontaneously or deliberately ignited, though they are related, in some way, to our material reality and they serve a number of different functions. While some of these

aspects are noted and supported by consumer research – such as Campbell’s (1987) recognition of three forms of imagining, and the acknowledgement of different functions by a number of researchers (e.g. Christensen 2002, Leonard 2005) – overall, the characterisation of imagination and range of possibilities for imagining that is presented in the broader literature is not sufficiently dealt with in consumer research, which I now turn my attention to.

## **The imagination in consumer research**

In this section I want to address and problematise the dominant conceptualisation of the imagination in consumer behaviour research. In doing so I consider influential theory and empirical research related to consumer imagining, including a number of concepts that are found to be intimately related to imagining, particularly various motivational constructs that may underlie what we imagine. With the imagination regarded as a driving force of contemporary consumption (Campbell 1987, McCracken 1988, Belk et al 2003) I then move on to consider how the imagination may be stimulated, paying particular attention to the roles of the marketplace, the media, and other people. I then consider that some consumer research also deals with the imagination in an implicit manner, that is, research that doesn’t tend to use the term ‘imagination’ but, which may suggest more possibilities for consumer imagining. Finally, in light of the broader view of imagination, I consider what may be missing from consumer research in terms of how consumption may be experienced in the imagination.

### ***Conceptualising the consumer imagination***

In consumer research the imagination tends to be conceptualised as future orientated, pleasurable daydreams and fantasies that centre on desired goods and experiences. Such goods are seen as concrete anchors for what are often immaterial or abstract desires. This desire based view regards the imagination as a driving force of contemporary consumption, on the basis that individuals attempt to experience in material reality the pleasurable scenarios they create in the imagination – and they do this through purchasing commodities that hold the promise of actualising immaterial desires (e.g. Campbell 1987, McCracken 1988, Belk et al 2003, d’Astous and Deschênes 2005).

However, while this conceptualisation affords a significant role for the imagination in the maintenance of consumer society – forever desiring and buying novel goods – (Campbell 1987, Belk et al 2003), it may be considered narrow in light of broader theory and research on the imagination, on the basis that it focuses on one particular emotion – desire – and one temporal location – the future.

Campbell's (1987) thesis of the modern imaginative hedonist is an often cited, core source when it comes to conceptualising the consumer imagination and indeed contemporary consumerism (Leonard 2005). As a key theory of imaginative consumption it is important to review the central tenets of Campbell's thesis as this is what much empirical research draws on. I also consider aspects of Campbell's (1987) theory in more detail throughout the literature review as it is related to other theoretical accounts (e.g. McCracken 1988) and concepts (e.g. desire, Belk et al 2003).

For Campbell (1987) the modern hedonist is concerned with experiencing pleasure and does so through imagining and its associated emotional stimulation. The modern hedonist is regarded as an 'artist' of the imagination, crafting and modifying daydreams so that they represent a perfect version of life. Not only does the modern hedonist desire the pleasure associated with imagining but also the possibility of actualising such a pleasurable state of being in material reality. In terms of how this relates to consumption, Campbell (1987) asserts that novel goods possess unknown characteristics that present possibilities for pleasure through daydreaming. Through speculation regarding what might be in store, daydreams are 'hooked' onto specific objects of desire that hold the promise of experiencing the pleasure of the imagination in material reality. However, such artistic imaginative work necessarily implies that actualisation will result in disappointment, and so, in order to re-experience the pleasures of the imagination, the modern hedonist carries the dream forward by attaching it to a new object of desire. So desire is continually 'hooked' and 'unhooked' to new objects, and our desire to experience pleasure thereby drives consumption. For Campbell (1987) then, daydreaming is built around objects of desire and is projected towards the future, which holds possibilities for pleasure.



This future orientated, desire based conceptualisation of the imagination where goods are considered central is most widely referred to as pre-consumption daydreaming and this form of imagining is what empirical studies and theorisations have focused on.

### *Studies of pre-consumption imagining*

An array of terms, have been used to refer to pre-consumption imagining including; ‘day-dream’ (Campbell 1987), ‘pre-purchase dreaming’ (Fournier and Guiry 1993), ‘consumption visions’ (Phillips 1996, Christensen 2002, Christensen et al 2004) and ‘consumption dreaming’ (d’Astous and Deschênes 2005). Despite this array, it is generally accepted that pre-consumption daydreaming – as it will be termed from here on in this section of the chapter – is future orientated ‘mental representations of objects that consumers desire and experiences that they want to realise’ (d’Astous and Deschênes 2005, p1). They ‘consist of the consumption, acquisition, or experience of products, services, or activities’ (Leonard 2005, p1).

Fournier and Guiry (1993) were amongst the first to conduct empirical research on pre-consumption daydreaming. They conducted descriptive survey based research, focused on the ‘popularity, content and structure’ (Fournier and Guiry p352) of pre-consumption daydreams and the manifestation of these in the (pre-consumption) activity of wish list construction. Their findings acknowledged that pre-consumption daydreaming ‘is an essential part of consumer culture’ (p356), one that is considered to be a normal activity and is engaged in widely.

Themes of ‘consumption excess’ and ‘consumption escalation and trade-up’ (Fournier and Guiry 1993, p355) have been found to be ubiquitous in consumption dreams and wish lists, signalling a strong desire for a material ‘good life’. In such studies, material possessions emerge triumphant as the most important objects, followed by cars, luxury goods, then consumer experiences such as travel and exotic vacations. After these come less material and more lifestyle focused ideals, such as successful careers, family, happiness, health and philanthropy, and these are above more general dreams of wealth (Fournier and Guiry 1993) Dreams then, as they have been researched to date, can be

categorised as ‘dreams of possession, of experience, of ideal, or of money’ (d’Astous and Deschênes 2005, p15). It has been established that consumption dreams are generally limited in number, can be ranked in order of importance and are often activated on demand (Fournier and Guiry 1993, d’Astous and Deschênes 2005).

Pre-consumption daydreams may vary according to a number of characteristics (d’Astous and Deschênes 2005, Christensen 2002), which acknowledges that there are different kinds of pre-consumption daydream, similar to everyday daydreams as we saw in the review of wider literature. Elaboration or clarity is found to be a central factor as some daydreams can be extremely detailed while others are more vague, and this may relate to a number of other characteristics such as the degree of abstraction, how typical or personally unique a daydream may be, how important a dream is to the individual and how the dream came into being (whether recent or long standing). One further characteristic that is made explicit by some researchers (d’Astous and Deschênes 2005, Christensen 2002, Phillips 1996) and only implicitly referred to by others (Fournier and Guiry 1993) is that pre-consumption daydreaming is self-centred, that is, it revolves around the self and one’s (consumption related) hopes for the future.

On top of this, we also see broader attempts to theorise different forms of imagining, such as Fournier and Guiry (1993) who adapt Fenichel’s (1945) and Singer’s (1975) differentiations of creative or planful fantasies and ‘pure’ daydreaming fantasies, specifically for consumption. Planful daydreams are about prioritised future goals or ‘wants’ and ‘probable future actions’ (Fournier and Guiry 1993, p353) while pure daydreaming is about ‘highly improbable events or fanciful wishes’ and desires. These daydreaming styles exist on a pole from realistic to fantastic, a scale of abstraction that other researchers also note (e.g., Christensen 2002, Belk 2001). So although research to date has focused on one form of imagining – pre-consumption daydreaming – it is recognised that this itself can take several forms, yet there remains little investigation of these different experiences and the conditions surrounding them (Leonard 2005).

Studies have also paid attention to the role and function of pre-consumption daydreaming. An important and unique quality of pre-consumption daydreaming is that

it provides a surrogate experience. Borrowing Doob's (1972) phrase, MacInnis and Price (1987 p482) state that at a pre-consumption stage, daydreaming secures 'substitute satisfaction'. This is particularly the case when actual consumption is not possible due to various lifeworld constraints and the authors suggest that daydreaming or 'imagined consumption' (p483) is most pleasurable, and therefore useful, in these circumstances. Here then, we could see consumption related imagining as an 'escape attempt' from the dissatisfactory reality of everyday life (Cohen and Taylor 1976). Yet more recently d'Astous and Deschênes (2005) have noted that consumption dreaming can also lead to experiencing negative emotions in response to a dream when some kind of situational constraint denies actualisation (for instance when we realise that actualisation is long way off) and so although we may feel happy or elated during the daydream, this feeling may not last. It seems then, that there may be a fine line between a pre-consumption daydream's ability to perform a welcomed compensatory or surrogate experience and its potential to leave the individual in a state of disappointment, sadness, resent or even anger. And we might wonder at the potential further consequences of these negative emotional reactions – for both subsequent imaginative activity and actual behaviour. If we feel negatively towards a dream are we likely to stop imagining it? Might we modify the dream to make it more achievable? Or move on to desire something else? Perhaps we will endeavour to change our material conditions so that they are more conducive to actualising the dream.

One area of d'Astous and Deschênes' (2005) study focused on such consequences of pre-consumption dreaming, finding that consumers often talk about their dreams, search for information on desired objects, make related purchases, and in some cases save money in order to come closer to their dream object (d'Astous and Deschênes 2005). So as well as being part of the overall consumption experience and often indulged in as an end in itself (MacInnis and Price 1987), imagining can prompt other behaviours in an effort to bring the dream closer to material reality.

Consequences for behaviour are also related to the functions of pre-consumption daydreaming. Beyond acknowledging that individuals gain pleasure, Christensen et al (2004) highlight a number of other functions. As escape they recognise the compensatory function described by Fournier and Guiry (1993) and MacInnis and Price

(1987). As part of decision making pre-consumption daydreams that become goals, rather than pleasurable escapes or compensation, enable consumers to make purchase decisions. This leads to their use in planning where individuals visualise a macro event and then envisage smaller component parts of that event that require preparation. Finally, in an extension of the behaviours that pre-consumption daydreams may trigger, Christensen et al (2004) state that pre-consumption daydreaming is motivational and visualising how something may pan out spurs individuals on to actualise the things they imagine.

So the picture we get is that pre-consumption imagining is a common and natural activity that is predominantly centred on a material 'good life'. It exists on a number of levels in terms of how realistic or fanciful a dream is and a number of characteristics are found to vary from dream to dream and person and person, and over time dreams may be modified. There are also concrete consequences for behaviour as well as a number of uses and functions that pre-consumption daydreaming may perform. Yet this set of premises comes from a particularly small body of research and in comparison to a more accepted, traditional and widespread area of research, such as decision making for example, we can note just how limited research into imaginative experiences is within consumer behaviour. What's more, these studies concentrate on what is the focus of a daydream and while they are interested specifically in how imagining relates to consumption, they do not look further into how consumption may be situated within other dreams, such as ideals – how a successful career may be contextualised, or how we understand the abstract notion of a happy family. Consumption is likely to play a role in many practices that may not be considered first and foremost consumption, so there may be many more possibilities for the way consumption is featured in the imagination that may be important for consumer researchers to understand (Jenkins et al 2011 forthcoming).

In exploring the imagination in more depth, it is important to address the motivations behind imaginative activity. I have already acknowledged that desire is an integral component to pre-consumption daydreaming, but so too it seems are goals and 'prioritised plans' (Fournier and Guiry 1993). I now address the various motivational constructs which imagining may be based on.

## **Motivational constructs underlying consumer imagining**

The concept of consumer desire is regarded as central to the creation of pleasurable pre-consumption daydreams (Campbell 1987, McCracken 1988, d'Astous and Deschênes 2005) and therefore I will take this as the starting point for discussion. In unpacking the concept I consider other motivational concepts, specifically needs, wants, and goals, and take into account some of the limitations with regard to the wider implications of desire as the driving force for contemporary consumption as well as the lived experience of desire for consumers. As with forms of imagination there is some cross over and discrepancy in the literature when it comes to the concept of desire and its related constructs. The intention here is to review the various conceptualisations so as to come to an informed understanding of the various motivations that may cause us to imagine and provide a set of appropriate terms, definitions and distinctions that will be used throughout this study.

### ***Consumer desire***

Belk et al (1996; 1997; 2000; 2003) are heralded for bringing the study of desire to the attention of consumer researchers, advocating passionate desire as 'the motivating force behind much of contemporary consumption' (Belk et al 2003, p326). This proposition is shared by Campbell (1987; 1992) and McCracken (1988) who regard desire as the phenomenon that accounts for our 'continual development of endless wants for new goods and services' (Campbell 1992, p58). So what is desire, and what is it like to be in a state of desire?

Desire is a multifaceted phenomenon. Fundamentally, it is experienced as an intense and positive emotion or state of mind (Belk et al 1997; 2003, Frijda 1986, Boujbel 2008 Perugini and Bagozzi 2004). Regarded as; 'overpowering....something that takes control of us and totally dominates our thoughts, feelings and actions' (Belk et al 2000, p99), consumer desire is 'steeped in fantasies and dreams' (Belk et al 1997, p24) and pivots on 'a longing for transcendent pleasure' (Belk et al 1996, p369). As the construct at the heart of our consumer imaginings, desire is considered as our motivating force to experience pleasure, both in the imagination – where we yield pleasure from

daydreaming about objects of desire – and in material reality – at the prospect of the dream coming true (Campbell 1987). More than just an emotion, desire is recognised as a process whereby individuals imagine and cultivate their desires (in the pursuit of pleasure) (Belk et al 2003, Campbell 1987, McCracken 1988). Before going into more detail regarding the process of desire, it is important to explain how it is that consumer goods and experiences come to be desired.

Desire for goods is created through the social and cultural meaning that we ascribe to goods (McCracken 1988) and thus it is deeply linked to the social world, for this is where meaning is created (Belk et al 2003). From an anthropological perspective, Mary Douglas ([1978] 2001) maintains that culture itself is generated through material consumption, that is, commodities (visible, physical ‘things’) help us to make sense of the social world, giving meaning to and helping us understand social processes. For instance, we differentiate between times of the day, days of the week, and special occasions by the use of ‘things’. Goods (e.g. certain food, china, gifts) are fixed markers of these occasions, and through meaning that we attach to them, we understand our social reality. Yet consumer goods can stand for more than this. In our consumer society commodities and experiences are also markers of status and markers of aspiration; the objects that star in our daydreams apparently tell us who we want to be in the future (McCracken 1988). Such goods, as well as services and experiences, hold ‘magical meaning’ (Belk *et al.* 2003, p327); they symbolise a certain way of being – a better lifestyle; an enhanced identity, or; an idealised version of life – by concretising abstract concepts that are then realised through purchase (McCracken 1988, Campbell 1987, Belk *et al.* 2003). Therefore, in desiring a certain good we actually desire what it represents. There are two issues to address here; the nature of desire – that is the meanings that goods and experiences represent which we desire over and above their possession – and what happens when we attain an object of desire, which refers to the cyclic process of consumer desire.

### ***The nature of desire***

The desire for the symbolic value of goods emphasises that consumers seek to satisfy emotional desires through consumption (Bocock 1993), a concept that stems from

psychoanalytic views of desire. Psychoanalytic views consider that underlying all forms of desire is an unconscious longing for maternal love (Lacan 1982) which, we try to fulfil, or 'flesh out' (Belk et al 2003) through the promises of consumption. Yet the underlying desire is un-fulfillable (O'Shea 2002) because we misunderstand its source (Shankar et al 2006) as a result of it being repressed in the unconscious, hence we are never satisfied with the objects that we desire and think will make us happy. That desire is unfulfilable but also unknowable (because it resides in the unconscious) therefore drives consumption and consumer desire (Bocock 1993).

One particular desire that the symbolic nature of consumer goods and experiences represents, is a desire for 'otherness' (Belk et al 2003). Coveted goods promise a transformation and an escape from what may be a dissatisfactory present to a 'golden' time or place where one's ideals can be realised (McCracken 1988). In his theory of displaced meaning, McCracken (1988) uses an example of a Rose covered cottage, the desire for which represents a desire for a happy family life, financial security and perhaps a slower pace of life. This desired good then acts as a bridge between the real (present) and the ideal (another time or place where the cottage exists), so when we imagine owning a particular object we imagine that it will bring with it our ideal circumstances. Campbell (1987) makes a similar argument, stating that the pleasure of daydreaming is a function of the meanings we associate with the objects of our desire, and the experiences to which they lend themselves; 'the 'real' nature of a desired good is of little consequence compared to what it is possible for consumers to believe about them' (Campbell 1987, p89). For both McCracken and Campbell, the sought after object of desire is all important.

Belk et al's (2003) empirical research findings support these theorisations asserting that desire is a strong, embodied emotion because it holds so much promise – we have a lot riding on the goods and experiences that we covet – whether it be nostalgia that will return us to a golden past, hope for a golden future or a different way of being in a different location altogether. A rather striking finding from Belk et al's (2003, p335) work revealed that otherness in relation to time was not just a desire for an improvement to current conditions but 'the desire is to escape to something far better, to a life diametrically opposed to the one currently being lived, to a condition of sacredness that

transcends the profane present'. Yet otherness of place had a greater range of transformative possibilities, from slight to dramatic improvements in present conditions. Desire then, as Belk et al (2003) observe it, is an arresting experience that transfixes us. We can see that this is present in McCracken's (1988) explanation; the different way of life offered by the rose covered cottage may be in complete opposition to current circumstances, perhaps it will be retirement, or a change of career, perhaps it will be the place where a young couple will raise their family. This may represent otherness of place, time, even complete lifestyle – the country versus the city, the future versus the present, married versus single, calm versus stressful. Again, we see how imagining these things helps us to escape from our dull, unsatisfactory material reality (Cohen and Taylor 1976) and this escape may be what is desired, rather than consumption.

In order to transfix us and thereby fulfil its role successfully, an object of desire must be something that is not easy to attain, though there must be some feasible prospect – or hope – of ownership (McCracken 1988, Belk et al 2003). Often this distance or inaccessibility is what makes something desirable as Campbell (1987) theorises and Belk et al (2003, p340) note; 'the difficulty in reaching the object of desire is a defining aspect of desire'. McCracken (1988) discusses collecting as a way for wealthy individuals to locate displaced meaning. When someone has limitless funds ordinary commodities cannot serve as objects of desire, and so rare goods that pose acquisitional difficulty become 'bridges'. Distance, constraints and inaccessibility keep desire alive and in some cases may make it stronger, yet we must also have a sense of hope (likelihood or belief of attainment) that what is desired can be attained. Desire then, is a balancing act of distance and hope; of having barriers in our way but also the ability to break them down (Belk et al 2003). Going back to McCracken's (1988) rose covered cottage, the present may deny attainment of the cottage due to financial constraints for instance, but the future holds possibility that this will actualise – it is not beyond hope. But is hope always necessary? For some individuals, acquisition may never be possible, yet this does not eradicate the possibility of experiencing consumer desire. Tari et al (2008) have recently shown that in cases where hope does not exist and acquisition will never happen – such as is the case for impoverished consumers – an object may serve as desired until imagining it no longer brings enjoyment. In these cases, 'desire is beyond hope but it still exists' (Tari et al 2008, p850). So it may be the case that when in *pursuit* of a desired object, hope is necessary.



In line with Daniel Miller's (1998) work, which regards consumption as a material expression of love and relationships, and Douglas and Isherwood's (1978, p39) assertion that goods 'make and maintain social relationships', Belk et al's (2003) findings also revealed that the concept of consumer desire is highly social. Desired objects were shown to serve as a means to create, sustain and enhance interpersonal relationships, which includes desire for social approval. Beyond developing relationships, it seems that individuals also have a desire to be and feel like others and thus consumer desire may be triggered by the observation of other peoples' consumption. So rather than desire for the objects themselves, there is an underlying desire for improving relationships *with* others and a form of mimetic desire to be and feel *like* others (Girard 1977). Goods then, not only carry a promise of transformation but also a promise of improved social relations, and although pre-consumption daydreams about objects of desire may be centred around the self (d'Astous and Deschênes 2005), in fact the concept of desire may be regarded as 'ultimately social' (Belk et al 2003, p337). We can note a strong, established link between the rituals of consumption and our relationships with others (Miller 2010) – consumption is a ritualistic resource through which we may enact other things. This desire for relationships with others suggests a rejection of the notion of individualism as a consequence of our consumer society (Bauman 2003), that rather than damaging to relationships, consumption may help us enact and improve them (e.g. Miller 1998; 2008, Molesworth et al 2011 forthcoming)

### ***The cycle of desire***

Desire is a cyclic process that involves the active cultivation of desire through the use of imagination. The imagination is key to desire – we might even call it the home of desire – for it is where desire 'originates and is perpetuated' (Belk et al 2003, p341). We craft pleasurable and elaborate daydreams around objects of desire, imagining what life might be like once the object of desire is in our possession. These daydreams serve to intensify our desire and consequently motivate actual consumption. Yet when we finally acquire it, desire is extinguished. At this point there are a number of variations or nuances in the cycle.

Campbell (1987) theorises that desire dies because reality is disillusioning due to the fact that it cannot live up to the embroidered pleasures experienced in our imagination and so we ‘hook’ our desire onto other novel goods that hold more possibilities for pleasure. The cycle of desire according to Campbell’s theorisation (1987; 1992) is thus; desire – acquisition – disillusionment – renewed desired. While Belk et al’s (2003) empirical work establishes that once in possession an object can no longer serve as desired, simply because the basis for consumer desire is longing for something one does not have (after all, if we cannot desire something that is readily available, why would we be able to desire something we already own?). Yet they also acknowledge that in some cases desire can be recycled because of the satisfaction and pleasure yielded, which individuals want to repeat. Their cycle has two possibilities; desire – acquisition – reformulation of desire ad infinitum, or desire – acquisition – recycling of desire. This in itself means not all goods lose their ability to remain objects of desire. And perhaps there are other possibilities too. What of the ‘post-consumption bliss’ that Gould (1991) acknowledges prior to the renewal of desire? Belk et al (2003, p342) elaborate on this claiming that ‘if there is joy in realizing a desire, it is short-lived and transforms itself into routine, boredom, or even negative feelings about the beloved object’. Here what was desired becomes ordinary and routine, it loses its appeal, in the same way that Cohen and Taylor (1976) state that escape attempts become routine; we may crave other roles and scripts as an escape from mundane material reality, but as we embark on it, it too becomes mundane and no longer serves as an escape. Desired goods do this too. But in cases where we may be drawn to recycle desire, are consequent negative feelings assured? Don’t we sometimes experience positive emotions towards desired goods that we acquire and experiences we realise even when we don’t want to repeat them? Perhaps, but they may not compare to the intensely positive feelings we experience whilst in the desiring mode and hence, based on the constant renewal or recapturing of desire, what is agreed upon is the notion that we have a desire to desire (Campbell 1987; Belk et al 2003, O’Shea 2002). The idea that we derive immense pleasure from the desiring mode and that this pleasure is what is desired in itself (Campbell 1987, Lefebvre 1991, Žižek 1991, Belk 2001, Belk et al 2003).

Žižek (1991), who develops Lacan’s view of desire, argues that desire is itself desirous (Shankar et al 2006), that the aim of our desire – the experience and journey towards obtaining it – is what is desirable, rather than the object and its acquisition. Likewise,

Campbell (1987, p86) states that anticipation experienced through daydreams about objects of desire provides a feeling of ‘enjoyable discomfort’, and asserts that this state is in fact what consumers find pleasurable. Campbell’s (1987) cyclic process of desire; anticipation – consummation – disappointment – renewed desire, means consumers are constantly in a state of desire, and when a desired object is attained, the pleasures associated with the anticipation and daydreams about it are likely to be eliminated (Campbell 1987), thus desire becomes ‘an attractive and sought after state of being’ (Belk et al 2003, p331). Belk (2001, p197) asserts that our desire for desire means that consumers ‘strive to multiply, expand, and deepen our desires for consumer goods’, consequently, ‘wanting rather than having is the main focus of pleasure seeking’ (Campbell 1987 p86). This desire for desire helps to account for why desire is regarded as insatiable, because it is not the object that we desire but being in a state of desire.

As mentioned previously, the experience of desire is found to be passionate and intense. At times desire may be felt as dangerous and uncontrollable, a power that enslaves the individual and may turn into obsession (Belk et al 1997; 2003, O’Shea 2002). These overpowering experiences of desire – being something we cannot control and may in fact sometimes be more controlling of us – causes us to question whether desire is commonly felt this passionately and intensely and, how does living with such intense emotions interact with everyday life? While it is regarded as an enjoyable state of discomfort (Campbell 1987, Belk et al 2003), such a passionate feeling and state is surely difficult to live with and maintain?

### ***Distinguishing desire from other motivational constructs***

In order to convey the passion and intensity with which consumer desire is felt, we can differentiate it from needs and wants based on the discourses that surround each of them in everyday consumption (Campbell 1998). Belk et al (2000, p99) state that *needs* are ‘anticipated, controlled... planned for...prioritized...’; they must be satisfied, moreover, only certain things can satisfy a need and so the concept has a sense of utility value invested in it (Campbell 1998). Desire on the other hand is not restricted in this sense, anything can become an object of desire (Belk et al 2003) and one of its defining features is that it (desire) cannot be satiated (Campbell 1987, McCracken 1988, Belk et

al 2003). Turning to the concept of *want*, Belk and colleagues (2000; 2003) note that *want* is too controlled by the mind, meaning it does not involve the kind or level of emotional aspects that we experience with desire and so the level of emotion is therefore a differentiating factor; one that is not present in more rationalised needs, nor dominant in controlled wants or preferences. This notion of controlled wants and preferences resonates with Fournier and Guiry's (1993) research findings, which suggests that many 'wish lists' could be more appropriately thought of as 'want lists', because they consist of 'prioritized plans' for future consumption. This planful, prioritisation conveys wants as a more systematic and controlled concept that individuals expect to achieve. So maybe desire is only relevant or 'felt' for certain objects and experiences – those that lure us with strong symbolic qualities perhaps – others are mere 'wants'.

Despite these distinctions, there is some discrepancy in the literature with regard to the use of the terms and therefore their meanings. Campbell (1998, p236) for instance, puts forward that 'desire' is included in the rhetoric of 'want'; 'the discourse and rhetoric of want consists – in addition to the term 'want' itself – of such words and phrases as 'desire', 'fancy', 'love'....' and so equates desire with want. This may be reflective of the fact that in everyday language we may class desire and want as synonyms, along with various other terms, and thus is symptomatic of the absence of a collective definition and understanding of the concepts in the field of consumer behaviour. For the purpose of this study, wants and desires are recognised as distinct categories in line with Belk et al's (2000; 2003) stance where desires are more intensely and emotionally felt than wants. Of course this is not to say that we do not create pre-consumption daydreams around things that we want, as d'Astous and Deschênes (2005) acknowledge, pre-consumption daydreams vary according to a number of characteristics and so it may be the case that perhaps the less detailed kinds of daydreams are based on wants and more elaborate ones based on desires, like Fournier and Guiry (1993) put forward, some daydreams may be more planful in nature and therefore less intense because we expect to attain, rather than desire, particular goods and experiences.

Another issue to consider with regard to needs and wants is that we 'want to need' in order to justify or legitimate consumption to ourselves. Just as Maslow's hierarchy of needs may have a 'need-want' structure, in that some 'needs' are less critical, we see

that wants become translated into needs, just as they do in consumer culture – yesterday’s luxuries are today’s necessities (Campbell 1998). For instance, it was not so long ago that mobile phones were the property of a business elite, yet today they are considered a necessity to the masses and moreover our ‘needs’ with regard to mobile phones have evolved so that models must feature certain functions over and above being a convenient talking device.

As previously mentioned, the emotional aspect of desire distinguishes it from needs and wants. This aspect also distinguishes desire from other motivational concepts, particularly goals. The main source of difference between a desire and a goal is a commitment to action. While we may desire a particular something, turning it into a goal means we set out to attain it. Goals, or goal objects, are desired states that direct action, and that one is committed to attain or achieve (Bagozzi and Dholakia 1999, Pieters 1995). Essentially, a desire precedes a goal and is ‘the first step towards a decision to act’ (Perugini and Bagozzi 2004, p71). By turning a desire into a goal we increase our likelihood of success – because of the commitment we now have to it (Belk et al 2003). In this way, we may see that goal setting – taking action to actualise a desire – is in fact a consequential behaviour of desire and pre-consumption daydreaming. Though we must also acknowledge that not all desires become committed goals, some – for instance fantasies (with regard to the definition put down by Campbell 1987) that have no or very limited possibility of actualisation – remain as hedonic ends in themselves (Oettingen 1997, Oettingen et al 2001).

A notable issue related to goal orientated research is that it may be seen to objectify a desired state and the felt experience of desire itself, that is to say that the emotional aspect that may underlie a goal is not considered in enough depth and therefore results in the rationalisation of behaviour – treating every want, wish, aspiration or desire as a goal seems to reduce the intensity and emotionality of the lived experience to a series of processes, oriented to setting and meeting targets (Belk et al 2000; 2003). Bagozzi and Dholakia (1999, p20) explain that individuals may have ‘a strong desire to achieve a goal’ and this articulation conveys the separation of the two concepts, noting that desire is a subjective and more abstract motivating force, while a goal is objectified (Perugini and Bagozzi 2004). That said, it is possible to draw parallels with the goal hierarchy

(Pieters et al 1995) and consumer desire, particularly in relation to McCracken's (1988) theory of displaced meaning.

A 'focal goal' is the desired state that one is striving for. In McCracken's (1988) terms this is the object of desire (e.g. rose covered cottage). The 'superordinate goal' is the reason(s) why one wants to achieve it, for McCracken this equates to the symbolic or magical meaning that the desired object is thought to hold (e.g. slower pace, country lifestyle, financial security). Finally the 'subordinate goal' is the action(s) that will enable the focal goal to be achieved, this would be the acquisition of the object (but also the things that may be required to be able to acquire it, e.g. getting a promotion, saving money) that is thought to enable one to attain the superordinate goal – for a desired/altered way of being. So different types of goal in the goal hierarchy equate to the model of consumer desire put forward by McCracken (1988), which acknowledges the desiring and imaginative mode of consumers, yet by setting them out as goals we see them become rationalised objectives, which leads us to consider what the subjective experience of goal pursuit is like – surely the process of becoming a goal does not eliminate the feeling of desire altogether? Belk et al (2003) state that turning desires into goals means greater hope (of actualisation) is experienced – could greater hope mean more emotion? If we strongly believe something will transpire mightn't we feel a stronger sense of excitement or pleasure for instance?

Some of the consequences of pre-consumption daydreaming for behaviour, as discussed in the previous section, may be seen as rather rational, planned steps to achieving one's desire, behaviours such as saving money (d'Astous and Deschênes 2005), and so these are effectively subordinate goals. It may be then, that when 'approaching' a desire to bring it closer to actualisation, and indeed when in the process of actualising a desire (goal striving) desires are necessarily converted into goals. And this may have implications for imagining. Christensen et al (2003) find that once consumption visions become goals their function changes, they perform planning and decision making functions and motivate people to action – the imaginative experience of this is likely to vary from pleasurable daydreams created for pleasure. Similarly, Leonard (2005), who focused on the honeymoon as a particular consumer fantasy, notes that when people are in the throws of planning imagining may take place within a 'framework of constraint'

(p49) and that in these experiences, there is less focus on and talk about hopes, dreams and aspirations – imagining becomes more matter of fact and focused on the constraints that are faced in material reality.

### *Critiquing desire*

Belk et al (2003) focus on the lived experience of desire and convey it as a powerful, embodied and pleasurable experience, but we are left to wonder whether desire is always such a passionate experience. Indeed, a number of researchers have noted that different types of desire are possible and thus note a shortcoming of Belk et al's conceptualisation (Frijda 1991, Rodriguez 2006, Boujbel 2008, Illouz 2009).

Boujbel's (2008) conceptual paper fuses consumer desire with a number of related concepts that are often associated with desire or used interchangeably – noting the lack of consistency within the discipline. Boujbel distinguishes desires from passions (the focus of Belk et al's research), temptation, dreams and goals. Likewise, d'Astous and Deschênes (2005) distinguish consumption dreams from daydreams, desire and goals, noting that it is akin to all of these but not fully explained by any of them. The contrasts that Boujbel (2008) makes illustrates that because desire is an emotion, and emotions vary in intensity, then desires too may vary in intensity, from passions (as put forward by Belk et al 1996; 997; 2000; 2003) to more harmonious and latent desires. The level of intensity is found to be dependent on the importance to the consumer, hence desire can be experienced in different ways and degrees. Similarly, Rodriguez (2006), drawing from the philosophy literature, distinguishes two key forms of desire; appetitive and volitive. The difference being that appetitive desires arise without one's will and are associated with longing, craving or urges – these are akin to Belk et al's (2003) passionate desire – while volitive desires are acts of will, they are controllable and reason based, associated with wants and wishes (Davis 1984; 1997) and so volitive desire may be simply an alternative term for want or wish. With regard to temptations, Boujbel (2008) argues that desires may have varying temporal horizons, some may be cultivated over time, while others, such as the kind experienced by impulsive and compulsive buyers may seek immediate fulfilment. This marks a different kind of desire from that acknowledged by Belk and colleagues – it is not a cultivated desire or longing

for a certain something but a desire for (the act of) purchasing/acquiring. In line with these ideas we can draw from Bauman (2001), who cites Ferguson (1992) regarding the suggestion that 'wish' is a 'more powerful and versatile replacement' (p14) to desire as it accounts for casual and spontaneous purchases, which are more common in today's consumer culture, while desire is seen as resource intensive.

In contrast to consumption dreams, Boujbel (2008) argues that possession is less important in pre-consumption daydreaming because the activity may be indulged in for hedonic reasons, and often as a compensatory activity. She further argues that pre-consumption daydreaming 'does not induce discomfort and frustration as it is the case with consumption desires' (p319), yet if we look more closely at d'Astous and Deschênes (2005) work, which Boujbel draws on, we see that they recognise negative emotions as a potential response to pre-consumption daydreaming, as does Christensen (2002), which may include or result in frustration, and discomfort, as well as other negative emotions and so this difference in concepts may not always be the case. Of course the negative responses are based on not being able to attain the object of desire around which the dream is built and so the overlapping of concepts may be responsible for the lack of clear differentiation.

In addition to critiquing and extending the concept of desire beyond the passionate kind which currently dominates the treatment of it in consumer behaviour, Illouz (2009) offers a more critical approach acknowledging that desire is too narrow and problematic a concept to explain contemporary consumption. She argues instead that emotions are more appropriate to explain consumption and moreover, that emotion is the linking mechanism between imagination and consumption. When we reflect on the broader literature, which recognises a variety of emotions and their intensity in an imaginative experience (e.g. Singer 1975, Klinger 1990), this seems more appropriate.

In a similar argument to Boujbel (2008) and Rodriguez (2006) regarding different forms of consumer desires, Illouz (2009) highlights a lack of differentiation when it comes to how different kinds of goods and experiences may be desired differently and how experiences of desire may relate to other kinds of emotions. Emotions however, are



more differentiated and account for both positive and negative incentives to consume. This also acknowledges the possibility that goods and experiences may be consumed for a number of reasons, indeed that these reasons may change and conflict, while desire does not account for this possibility (although Klinger (1990) regards desire as inclusive of a desire to avoid, which acknowledges that negative emotions can drive certain forms of imagining). Further to this is the notion that desire has too much or too little agency, in that it is either regarded as something we cannot control because it is based on our unconscious – too little agency – or is the only thing that we are guided by and care to tend to, when it is considered to be something that takes over us (Belk et al 2003) – too much agency. Emotions on the other hand involve ‘intentions, appreciations, motivations and goals’ (Illouz 2009, p385), whereas although desire may be experienced as an emotion, it may be considered predominantly as a motivation, moreover, a passionate, embodied one that we cannot always control. Although Illouz (2009) opens up the possibility of consumption and the consumer imagination being driven by emotions rather than desire her account remains firmly rooted in emotions related to the consumption experience – when it is at the centre of imagining.

In summary, desire has been regarded by many as the driving force of contemporary consumption, yet it seems that the concept requires further empirical research with regard to the way that it is experienced in order to broaden our understanding of the varying forms that it may take. As it stands, passionate desire as researched by Belk et al (2003) may not be sufficient to explain consumption alone. Indeed, it seems there may be a variety of constructs that underlie consumer imaginings, including a broader range of emotions both positive and negative that more fully account for the range of emotions consumers experience (Illouz 2009). It may be the case that a variety of motivations and emotions sit on a scale of intensity from want to desire, fear to elation, moreover, many of these may be related to one another, for instance we may take a desire and turn it into a goal in order to actualise it, we may feel other emotions as well as desire, indeed we may experience conflicting (positive and negative) emotions simultaneously. But how do we come to want, desire, or fear certain goods and experiences? How is the imagination stimulated so as to drive consumption? I now turn my attention to the various external (social) influences that stimulate the imagination.

## **Stimulating the imagination: creating and cultivating desire**

Desire is said to originate externally and consumers are considered to ‘lack the self-knowledge and creativity to conjure our own desires’ (Belk et al 2000 p99). This notion of externally stoked or socially driven desires is also found in literature outside consumer research, for instance Cohen and Taylor (1992) argue that daydreams and fantasies are unlikely to ever be regarded as unique but in fact come from a common cultural stock (see also Caughey 1984). While Singer (1975) recognises that television and celebrities expose individuals to a wider range of fantasies – of course these are not consumption focused fantasies but other life scripts and narratives. Not only might desires (which may include desire to avoid) be created by external sources, but they are ‘born, reborn, fuelled, nourished and sustained’ by external sources that offer inspiration for us to craft daydreams and fantasies (Belk 2001 p199).

The precise nature of the social and cultural shaping of desire is an aspect that Illouz (2009) takes issue with, pointing out that there are too many vague references to the link between desire and advertising or marketing. For example, Bocoock (1993, p93) asserts that ‘modern consumption depends on advertising and the display of commodities...in a way which creates and elicits desires’ (Bocoock 1993, p93). Illouz (2009) therefore argues that there is a need for greater conceptualisation regarding how such cultural and social structures influence consumers and create desire that drives consumption. This is an intention of the following discussion.

A variety of stimulants have been acknowledged to create and fuel consumer desires and provide stimulation for the imagination, particularly in the form of pleasurable daydreaming (Belk et al 2003). Featherstone (1997 p68) refers to the ‘commercial manipulation of images’ as responsible for the constant reworking of consumer desires. Particular stimulants that perform this ‘manipulation’ include; advertising, branding, retailing, promotions, packaging, display and design (Featherstone 1997; 2007, Belk et al 2000; 2003), all of which are said to create symbolic meaning for goods – based on shared cultural meanings – which tempt consumers by promising an enhanced identity upon ownership (McCracken 1988). Within these however, we may see evidence of Illouz’s (2009) criticism regarding a lack of detail as to how such sources operate; many

of these are theoretical and therefore we may even consider that such accounts come from the imagination of others, based on their own knowledge, experiences and observations. Other stimulants, on which more empirical research has been conducted, include activities such as; window shopping and browsing (Williams 1982, Featherstone 2007, Falk and Campbell 1987; Bloch and Richins 1983), catalogues (Stell and Padden 1999, Clarke 1998), television, film (Friedberg 1993), specialist magazines (Belk 2001) women's magazines (Stevens and Maclaran 2005), the internet (Miller and Slater 2000), word of mouth conversing and observation of others' consumption (Girard 1977, Belk et al 2003, Denegri-Knott 2010). We can see here that there are essentially three forms of stimulant; the market or marketing, the media, and other people – these are not necessarily mutually exclusive, for instance magazines feature advertisements and PR based editorial and promotions, film and television feature strategic product placement, equally word-of-mouth may be manufactured as in the case of Buzz marketing and the use of 'Buzz agents' (Kelly 2007).

### *Consumer seduction in the marketplace*

Deighton and Grayson's (1995) landmark paper introduced the term 'seduction' to consumer behaviour (Chadderton and Croft 2006). The authors regard seduction as 'interactions between marketer and consumer that transform the consumer's initial resistance to a course of action into willing, even avid, compliance' (Deighton and Grayson 1995, p660) to the point that consumers validate, or cheer on, their seducers (Miller 1991). The notion of compliance distinguishes it from deception – which may be considered the darker side of marketing – marking it as an enticing and 'playful, gamelike social form' that may speak to consumer fantasies and ideologies (Deighton and Grayson 1995, p661). This compliance is further acknowledged and explored by a number of researchers who have investigated the role and seducing power of a variety of marketing and media sources and assert that far from being victims of seduction techniques, consumers are willing accomplices or 'sorcerers apprentices' and take part in what Belk et al (2003 p341) term 'self seduction'; intentionally seeking out ways to intensify daydreams and desires. Consumers then, seek to be seduced, we embrace it and actively take part in our own seduction (Belk 2001, Belk et al 2003, Chadderton and Croft 2006). Along this line, Campbell (1987) refers to consumers as 'dream artists', who draw on their environment and intentionally take part in activities as a consequence

of daydreaming in order to bring them closer to their dream objects and provide more fuel for the daydream (Belk 2001, Belk et al 2003, d'Astous and Deschênes 2005). Perhaps though there is an issue that consumption is overstated as the 'only' thing we draw on to create daydreams.

A number of studies have focused on persuasion, deception and seduction in marketing and advertising, many drawing on the ethical aspects of advertising techniques. Although Deighton and Grayson (1995 p60) for example, state that marketing 'induces consumers to enjoy things they did not intend to enjoy', there is less emphasis on engaging the imagination or appealing to consumer wants and desires. There is also little emphasis on the proactive role of the consumer in seeking out ways to engage in imaginative activity. So although in effect commentary and research on marketing tools and techniques may be grounded in desire – in that their ultimate goal is to create and speak to these in order to drive sales – this notion was not necessarily explicit until more recently when the concepts and experiences of need, want and desire were explored in their own right (see for example Campbell 1998 and Belk et al 2003).

### ***Traditional advertising***

Advertising is traditionally regarded as a key source evoking desire. Markus and Nurius (1986) and Thompson (1995) state that advertising works to stimulate and manipulate desires by offering people opportunities to 'glimpse' at idealised alternative lifestyles and possible selves, which prompts them to 'reflect critically on themselves and on the actual circumstances of their lives' (Thompson 1995, p212), but more than this advertising not only offers us lifestyles and selves to aspire to, but the opportunity to emulate these through consumption (Shankar et al 2006). As well as these broader views, there are also examples of more specific uses of advertising in consumer research related to the imagination.

In his study of specialist magazines, Belk (2001) acknowledges that individuals intentionally turn to advertisements to find new objects to desire, though these of course are personally relevant and may therefore speak to individuals in a different (more precise and personal) way than broader advertising does (Krishnamurthy and Sujan 1999, Escalas 2004). In a consumption situation print advertising has also been found to

stimulate the imagination (Phillips 1996), enabling consumers to conjure ‘consumption visions’ (images in their minds about future consumption situations), particularly when product attributes are depicted ‘either verbally with concrete and detailed language or visually with a picture’ (p73). This research focuses on imagining in a consumption situation rather than naturally occurring pre-consumption daydreams, and advertising as a more general imaginative resource, nevertheless the influence of advertising on imagery creation contributes to our knowledge and understanding of the consumer’s imagination, in that it helps to establish effective methods that stimulate the imagination and therefore consumption.

### ***Market based stimulants***

Williams (1982) writes of nineteenth century department stores as ‘dream worlds’ of display that provided consumers with the freedom to browse and acknowledged that arousing desire was as important as purchase. The decor and organisation of department stores were the basis for luring consumers in, and once inside goods were imbued with ‘glamour, romance, and, therefore, consumer appeal’ (Williams 1982 p70-71). By instilling this kind of symbolic value in an intoxicating environment, department stores inflamed material desires, seducing and encouraging them to want to purchase sometime in the future. This ‘shopping experience’ has developed considerably since Williams’ writings, with organisations offering varied consumption experiences that engage the imagination (LaSalle and Britton 2003) such as themed retail spaces (e.g. Penaloza 1999, Kozinets et al 2002; 2004).

Browsing without intention to buy is now commonly referred to as ‘leisure’ or ‘recreation’ shopping (Stevens and Maclaran 2005, Bloch and Richins 1983) in which the quest and exploration, not the purchase, is the goal, this kind of consumption takes place predominantly in the imagination (Stevens and Maclaran 2005). It is not only the experience of browsing itself that offers pleasures but the imaginative experiences that it may stimulate. Various forms of browsing (e.g., online, store, catalogues) may fuel existing desires and develop daydreams or create new ones.

Catalogue browsing may be considered a form of vicarious exploration (Stell and Paden 1999) and source of enjoyment (Gehrt and Carter 1992). That is, catalogue browsing is a leisurely pursuit that provides pleasure, one that does not seek to satisfy specific purchase needs but rather may be engaged in by consumers 'to increase stimulation and relieve boredom, satisfy their curiosity, learn about products, or to recreate and socialize with others' (Stell and Paden 1999). Pleasure from catalogue browsing comes in the form of daydreaming, seeking information or 'keeping up to date', and talking about the goods on offer with other people. In their quantitative study, Stell and Paden (1999) found that individuals report imagining themselves in the clothes, imagining the quality of clothes and the colours that would suit them and imagining where they would wear the clothes. Here then marketing materials prompt us to daydream specifically about goods.

Clarke's (1998) ethnographic study of catalogues and classifieds as modes of consumption found that they offer opportunities for fantasy consumption or 'brain shopping' (Rudnick 1989) and in some cases even led to couples 'play' arguing over fantasy purchases. As a form of vicarious exploration, when actual consumption is not the intention, catalogue browsing is a practice in self-seduction, an intentional activity that individuals may engage in to stimulate the imagination and attain pleasure from daydreaming about goods. Moreover reading them can, for some, become an enjoyable and anticipated part of life, as illustrated by participants in Clarke's (1998) study who revealed that reading 'Loot' (a second hand free-listing publication) became a shared experience;

Nowadays Jennifer and Michael frequently read *Loot* together, at the kitchen table with a cup of tea, comparing prices, considering potential bargains and "play" arguing over fantasy purchases. Jennifer, for example, while having no intention of acquiring a pet, regularly browses the "Animal" section to fantasize about "a nice little Siamese cat" (p83).

This is a sociable activity where individuals can 'play out' consumption possibilities together and indulge in imagining things that they have no intention of actualising or purchasing, and so we may see that although daydreaming is usually considered to be a private activity (Singer 1975) it may also be a sociable activity that we share and develop with those close to us, through the use of social tools and resources. It is also

the case that a publication like *Loot* operates in a similar manner to a specialist magazine, for it is purchased by people who have a specific interest in (and desire) non standardised 'objects with histories' (Appadurai 1986, Clarke 1998) which in itself may be considered a special interest, as such, individuals seek information and goods related to it in order to increase their knowledge and find objects to desire and purchase (Belk 2001).

From the virtual market place of classified ads, to the virtual marketplace of eBay. Recently Denegri-Knott (2010, p2) has identified that auction site eBay is a powerful source that not only fuels desire for consumer goods but is a 'composite of consumer practices, including browsing, monitoring, temporary ownership of goods and actual material ownership through purchase', and so it is likely the case they other forms of digital virtual consumption enable similar practices.

### ***Media stimulants***

The broader media environment has been the focus of study in relation to consumer desire and the imagination. For instance, Belk (2001) studied the role of specialist magazines in creating, fuelling, nourishing and frustrating desires and Stevens and Maclaran (2005, p282) focused on women's magazines as 'imaginary shopping spaces'.

Belk (2001) testifies that readers of specialist magazines are 'eager, thorough, and ardent consumers of the articles, photographs, and advertisements so lavishly presented' (Belk 2001) and considers magazines to be 'near perfect vehicles' for the anticipatory phase of consumption, that is, daydreaming, because their periodic nature and 'cult of the new...continually serve to invigorate, enrich, and renew our desires with ever more objects for further wishes' (Belk 2001, p198). Readers purchase them specifically to be provided with new objects of desire in their respective interests. Further to this, Belk (2001) reveals that ultimately, to be without stimulation, that is, to be deprived of specialist magazines for example, is to be without desire, implying that desire cannot exist without external stimulation. If this is the case, then the broader imagination too, may be without stimulation, in the first instance stimulation for creating a pre-

consumption daydream about an object of desire, and in the second instance, in nurturing and developing daydreams. Belk (2001) found three specific uses of magazines by consumers in the anticipatory phase of consumption. First, as 'hopeful fantasies', magazines are used as 'an exercise in fantasy consumption that consumers hope will translate into actual consumption', for instance by building portfolios of their special interest. This explanation of hopeful fantasy suggests that magazines specifically help to craft pleasurable, pre-consumption daydreams. Second, magazines are used to construct 'hopeless fantasies'; something that is totally out of reach, for instance, looking like a model featured in an advertisement, this is more akin to fantasy as we have defined it. And third, magazines provide 'enchanted illusions', when readers look for 'imagination-inspiring illusions in which they can believe'; these illusions are similar to anticipations about expected future purchases or events. Ultimately, reading specialist magazines is an alternative form of window shopping; which whets readers appetites, and helps them find products that they want and then proceed to buy. If specialist magazines are used in specific ways as described by Belk (2001), it is natural to assume that various other resources may also be used in similar ways, therefore it is important to extend Belk's (2001) research to a wider range of sources and activities that play a role in aiding the construction of daydreams (consumption orientated and otherwise), informing the things we imagine but also in triggering particular imaginative episodes.

Stevens and Maclaran's (2005) study finds that the 'glossy appeal' of advertisements can "transport" women, allowing them to visualise themselves in particular situations or looking a certain way, but only when the advertisement appeals to the individual, this may be linked to Klinger's (1990) line on daydreams being triggered by something that relates to our goals and desires, or something that was once a goal or desire. This suggests that images stimulate the imagination by giving consumers something to work with, but the daydream itself is developed and modified independently as advocated by Campbell (1987). Essentially this means it should align with the individual's ideals, or as Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) put it, how they want reality to be. Editorial content was found more likely to be translated into material reality (acted upon) arguably due to the fantasy-reality gap being reduced by the "real" advice and guidance that is offered, therefore the desired lifestyle that is portrayed appears closer and more hopeful (Belk et al 2003, Stevens and Maclaran 2005). So while advertisements are drawn from,



information coming from more trusted sources or “real” people has stronger implications for believing in and actualising a consumption dream.

Film and television are also said to hold appeal because they present images of ‘delightful illusions’ (Williams 1982 p82), which captivate consumers. Gauntlett (1999, p130) says television ‘can be a source of engaging narratives, which may stimulate new and related ones in the mind of the viewer’. In this way television offers otherness, exposing us to alternative realities and these may be what we desire reality to be (Hirschman 1982). Not only does film and television provide inspiration and access to other worlds and lives, but it may be consumed precisely because of the imaginative experiences they offer. Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) note that this is particularly the case with the consumption of film and pornography and other ‘absorbing experiences’ that offer the opportunity to indulge in sexual fantasies, or imagine oneself as a certain character. All of these sources and activities contribute towards constructing imagined scenarios. They may be enjoyed for the imaginative activity and pleasure they stimulate, but may also be a source that stimulates our desire to experience in reality the kinds of things we see in the media (Bocock 1993).

The final area to consider in relation to stimulating the imagination, desire and consequent consumption is the role of other people. In effect, the media (re)presents other people (and their consumption) as desirable, therefore media sources may be classed as the story or presentation of other people, captured in a specific medium and light. In turn, the stories presented in the media are also the construction of someone else’s (the director’s) imagination and indeed their own experiences, memories and observation of others in the environment. This leads us to consider other people (not necessarily in the media) as sources that instil desire and inspire the imagination.

### *Other people*

As discussed in relation to the underlying drivers of consumer desire earlier, Girard (1977) puts forward the notion of mimesis; the idea that desire increases when other people have, or desire, the same thing, which makes desire a social phenomenon. This

can of course be seen to be based in, or a variant of, Veblen's (1899 [1994]) conspicuous consumption thesis where envy generates desire for and the consumption of goods (Illouz 2009). In terms of resources that instil desire and aid the imagination, mimesis is dependent on what one sees, hears and knows of others, whether those others are fictional or 'real'. Belk et al (2003) state that mimetic desire is embedded in imagery that refers to what is considered as 'belonging to the canon of what it takes to live "the good life"' (Belk et al 2003, p337), for instance in magazines, television programmes and films that feature glamorous celebrity lifestyles. Bocoock (1993) asserts that many television series' are about lifestyles, which are characterised by consumer goods, these lifestyles are consequently perceived as desirable in the eyes of consumers (Bocoock 1993 p93). Here it can be seen that mimetic desire is also linked to transformation and escape from present conditions, as mimesis can involve desiring the 'ideal' that is unobtainable. It is not only celebrity and media representations of images that consumers mimic, however, word-of mouth conversing and observation of other people's consumption habits can also be seen to follow the same pattern as mimesis (Belk et al 2003). For instance, Elliott (1997, p288) states that consumer goods are utilised 'to construct pastiches of others we have been exposed to via the media or more directly', therefore it is likely that consumers will be influenced by friends, family, and acquaintances. In relation to the experience of travel, Rojek and Urry (1997) argue that 'travellers tales' create new values for tourist sites, thereby encouraging others to go there in order to experience what they have seen or been told by others, and Fullagar (2002, p63) illustrates the competitive aspect of mimetic desire in travel, stating that 'travel stories accrue status' and 'are a measure of cultural capital'. Yet Elliott's (1997) notion of pastiche does not necessarily have to be so concerned with competition but may suggest the possibility of others as inspiration, even role models that we may aspire to and emulate. We might also see this in Belk et al's (2003) study where consumer desire is underwritten by a desire for improved social relations, including where individuals want to be and feel like others, to be socially accepted.

### ***Summary of desire based imagination***

So what do we know about the imagination in terms of theory and research in consumer behaviour to date? And what can we draw from it? We see that desire is the dominant concept upon which, future orientated pleasurable daydreams are built, though as the

motivating force of contemporary consumption desire may be problematic and insufficient to account for the variety of emotions that we have towards consumption and imagining. The conceptualisation of imagination as desire also limits our knowledge and treatment of imagination to future orientated, pleasurable experience. There is a strong role for market and media-based resources in fuelling and sustaining desires and daydreams, predominantly a result of a social form of desire – mimesis (Girard 1977, Belk et al 2003), there is also a role for other people in stimulating the imagination, but there may also be potential for others to be part of the imagination and imaginative practices, particularly in forms of vicarious consumption such as browsing and window shopping (e.g. Clarke's 1998 study). We can also recognise that there are limitations with regard to how the imagination has been conceptualised in terms of desire, as it only explains and deals with pleasurable, anticipatory, pre-consumption daydreaming and, as articulated in Illouz's (2009) critique of desire and proposal for greater emphasis on emotion as well as recognition in the broader literature, there are more possibilities for imagining in terms of emotion, temporal location, elaboration, abstraction and function, and these are likely based on differing motivational constructs and deeply related to the individuals material reality. I now turn to research in consumer behaviour that implicitly deals with the imagination noting, like Illouz (2009) does for emotion, that in fact, the imagination may have been the subject of research for some time but not in an explicit manner.

### **Implicit consumer research on imagination**

It is possible to see an implicit recognition of the imagination in other consumer research and so we might argue that consumer researchers have been 'dealing with it all along without acknowledging or making it explicit' (Illouz 2009, p388). For instance post-consumption thoughts and feelings have been explored in relation to decision making as dissonance (Festinger 1957), which was applied to consumer behaviour approximately 40 years ago. Unlike imaginative desire, its study concerns the *negative* thoughts and feelings that occur *after* making a purchase decision, in light of attractive alternatives that could have been chosen (Oshikawa 1969, Cummings and Venkatesan 1976). Such studies continue with buyer's remorse, an accepted term to describe post-purchase feelings of regret, generally in relation to how a foregone alternative may have had a better outcome (Bell 1982, Inman et al 1997, Tsiros and Mittal 2000).

Alternatively satisfaction research focuses on how consumers' feel regarding the actual outcome of a situation compared to the expected outcome (Oliver 1980, Oliver and Mano 1993, Gardial et al 1994). MacInnis and Price (1990) pick up this notion, linking the use of pre-consumption, anticipatory imagery on satisfaction, finding that it generates higher levels of satisfaction. This area of study presents an opportunity to compare imaginative and real experiences, whether goods (objects of desire) live up to expectations (expected outcome) or result in disillusionment (actual outcome, regret). Here the focus of the imagination is also reflective, or past-orientated. This presents the idea of a trajectory of imagining, from desire to regret; pleasure to dissatisfaction and a temporal dimension from future to past.

Research has also been conducted on nostalgia as it relates to consumer behaviour, marketing and advertising (e.g., Havlena and Holak 1991, Holbrook 1993, Holbrook and Schindler 1991, Holbrook and Schindler 2003). In relation to consumption, nostalgia is taken to be;

a preference (general liking, positive attitude, or favourable affect) toward experiences associated with objects (people, places or things) that were more common (popular, fashionable or widely circulated) when one was younger (in early adulthood, in adolescence, in childhood, or even before birth) (Holbrook and Schindler 1991, p330).

Nostalgia is also past-orientated imagining, but is induced or triggered by a variety of stimuli (objects) that are personally relevant to individuals and help us to bond with our, or a, past (Holbrook and Schindler 2003). This is significant because it suggests that goods may 'live on' in our imaginations long after initial future-orientated desire has passed. Furthermore it suggests that we use goods to anchor our thoughts about life experiences, emphasising the significant role of consumer goods in the imagination and more than that, in life generally (Douglas and Isherwood 1979). Studies of treasured possessions (e.g. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981) are relevant here for they suggest objects are treasured because of the memories they hold that invite us to reflect on the past. Nostalgic imagining further highlights a trajectory of imaginative experiences, from past to future.

Consumer behaviour generally considers daydreaming to be a pleasurable, widespread and important, if not essential, part of the overall consumption experience (Fournier and Guiry 1993). The focus on future orientated, pre-consumption daydreaming may account for the positive view of the imagination in consumer behaviour. The future is where we place hope, and we generally look to the future with positivity because it holds opportunities for bettering ourselves and our lives, as a consequence daydreams about the future are also likely to be positive and hopeful. But taking into account the definition of imagination as put forward by Thomas (2004) early on in the chapter, which incorporates a variety of different forms or activities, it is evident that consumer behaviour's focus on, what is essentially, one form of imagining presents a narrow consideration and conceptualisation of the imagination. Broadening the scope of the consumer imagination may uncover other forms of imagining that take place throughout the consumption experience, for example disillusionment that is a key component in the cycle of desire (Campbell 1987) may be experienced in a variety of ways in the imagination; as regret, worry, disappointment, elation followed by disappointment. Equally, rather than objects being discredited perhaps desire becomes something else such as joy or reliability – just because we no longer desire a particular good does not necessarily mean we do not feel anything towards it. This is demonstrated in research which finds that goods are not always disregarded, but may become treasured possessions (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). So there are possibilities for research regarding how consumption is imagined, but this in itself – this focus on consumption as the point of departure for investigation – may be problematic in that it suggests that much of our imaginative activity focuses on consumption. Yet the broader literature on imagining tells us that we imagine about all sorts of things related to our daily lives, and while consumption may at times take the focus (e.g. as noted by Singer's early studies that found consumption to be a common theme of everyday daydreaming), it is not always the topic of our imaginings.

Studies of the consumer imagination ask specifically about *consumer* desires and *consumption* dreams, bringing possessions and consumer experiences to the fore. For instance d'Astous and Deschênes (2005, p6) asked participants to describe 'their most important consumption dream' and Christensen et al (2004, p130) studied 'consumption visions' which are taken to be 'anticipatory mental images of future product use'. While daydreams themselves may be about the experiences to which goods lend themselves

(e.g. Campbell 1987, McCracken 1988) the object of desire remains central as a way to attain a desired transformation and so consumer goods are considered central to, and key resources in the construction of daydreams. While such studies may help us to understand the role of imagining in the consumption experience, there is value in broadening the focus to allow for a contextualised understanding of consumption in the imagination.

Other research, for instance Pettigrew (2005), shows that consumption is not always central in the imagination. Pettigrew's (2005) qualitative study exploring Western adults' beliefs of their ideal life showed an overwhelming concern with *less* materialistic, even non-consumerist, aspects of life such as the quality of relationships with loved ones and a desire for more time and space to enjoy them. Whereas consumption dreams present individuals as desiring a transformation and altered state of being (often diametrically opposed to current material reality, Belk et al 2003) Pettigrew found that many people would not want to change their lives and lifestyles, that in fact they were generally content. Likewise, Twitchell (1999, p57) notes of gallop poles that consumer goods, or 'having nice things' comes in 'dead last' when people are asked about the important things in life. In addition to this, we might note the recognition of the current cultural trend towards low consumption, high fulfilment lifestyles (De Graaf, Wann and Naylor 2005). Hamilton's (2003) surveys, for instance, indicate that downshifting principles, such as choosing to work and earn less, are being practiced by a range of socio-economic groups in the UK, and Thomas (2008) illuminates changing notions of the 'good life' as represented in UK lifestyle television programming. These suggest a possible disenchantment with consumption and the material 'good life', and by implication, alternative possibilities for imagining the good life, such as that proposed by Soper's (1998; 2003) work on alternative hedonism, which recognises changing attitudes towards 'consumerist' consumption. When consumer desire and dreams are not the starting point for research then, other roles for consumption may be visible that tell us more about the relationship between imagining, consumption and everyday life (Jenkins, Nixon and Molesworth 2010). And so I consider that the methodological framing of studies of the consumer imagination points to a broader concern regarding consumer research in general.

## **The consumption lens**

Expanded definitions of consumption suggest that everything can be theorised as consumption. In seeking to legitimise consumer research as a field of study in its own right, liberated from the confines of managerial application, Holbrook's work (1985; 1987; 1995), which called for the conceptualization of consumption to be widened, proposes;

...almost everything we do involves consumption: people get up in the morning, start consuming the moment their toes touch the carpet, allocate their time to various consumption activities throughout the day, and they continue consuming until they finally drift off to sleep at night, after which they confine their consumption mostly to dreams, pajamas and bed linens. (Holbrook 1985, p146).

We can see this all-embracing view of consumption in research on the consumer imagination where Leonard (2005) classes the honeymoon as a consumption fantasy on the basis that it involves consuming. And in consumer sociology, romantic encounters such as a walk in the park or snuggling up on the sofa are regarded by Illouz (1997) as consumption experiences, albeit 'indirect' ones. Yet this may not be how individuals experience or understand their experiences and by focusing on it in this way we may lose sight of how it is part of a broader set of practices and existence, and overlook the possibility that consumption is a means to a more important end.

Such a view is shared by a number of academics who regard 'consumer' as only one of many labels and consumption as one of – and involved in – many other practices (e.g. Gabriel and Lang 1997, Warde 2005, Black 2010). Shankar et al (2009, p76) in particular, note that 'because consumer researchers' theoretical and analytical focus is, quite understandably, consumption, this has resulted in an overemphasis on the importance of consumption'. In-line with Warde (2005) they acknowledge that individuals do not necessarily see themselves as consumers or consuming but as participating in various practices. Warde (2005) advocates that consumption should be seen as an outcome of practice and this helps to resolve the discrepancy between what is and isn't seen as consumption. Warde (2005) recognises two forms of practices; 'dispersed' and 'integrated'. Dispersed practices are those that are not viewed as consumption, such as going to the cinema, eating, playing sport, or going to the park,

though in most cases of course they involve consumption in some way. Integrated practices on the other hand are those directly concerned with being a consumer and consuming, such as going shopping (Shankar et al 2009). This theory of practice is useful when exploring how consumption may feature in the imagination – at times it may not be the focus but a necessary part of some other social practice, at other times it may well be experienced as the focus.

Findings from Illouz's (1997) study of the commodification of romance, however, while recognising the importance of understanding experiences from the perspective of the individual, notes that this can mean that the role of consumption itself is obscured, yet may still be important for understanding the relationship between social practices and consumption.

Illouz (1997) explains that romance has become commodified and is therefore understood and practiced through the market. However, her empirical findings reveal that for the individuals involved, romantic 'moments' are perceived as 'entirely divorced from acts of consumption', the emotional experience meant people 'evaded (forgot) its consumerist character' (Illouz 1997, p147-148). However, Illouz (1997) draws attention to the fact that the emotion of the romantic bond prevents individuals from recognising the consumer practices that are necessary to enact love and romance (e.g. the consumption aspects involved in a walk on the beach may include a car and car parking fee, or public transport, as well as food). While we may consider it a good thing that people consider love and romance as primarily emotional experiences, not recognising the aspects of consumption involved allows the consumerist order to be reproduced. What we see here is consumer culture – the way we understand romance – providing the context for our experiences. The issue is that consumption is not always central in consumer accounts and may not even be recognised by individuals – its influence may be imperceptible – but it may still play an important role. Hence Illouz (1997, p21) calls for researchers to not only address what 'actors know about their own practices and representations' but also what they 'ignore or mis-read in them'.



The idea that consumption can be imperceptible, that it fades from view, is also apparent in Miller's (2010) work. Miller (2010) explains that goods become important, in terms of their ability to act on us – framing our behaviour and identity – when they 'disappear'; goods work by 'being invisible and unremarked upon, a state they usually achieve by being familiar and taken for granted' (Miller 2010, p50). Goods do not have to be at the centre of an experience to be of importance, and this means that we should appreciate goods in whatever role they play, rather than attribute greater prominence to consumption by making it the focus of a scenario at the expense of its more important function, that of facilitating social relations (Shankar et al 2009). From Miller's (2005) perspective, goods may set the scene for our behaviour, providing the context within which we understand immaterial or abstract concepts – particularly relationships.

If consumer culture, consumer goods and consumption practices take different roles in everyday life, then it follows that these roles may be reflected in everyday imaginings and we should therefore pay attention to how and where it occurs, as it sits and is experienced in relation to other things – how an imagined scenario is constructed. Such notions regarding the need to appreciate and study the complexity of everyday experiences and practices of consumption, as made apparent in variations of practice theory (e.g. Warde 2005, Reckwitz 2002, Schatzki 1996) and Actor Network approaches (e.g. Latour 2005, Law and Hassard 1999), are brought to attention by de Certeau (1984 [1980]). de Certeau articulates that 'everyday practices, "ways of operating", or doing things' (1984 [1980], p xi) should be foregrounded and articulated. This 'everyday' approach takes as important what people do and experience at the level of the everyday – the specifics of lived experience are of interest here – and stems from a 'dissatisfaction with macro theory, positivism and critical sociology for being overly deterministic in their portrayal of the individual in society' (Adler et al 1987) that tends to cast people in passive roles governed by rules and norms. In relation to studies of the imagination we might consider large scale surveys such as those conducted by Singer and colleagues (e.g. Singer and McCraven 1961, Singer 1975), in their work that normalised the topic of daydreaming for instance, to offer such portrayals. De Certeau argues that we should not be satisfied with understanding generalised representations or modes of behaviour but what individuals *do* with those – how those may be manipulated. When it comes to the notion of the everyday imagination then, it is not about the fact *that* we imagine, or *what* we imagine, but *how* we imagine, what we *do*

with those imaginings *and* how imagining relates to our material reality. In addition, his acknowledgement that ‘consumption insinuates itself everywhere, silently, almost invisibly’ (de Certeau (1984 [1980], pxiii) suggests that its omnipresence is something we should seek to understand within the lived experience of the everyday.

When it comes to theory and research on the imagination we see also references to the composition of imaginative scenarios. In its function as a pleasurable escape from a less than satisfactory material reality, the imagination is regarded as a place where the mundane routine and details of daily life can be made absent and more pleasurable possibilities can be focused upon (e.g. Cohen and Taylor 1976; 1992, Campbell 1987, McCracken 1988, Klinger 1990, Fournier and Guiry 1993, MacInnis and Price 1987). For instance, Campbell (1987) asserts that our pleasurable visions of the future are ‘free from all blemishes and imperfections’ (p86), coming to ‘represent a perfected vision of life...deviating more and more from that which anyone has god reason to expect’ (p84). In other words, to make our ideals present, we need to make absent other more mundane, or constraining aspects of a scenario that might be more prominent in everyday life.

Across a number of disciplines then we see a similar analytical approach emerging; a recognition of the focus of an experience and the seeing of a ‘structure’ to an experience regarding a context and a set of roles for consumption (where consumer goods, consumption practices and consumer culture may be acknowledged separately). These approaches attempt to understand how a particular situation or experience comes to be – how a particular situation or experience is assembled. In bringing these ideas together, I find the terms used by John Law (2004), in his discussion of ‘mess’ in social science research, consistent and useful.

Law (2004) discusses how reality is experienced and assembled, and sees it consisting of three interdependent categories. That which is ‘present’ and directly experienced – the focus of a scenario or experience. That which is ‘manifest absent’ – aspects of a scenario that are necessary for it to take place but are not focused on. Like Miller (2010) and Illouz’s (1997) stances, this is when aspects of consumption may be invisible or

hidden – there but not acknowledged. The third category is that which is ‘othered’; this refers to aspects of a reality that ‘disappear’, often due to them being uninteresting or routine – with regard to pleasurable daydreaming then, we may consider that we might ‘other’ the mundane aspects of daily life that we wish to escape through imagining (e.g. Campbell 1987, Cohen and Taylor 1992). Othering some aspects means that a specific reality can be maintained. While othering is often used in relation to people; ‘the process of casting a group, an individual, or an object into the role of the ‘other’ and establishing one’s own identity through opposition to and, frequently vilification of this Other’ (Gabriel 2008, p213), Law (2004) uses the term to refer to other possible realities of a situation. It is not intended to cast aside or denigrate other possibilities but merely asserts that in experiencing one particular reality, other realities are also possible but not considered. When it comes to consumer research we might consider other realities as other ways of being; i.e. an alternative to the material good life in a consumer culture.

Considering Law’s (2004) concepts, as well as Miller (2010) and Illouz’s (1997) research findings, we can see how research that focuses on consumption effectively assembles just one reality of a given experience and does not acknowledge the possibilities for or processes of making things manifest absent and othering.

### **Broadening the study of imagination in consumer research**

Whether we partake in imagining spontaneously, or intentionally; for pleasure, or compensation; to help organise, plan and make decisions, or to aid personal development, imagining is ‘an essential personal resource for coping with life’ (Klinger 1990, p307); it is more than about experiencing consumption related pleasures. Work from psychology and sociology shows that there are more aspects of imagining than have been explicitly considered in consumer behaviour research. The range of characteristics that have been discussed exist on a dimensional scale and present a variety of imaginative experiences that may be mapped according to four main elements;

- the type and strength of emotion experienced (positive or negative)
- the temporal location
- the level of elaboration, and
- the degree of abstraction.

The range of emotions allows us to distinguish between positive and negative forms of imagining, as it is apparent in the wider literature that daydreaming is not only positive as it has often been conceptualised in consumer behaviour research (Cohen and Taylor 1976, Klinger 1990). And if we accept the disillusionment and disappointment associated with desire, this suggests that the consumer imagination is also characterised by negative emotions, particularly frustration (Belk et al 2003, Illouz 2009). But more than this, we see that consumption itself is triggered and experienced through many more emotions than desire and these must also play out in the imagination (Illouz 2009). Likewise, the wider literature emphasises that the temporal location alters the imaginative experience and therefore it is necessary to widen research beyond the current concentration on future orientated pre-consumption imagining. Elaboration denotes the intensity of an imaginative experience in relation to the mental imagery, thought, emotion and bodily sensations, and we have seen across the literature that imagining – including pre-consumption imagining (e.g. d’Astous and Deschênes 2005) – varies according to these characteristics. Finally the level of abstraction captures the degree to which imaginings are probable in material reality. When these elements are experienced in different ways and combinations the outcome is different imaginative experiences, which constitute different forms of imagination.

We also see that imagining has a variety of purposes, it may help us escape from mundane material reality and experience pleasure, or may be more practical, helping us plan and make decisions in everyday life for instance (e.g. Christensen et al 2004). It may also be stimulated by a variety of environmental prompts, and based on broader research regarding everyday experiences and material culture (Illouz 1997, Miller 2010) we can see that when it comes to the everyday imagination – where consumption is not promoted to be the central focus – consumption is likely to feature in variety of roles and guises – consumption practices, consumer goods and consumer culture should all be considered, whatever their level of presence or absence.

The imagination is of course a complex phenomenon and so as well as considering other forms of imagining and roles for consumption within these, there is also a need to study the trajectory of imagining – a range of imaginative phenomena as they occur over time and in relation to a (single) event or experience; how they drift from one to another – for example from pleasurable pre-consumption daydreams, to more realistic planful imaginings, to post-consumption worry or disappointment and then to enjoyable reminiscences – and how each of these stages are experienced by individuals. For example consider a wedding; we may have an idealised or abstract view of a ‘dream wedding’, the daydream-laden planning of an actual wedding; the anticipation and angst of the day itself, worry over decisions about flowers and colour schemes, and later fond reminiscing over photos and gifts, pangs of nostalgia, and possibly even regret.

The consumer imagination is not just about pleasurable, future orientated desire based daydreaming as it is so often presented in consumer research, although the reasons for the focus on this form of imagining is obvious – it is where our desire to buy and experience ever more in the market comes from and it is where the future may be glimpsed. However, there is a need for a fuller understanding of the complex and contradictory nature of consumer imagination practices and the investigation of these practices will offer us a much more comprehensive understanding of consumption in the imagination and the imagination in daily life.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

Imagining is easy enough to enact or experience but it is extremely difficult to capture midair for the purposes of scrutiny and examination (Casey 2000, p4).

As an elusive, intangible and unobservable aspect of the consumption experience, we are presented with methodological difficulties in the study of imagination as Casey's (2000) quote succinctly describes. In this chapter I therefore want to consider some of these difficulties and explain the value of phenomenological interviews in this area, and in doing so explain why alternative options may be problematic, as well as consider which methods have been successfully employed in similar studies. I then explain the procedures I followed in detail, regarding the approach to interviewing, sampling and analysis.

### **Researching the imagination**

When it comes to researching the private, inner realm of imagination a number of difficulties present themselves. Such difficulties may include the verbalising of what may be experienced in non-verbal terms (Klinger 1990, Hirschman and Holbrook 1982), disclosing personal information about imaginative experiences that may only rarely be discussed with other people, capturing and therefore doing justice to a complex experience that occurs in a private realm and capturing experiences that may often go unnoticed, which can result in only the more prominent or emotional imaginings being recalled and described (Klinger 1990). Eliciting and revealing personal inner thoughts and feelings about hopes, plans and fears as well as more abstract daydreams and fantasies, how these may be connected to one another and develop over time, requires a flexible and sensitive approach to data collection.

Existing studies of the imagination have conducted quantitative research, often in the form of laboratory based psychological studies and questionnaires (Singer 1975, Klinger 1990, Fournier and Guiry 1993, d'Astous and Deschênes 2005). These were successful in identifying aspects such as when and how often people daydream, what they daydream about and individual difference variables related to such aspects and

have contributed significantly to providing the academic basis for this study, yet such methods are regarded as lacking detail and intensity that is required to truly understand the phenomenon (Singer 1975, Rook 1988, Leonard 2005).

Qualitative approaches are considered more appropriate in being able to deal with some of the difficulties associated with the imagination and a number of studies in consumer behaviour have used a qualitative approach to study specific areas related to the imagination. For instance, Belk et al's (2003) study of consumer desire, Belk's (2001) study of specialist magazines as a source of desire, Stevens and Maclaran's (2005) study of women's magazines in stimulating the 'shopping imaginary', Martin's (2004) study of evoking and thematizing fantastic imagery in the *Magic* card game, and Belk and Costa's (1998) study of the *Mountain Man Myth* consumption fantasy. There are also a number of studies that focus on consumption contexts that evoke and engage the imagination, such as Penaloza's (1999) study of retail spectacle *Niketown*, and Kozinets et al's (2004) study of *ESPN Zone* as an adult playground. A small number of larger studies have been conducted using qualitative methods, such as Christensen's (2002) study of consumption visions and Leonard's (2005) study of the honeymoon as a particular consumer fantasy. It is also the case that a number of detailed theories of imagination do not provide any empirical support (e.g. Campbell 1987, McCracken 1988); currently there is an absence of larger empirical studies of the consumer imagination. As Christensen (2002, p10) argues, it seems consumer researchers have 'placed the cart before the horse' and 'have moved to the laboratory too soon', focusing on specific aspects or contexts before establishing a broader understanding of the phenomenon as a whole. More than this however, I argue that by placing consumption and consumer goods at the centre of investigation – i.e. asking directly about consumer desires and consumption dreams (Jenkins et al 2011 forthcoming) – this may have 'resulted in an over-emphasis on the importance of consumption' in the imagination (Shankar et al 2009, p76). What is required is a detailed understanding of everyday experiences of imagining to contextualise consumption in the broader imagination (Jenkins et al 2011, forthcoming). Opening up the study of imagination in this way allows for a range of imaginative experiences related to everyday life and consumption experiences to be explored, including a variety of temporal and emotional possibilities as well as changes in imaginative activity over time. Beyond this there are also antecedents and consequences to consider as part of the relationship between

imagination and material reality. The intention of this study is in developing a detailed, nuanced understanding of the everyday imagination, the role of consumption within it and its relationship to daily life.

## **Research philosophy**

Over the last thirty years there has been a burgeoning of research, particularly in relation to experiential aspects of consumption, that is interpretive in nature (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Whilst a fairly recent emergence, it is argued to have its roots in motivation research that pre-dates interpretive research by some 60 years (Tadajewski 2006). The interpretive approach has evolved from a shift of focus ‘from purchase decisions to *consumption activities*, from choosing to *using* and from buying to *consuming*’ (Holbrook 1995, p80 italics in original). Interpretive approaches recognise as significant the ‘experiential and meaningful aspects which underpin consumption’ (Goulding 1999, p860) and places value in understanding the social, complex, irrational and unpredictable aspects of consumer behaviour, of which imagining is one. This ‘interpretive turn’ in consumer research has placed increasing emphasis on philosophical issues and calls for researchers to make more of their discussion and stance in this area (Lai 2009, Goulding 1999; 2005). To say research is interpretive is not enough (Goulding 1999; 2005); ‘all research is interpretive; it is guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied’ (Denzin and Lincoln 2008, p31). These beliefs are ‘central to any understanding of interpretation in the social sciences, including consumer research’ (Annamma et al p346), therefore it is important that researchers locate their work within ontological and epistemological traditions that guide their studies (Guba 1990). With this in mind I now consider the philosophical and methodological basis of my study.

Ontologically, this research regards that reality is subjectively experienced (Hirschman and Holbrook 1986) and made meaningful by ‘people’s knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences and interactions’ (Mason 1996, p39). This subjective knowledge and experience is therefore of primary concern (Guba and Lincoln 2008), especially regarding the nature of imagination – I am trying to elicit experiences related to the private, inner realm of imagination, experiences that occur on



an individual basis and that are highly situated in nature. In line with a constructivist ontology, an interpretive epistemology is adopted, which stresses that knowledge and understanding of the world are not there to be discovered, but are constructed by us – the external world is not independent of human perception (Tadajewski 2006). Consequently, it is through talking to and interacting with individuals about the ontological properties mentioned above – their experiences and understanding of their experiences related to imagining and everyday life – that data can be legitimately generated (Mason 1996). This research therefore takes a phenomenological approach, which seeks to apprehend rich descriptions of individuals’ lived experience of a phenomenon – essentially, an understanding through examples (Casey 2000).

## **Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is concerned with understanding social phenomena as experienced by individuals and takes the assumption that the important reality is what people perceive it to be (Kvale 1996). It takes everyday lived experience as its starting point (van Manen 1990) in order to ‘describe, interpret and understand the meanings of experiences’ (Holloway and Todres 2003, p348) rather than capture peoples’ attitudes and beliefs about a phenomenon. Phenomenology begins with the lifeworld (van Manen 1990) and studies phenomena in relation to this on the premise that subjective experiences do not occur in isolation ‘separate from the environments in which they live’ (Thompson et al 1989, p135). That is, we cannot fully appreciate or understand a phenomenon without also appreciating how it is part of wider human experience and life. For Heidegger, the lifeworld ‘consists of a “referential totality” of equipment, cultural objects, natural objects, other people and institutions’, each of which are bound to one another (Churchill and Wertz 1985, p551). Not only is the lifeworld important to contextualise and situate experiences and meaning (Thompson et al 1989), but it is particularly important to this study as it aims to identify and trace how current and changing personal lifeworld circumstances contribute to imaginative behaviour, therefore it would not be appropriate to adopt an approach that separates and objectifies such aspects. Further support for the importance of recognising and studying the lifeworld when it comes to the imagination comes from Klinger (1990, p5) who states that daydreaming cannot be effectively studied without consideration of the person’s ‘current life, state and history’; the imagination is highly situated, personal and subjective, without

contextualising imaginative behaviour our understanding of it could be significantly weakened. For instance, Klinger (1990) tells us that daydreaming is connected to our goals and desires (which may include desire to avoid) in which case we need to have an understanding of these (e.g. what they are, how they came about) and this requires an understanding of an individual's wider lifeworld so that we can appreciate how goals and desires interact with other aspects of life (what they may precede and follow, how they impact behaviour and subsequent imaginative activity and so on). As Lanier and Rader (2010) stress, understanding reality helps us to better understand fantasy, and we may apply this on an individual level when it comes to one's imaginative activity in relation to everyday reality (Martin 2004). In addition, Murray (1986) states that imagining should not be abstracted from the context in which it is found, but 'if its significance is to be properly understood, we must approach it precisely from our experience of it in the lived world, the *lebenswelt*' (Murray 1986, p3).

It is not only contextualising the experience of imagining within the lifeworld that is important for this study, but also contextualising consumption within the broader everyday imagination. We may see the figure/ground metaphor that Thompson et al (1989) discuss as a way that phenomenology can account for such contextualisation. Thompson et al (1989, p136) explain that 'a particular setting can afford different experiences as certain aspects of the context stand out while others recede and become background'. There may be times in everyday life when consumption is at the foreground, occupying our attention, yet at other times, other concerns become figural and consumption may consequently recede. Therefore this metaphor is useful in raising our awareness to the way an experience is assembled in terms of background and foreground. When it comes to consumption in the everyday imagination we are able to see how it may sit in relation to other topics and concerns that occupy the imagination. These different roles are particularly important to consider in light of other relevant research, particularly Miller (2010) and Illouz (1997), whose studies have shown that aspects of consumption are often *more* important, in terms of their ability to act on us – framing our behaviour and providing the narrative to our experiences – when they are peripheral, taken for granted or ignored. So when consumption is in the background, or perhaps not even acknowledged and seemingly absent, it is important to consider – and a phenomenological approach, that appreciates the context of an experience as well as the focus of that experience, allows us to do this. Like Miller and

Illouz, John Law (2004) advocates an examination of the taken for granted, he proposes the terms 'presence' to refer to those things in the foreground, and 'manifest absence' to refer to those things that are taken for granted or ignored.

Anything that presents itself to consciousness is potentially of interest to phenomenology, whether real, or imagined, empirically measurable or subjectively felt (van Manen 1990, p9) – imagination then is a prime candidate for phenomenological research and has been the focus of phenomenology in the past (e.g. Sartre 1940, Casey 2000). Phenomenological methods have also been used to study experiences of other intangible phenomena such as anxiety (Fischer 1978) and time (Dapkus 1985), as well as imaginative phenomena of daydreaming (Morley 1998), consumption dreaming (d'Astous and Deschênes 2005) and desire (Belk et al 1996; 1997; 2003, Belk 2001). In research on desire, Belk et al (2003) developed a phenomenological account of consumers' lived experiences of longing for and fantasizing about goods, which enabled them to offer an explicit construct of the phenomenon. By adopting a phenomenological approach I hope to develop an holistic account of consumption in everyday imaginative practices; the roles imagining takes and functions it serves, how personal life world and external factors such as marketing and the media permeate the imagination, and how imagining impacts our feelings and behaviours, to give a clearer understanding of the personal and cultural meanings surrounding imagining (Stevens and Maclaran 2005).

## **Phenomenological interviews**

The difficulty with studying inner experiences, such as imagining, is that they cannot be studied in the realm in which they are experienced, consequently we have to rely on verbal reports to get some kind of understanding (Richardson 1999). Of course there are problems with this, relating to general difficulties associated with conveying and interpreting experiences accurately through language (Goulding 1999) and with regard to the fact that imagining is often not verbal and therefore it may be difficult to express in words, furthermore, talking about imaginative experiences immediately alters the experience (Klinger 1990).

It needs to be remembered that descriptions of lived experience are not identical to lived experience itself, all descriptions are transformations that have ‘lost the quiver’ of their undisturbed existence (van Manen 1990 p54). This is something that is unavoidable given that capturing any experience means relying on an individual’s recall of that experience and this is especially the case with imagination because it is an inner experience, a private, personal, individually experienced phenomenon which necessarily implies that talking about it removes it from the realm where it originates. With phenomenological research we need to be aware that full or final descriptions are unattainable because lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal (van Manen 1990, p18). The point however:

is to borrow from other people’s experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole of human experience (van Manen 1990, p62).

Thus in this investigation of the experience of imagining I wish to understand what imagining is like for this or that person as an aspect of his or her life and therefore, by extension, as an aspect of the possibilities of our being human. Despite these difficulties, Singer (1966) regards verbal reporting as a valuable means of attaining information about private events and daydreams. The interview is considered to be ‘the most powerful means for attaining an in-depth understanding of another person’s experiences’ (Thompson et al 1989, p138) and is the dominant method used in this study.

The phenomenological tradition entails that participants lead the course of the dialogue, which is more conversational in form than structured kinds of interviewing and intends to obtain a first person descriptive account of an experience (Thompson et al 1989). The conversation should be marked by fairly short descriptive questions from the interviewer, followed by extended and detailed descriptions from the respondent (Thompson et al 1989). Conversation should remain at the level of experience to avoid abstraction. This is particularly important when it comes to asking participants to explain their experiences. Rather than asking ‘why’, which drives people to rationalise or justify their behaviour, thoughts and feelings, and consequently may not provide a full or truthful answer (Dichter 1986, Thompson et al 1989), asking for a description

about a particular ‘time when’ returns the conversation back to the level of lived experience and should provide more detail on the matter as a result. As is the premise of phenomenology, it is important to ask about the individual’s lifeworld as well as the phenomenon under study (Thompson et al 1989). This is especially important for the study of everyday imagination and the influence of changing life-world situations and circumstances on it. Moreover, the everyday, and how people think, feel and imagine in relation to it, is the point of departure for this research and important for the analysis to better understand imaginative practices.

Phenomenological interviews are considered appropriate for this research because the focus is on conscious imagining and how it relates to everyday life, as Holbrook and Hirschman (1982, p137) assert when suggesting a phenomenological approach; research in the area of consumption related mental phenomena requires ‘a free commentary on whatever cognitive material the subject is aware of’. I want people to talk to me about their life projects and daily lives and what kinds of things they imagine in relation to it. Other methods, particularly projective methods such as collages or the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) (Zaltman and Coulter 1995, Zaltman 1997), while useful in terms of eliciting detail about image-based thought, were rejected on the basis that they ‘are thought to illuminate latent or unconscious components of individuals’ personalities’ (Rook 1988, p202), and that some require participants to think in detail about the topic at hand – for instance the ZMET technique requires participants to collect images over the period of 7-10 days on the research topic. This study is not about extracting thoughts and feelings from below consciousness but the everyday, conscious activity of imagining. This was not about ‘getting to the bottom’ of people’s fantasies or trying to interpret them, but to develop an understanding of how the imagination is practiced in everyday life and how consumption features within such practices. This study has a broad focus and often projective methods are used for more specific experiences, for instance Belk et al (2003) used a variety of projective methods to develop an understanding of consumer desire and in doing so generated rich data, but this was focused on the experience of one emotion. Getting people to complete similar methods for imagining could be largely incomplete, focusing only on one experience of imagining rather than the variety of possibilities that I wish to capture. Phenomenological interviewing does not require or result in rationalisations by the participants, something that researchers who originated projective techniques argued

was a result of direct questioning, survey based methods (Rook 1988), but generates rich, insightful descriptions of first-person experiences.

### **Life projects as a way to focus the imagination**

It is not common for individuals to talk naturally and openly about their daydreams and fantasies in an explicit manner, consequently they may experience difficulties expressing what happens in the imagination verbally (Klinger 1990). The focus on specific experiences enables the participant to focus on more concrete experiences, which reduces the abstractness of the topic and the tendency to generalise or talk idly about concepts. There is still likely to be difficulty when it comes to talking about particular experiences of imagining, consequently there is a need to provide further focus for the research participants. This has been done by recruiting a number of participants who are going through particular life projects, events or experiences that will ground the conversation enabling them to talk about specific experiences of imagining related to a particular life project or experience. In consumer behaviour studies related to the imagination consumption has formed this focus (e.g. d’Astous and Deschênes 2005, Phillips et al 1995) – asking individuals about goods and experiences they desire and want for the future provides something specific to talk about – but with everyday imagining as the focus, and the contextualisation of consumption within these broader imaginings, this is not appropriate or conducive to fulfilling the research objectives. Campbell (1994) suggests that life projects are fruitful for studying imaginative pleasure seeking because they are likely to occupy the mind. Just like adolescence is a prime time for imagining (Klinger 1990), so too are other transitions and life stages (Leonard 2005). In addition, certain life projects are likely to involve consumption (Campbell 1994, Davies et al 2010) and are therefore all the more appropriate for the study of consumption in the everyday imagination.

More than pleasurable imagining, such life projects invite the individual to imagine in a variety of ways across the life of the event. For example, in wedding planning the bride-to-be may fantasise about her ideal wedding and worry over decisions that she has made in the months leading up to the wedding, a few days before she may be anxious about how the day will pan out and making a life-long commitment, on returning from

honeymoon she may reminisce about the day and later regret her choice of hairstyle once the official photographs come through. It is these trajectories of imagining that are yet to be studied sufficiently. Life projects can be seen as a strategy for getting people to talk with confidence about different types of imagining but also help us to understand the relationship between imagining and everyday life. Interviews at different stages of an event or experience allow for probing and an understanding of how for example, anticipation, worry, angst and nostalgia are produced, experienced and evolve; exploring these imaginative transitions are what is missing from existing studies of imagination.

Phenomenological research uses planned, purposive sampling based on individuals having 'lived' the experience being researched, but they must also be able to sufficiently describe their experiences (Goulding 1999). With regard to imagining, Singer (1966) states that effectively we are all authorities on daydreaming because of the private nature of the phenomenon. However, in wanting to explore the full range and scope of the imagination and the ways that different types of imagining are structured, this required including a range of participants, covering a variety of ages, demographics and life projects or experiences. Although this study does not seek to analyse how certain types of people imagine in comparison to others, it is necessary to cover a wide/complete range of imaginative experiences, which vary and may be dependent on such aspects, as Klinger (1990) notes; daydreams are based on goals and desires which vary with age and circumstance. For example, young people leaving school, college or university are likely to focus on the future, whereas someone older, perhaps who is coming up to retirement, with fewer options for their future, may imagine more about the past (Giambra 2000) and therefore provides data about the experiences of reminiscing and nostalgia, which some younger consumers may not be able to provide. I should also note that while many of the life projects that the participants are undertaking may be significant – getting married, having your first child, retiring – these are also 'normal' in that they are what make up life. So while some of them may be important stages and transitions, they are not extra-ordinary.

## **Participants and practicalities**

The intention to capture a range of imaginative experiences guided the sampling procedure. I interviewed 20 people in total, including two couples who were interviewed together on at least one occasion. With regard to sample size, phenomenological research in the area of imagination has varied from the experiences of one person (often using introspection to attain a phenomenological understanding), such as the work of phenomenologist John Paul Sartre and more recently Casey (1976; 2000). Phenomenological consumer research studies have tended to use small samples, for example d'Astous and Deschênes (2005) conducted phenomenological interviews on consumption dreams with five participants and Christensen (2002) conducted research on consumption visions with 10, however these studies did not cover such a broad range of imagination. In other phenomenological consumer research Thompson et al (1994) conducted research into cultural viewpoints and consumer meaning with three women, while Holt (2002) drew from the experiences of twelve participants in his study of brand resistance. Elsewhere, Miles and Huberman (1994) acknowledge that a sample of 15 is considered appropriate for an in depth, qualitative study so that rich data is acquired, while Warren (2002) states that 20-30 interviews should be used. However essentially research should be guided by the quality of data and this means interviewing enough participants to the point where data begins to be repetitive and reaches the point of saturation (Bryman 2004), such that it is similar to theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss 1967). For my study then, it is not so much the number of people but the variety of experiences and circumstances which they represent. Extending the scope of the sample in terms of different life projects and experiences extends the scope of the research (Leonard 2005).

16 of the 20 participants were purposively selected to ensure that a variety of life experiences were covered, and to enable the researcher to unpack the ebb and flow of imaginative experience as it flows throughout the course of an event. The specific life events of these participants were; starting university, leaving university to embark on a career, buying/moving home, relocating/emigrating, getting married/planning a wedding, expecting a baby and retiring. Although these were starting points for discussion and provided concrete experiences from which the participants could draw, and relate their experiences of imagining to, other aspects of their lives – past and future



– were also discussed. At times, for some, these other aspects became more of a focus such as Sandra, who on our third meeting after her wedding talked about the ‘new’ project in her life – buying a house, rather than reflecting on the wedding day itself. Further justification for the use of specific life or consumption based events comes from previous studies that have either used, or called for research to be conducted into certain types of consumption experiences that may evoke daydreaming, in order to better understand the phenomenon (MacInnis and Price 1987); events that are anticipated and planned for such as buying a house, having a baby or retiring, for instance, do just that. Support for focusing on a particular experience or desire also comes from Belk (2001) who used participants with special interests and hobbies to explore how desire, which is always for a specific ‘something’ is fuelled. Similarly d’Astous and Deschênes (2005) asked participants about their most important consumption dream so that they could extract rich data about various aspects of pre-consumption imaginative experiences related to highly sought after goods or experiences. The remaining four participants were purposively recruited on the basis that they had no specific ongoing life project at the time of the first interview, they provided the ‘unoccupied’ voice of imagining so that I was able to gather data pertinent to those individuals without a figural experience to focus the imagination. By talking to individuals who had a specific focus as well as those that did not meant the construction of the sample allowed for a broader range of everyday imagining rather than restricting the research to the role of consumption in the imagination in relation to significant life projects.

Participants were initially recruited through personal and professional networks with subsequent snowballing. Four of the participants were known to me personally, two were past colleagues known in a professional capacity prior to the study, students were from the university and responded to a recruitment email, others were friends of friends, or colleagues and acquaintances of friends and family. Details of the participants are provided in Table 1 where I set out their names (pseudonyms) ages, occupations, life stage, their ‘figural’ life project along with details of the interviews and total time spent with each of them.

In total I conducted 38 interviews with the 20 participants which culminated in approximately 50 hours of recorded interview data and approximately 70 hours spent

**Figure 3: Participant details**

Name	Age	Occupation	Life stage	Life project	Interview dates	Time recorded (mins)	Time spent (mins)
Barbara	60	Social work assistant	Married with grown up children	Retirement	01/06/09, 19/08/09 & 09/04/10	240	360
Patrick	40	Marketing Manager	Civil partnership	Renovation project and move to Italy	08/04/09 & 14/10/09	190	230
Monica	27	Local Government worker	Single, living as couple	Buying first home, living as couple	20/03/09, 01/07/09, 19/08/09, 05/11/09	240	400
Sandra	27	Teacher	Living as couple/ married	Wedding & new home	27/12/08, 19/02/09 & 22/06/09 (via MSN)	130 + 140 MSN int.	255 (395 inc. MSN)
Simone	28	Practice Manager	Living as couple/ married	Wedding	25/06/09 & 06/04/10	160	195
Holly	24	Events Officer	Single	None specific	04/06/09 & 18/11/09	165	200
Jim	49	Civil Servant	Married with grown up children	None specific	20/08/09	80	100
Jayne	49	Social work Assistant	Married, one teenage son	None specific	11/06/09	105	180
Chris	19	Student	Single	New university student	18/11/09	70	80
Jez	18	Student	Single	New university student	04/11/09	65	80
Lucy	21	Student	Single	New university student	05/11/09	80	95
Lisa	35	Mature postgrad student	Single	MA student embarking on career	16/06/09 & 20/08/09	210	260
Eve	27	Environmental scientist (unemployed at second interview)	Single	None specific	16/08/09 & 20/11/09	150	190
Samantha & John	30 34	Sales Manager & IT worker	Married	Expecting first child	16/07/09, 07/10/09, 15/12/09 (not recorded) & 13/03/10	305	500
Sue & Peter	60 61	Retired police officer and retired receptionist	Married, two grown up children	Retirement & round world travel	06/08/09 & 31/08/09	190	300
Tim	24	Postgrad student	Single	Postgrad Student, embarking on career	09/07/09 & 07/11/09	140	200
Catherine	26	Personal assistant	Married	Expecting first child	12/09/09, 14/01/10 & 18/02/10 (not recorded)	130	385
Sheila	37	Project worker	Married, two young children	Emigrating to Australia	27/03/09 & 18/08/09	130	180

with the participants in total. Participants ranged from 18 to 64 years old and from university undergraduate to retired Police Officer. The majority were female though this was not intentional. They lived between Poole in Dorset, across to Portsmouth in Hampshire, Swindon in Wiltshire, London and East Anglia. One participant was American studying in the UK, the rest were English. The majority of interviews were conducted between December 2008 and January 2010, with several more follow up interviews in April 2010. I met with most participants at least twice, the number of meetings was generally dictated by the type and timeline of the experience they were going through as well as the individuals' availability and willingness to meet. For instance, I met with Sandra three times over 6 months, once shortly after she got engaged, once again two weeks before the wedding and once several months after the honeymoon.

The longest length of time that I followed an individual was 12 months, this was Monica, who I followed over the course of buying, renovating and moving into a new home with her boyfriend, and Barbara who I followed over 11 months, first meeting two months before she retired and twice during the first nine months of her retirement. The majority of interviews took place in the participant's homes. Interviews with students (undergraduate and postgraduate) took place at the university and one in a coffee shop after he had graduated. One interview was conducted online via an instant messaging programme, due to clashing schedules and long distance (Bournemouth – East Anglia).

In the spirit of phenomenology, interviews began by asking participants to tell me about their experience of the life event they were going through, whether it be the experience of being pregnant, buying a house, or telling me the story of how they came to decide to move abroad, how it feels to be coming up to retirement. For those without a figural experience to discuss I asked them to tell me about themselves and the discussion went on from there into areas about their family, home and work, their past, plans for the near future, longer terms hopes and plans. Consistent with Thompson et al (1989) participants lead the course of the interview with questions to elaborate, ask for specific experiences and probe meaning (Thompson et al 1989). Of course not asking why can be difficult as it is a natural follow up question, and where I found myself asking it I

followed their answer up with a request for a particular experience (a ‘time when’), so that the participants would elaborate and return to the level of experience.

All interviews, except for two, were voice recorded and have been kept for auditing as MP3 files. The two interviews not recorded were with new mothers Catherine and Samantha on the first visit after their babies had arrived when I felt recording was too intrusive and insensitive. I should point out that I didn’t ask Catherine and Samantha if I could record on these occasions; I felt it was somewhat insensitive to ask as I was in a privileged position to be invited to their homes so soon after having their first babies. During the interviews I made brief field notes as necessary (Silverman 2006) and after each interview I made more detailed notes regarding aspects that seemed pertinent as well as things that were said when the conversation was not being recorded.

## **Data analysis and interpretation**

All of the interviews were transcribed, however, as the interview recording is regarded as the ‘primary document’ because it allows you to get a good sense of individuals’ expression, tone and general feeling in their descriptions and discussions (Holloway 1997) I also listened and re-listened to the interviews in order to capture the participants’ voices and nuance that transcriptions cannot capture. The minimum number of listens was two, but I listened to most interviews three times. I conducted an initial analysis of each interview in order to develop an holistic understanding, noting the key themes that emerged from each and making summaries. As my intention was to understand how consumption fits into everyday imagining and how imagining relates to everyday life, the initial analysis consisted of highlighting and extracting excerpts and making notes related to: references to imagining, examples/descriptions of imagining, aspects of consumption in imagined scenarios, aspects of consumption in everyday life, resources that fed into the imagination and things that prompt imagining, issues related to the life project and/or everyday life in material reality, and consequences of imagining and behaviours related to pursuing a dream. I then took these themes and addressed each in more detail, for instance, with regard to descriptions of imagining I considered the experience itself, the kind and level of emotions involved, the temporal

location, the focus of imagined scenarios, its relation to the lifeworld and personal circumstances including its function. I then ‘synthesised’ (Goulding 1999) interviews with one another. Initially this meant relating each participant’s series of interviews to one another (for example Monica’s first, second, third and fourth interviews) in order to identify themes and trace developments in imaginative practices over time before comparing to other participants’ transcripts and identifying recurring or ‘global themes’ (Thompson et al 1989, p142) across these. At this point I also noted particularly illustrative stories of the themes. Emerging themes were compared across interviews, they were then reinterpreted in light of new understandings and insights (Thompson and Haytko 1997). The final stage of interpretation involves further developing themes by comparing findings from the study to existing research and literature where appropriate, in order to provide a deeper understanding of antecedents to, experiences of and consequences of consumer’s everyday experiences of imagining and the role of consumption within these imaginative practices.

In terms of contextualising consumption within the broader everyday imagination, and looking at the various roles it takes, I have already acknowledged that the figure/ground metaphor is useful and may be used specifically to analyse the ways that consumption may be central or may recede into the background. However, I extend the analysis that phenomenology produces by looking at the broader context of imagining, paying particular attention to how imagined scenarios are assembled. I note how different aspects of consumption – consumption practices, consumer goods and consumer culture – as well as other scripts and concerns, feature in terms of foreground and background or presence and manifest absence, and by implication, as advocated by Illouz (1997), I also consider what this means in terms of what individuals do not experience, e.g., other possible realities for imagining the ‘good life’, or in Law’s (2004) terms, what is othered. Consequently I also consider our ability or inability to ‘other’ consumer culture. In the analysis and interpretation I therefore use the set of terms put forward by Law (2004) as a means to more sufficiently capture and account for the different roles of consumption, consumer goods and consumer culture in the imagination.

## **Assessing research findings**

There have been difficulties in justifying the value of interpretive research findings, that said, qualitative research has become increasingly mainstream (Hogg and Maclaran 2008) and in consumer behaviour research the interpretive tradition is now well established, though not dominant (Arnould and Thompson 2005).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed a number of ‘tests’ for qualitative research to ensure the soundness of conclusions. These were intended as alternatives to the positivist tests of reliability and validity – credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. And while these were accepted by many, Wallendorf and Belk (1989) later renounced the concepts on the premise that they inflicted positivist concepts onto non-positivist research, they were therefore at odds with the principles of interpretive research (see Belk 1991 for a renouncement of these concepts). We may therefore consider reliability and validity as erroneous to phenomenological research (Holloway and Jefferson 2005, Madill et al 2000), for its very nature means we can never exhaustively know a phenomenon; ‘other perspectives ...are always possible’ (Churchill and Wertz 1985 p554). Given its intention to gain descriptions at the level of lived experience, phenomenology does not seek to develop theory that explains and thus, as with qualitative research more generally it does not offer the opportunity to generalise findings or generate theory, but enables us to make ‘plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world’ (van Manen 1989 p9). In relation to the imagination this is particularly appropriate because the intention is to develop our current limited understanding of the use of imagination in daily life in relation to consumption, thus we need to understand rather than attempt to explain.

Evaluative criteria needs to be appropriate to the nature of inquiry, for phenomenological research, this means being ‘faithful’ to human experience (Guba and Lincoln 2008, p274). What is important is that research findings are able to provide the reader with insight into the experience of the phenomenon being described, it should ‘serve as a reliable guide to the listener’s own actual or potential experience of the phenomena’ (Speilberg 1983, p694), this is what van Manen (1990, p27) refers to as the ‘phenomenological nod’. This is essentially an assessment of phenomenological

research that is based on the description being something the reader can nod to, recognising it as an experience s/he has had or could have. In a similar vein to this, more recently some emphasis has been placed on the importance of writing styles (rhetoric) to convey meaningful human experience and sound research discoveries (van Manen 1990, Todres 2007, Hogg and Maclaran 2008) as well as a more general discussion of presenting aesthetically pleasing and engaging research narratives (Sherry 2000, Hackley 2007, Brown 1998). With no accepted answer to criteria assessing the success of qualitative research, I turn to the aesthetic dimension as a means to convey meaningful qualitative findings.

### *The aesthetic dimension of qualitative findings*

Polkinghorne (1983) comments that focus be given to the artistic dimension of research, that phenomenological research findings should be written in such a way that the reader can judge its power and trustworthiness:

Is the research vivid in that it generates a sense of reality and draws the reader in? Are readers able to recognise the phenomenon from their own experience or from imagining the situation vicariously? In terms of richness, can the reader enter into the account emotionally? Finally, has the phenomenon been described in a graceful, clear, poignant way?

This reader judgement based on written style is particularly relevant when it comes to the topic of imagination. Because we may often not be aware of our imaginative activity, encouraging reader reflection is especially desirable as it prompts us to consider our own imagining in light of the experiences presented.

Similarly, in writing about the 'aesthetic dimension' of communicating qualitative research discoveries, Todres (2007, p7) acknowledges that there is a tension between 'how to retain the richness and texture of individual experiences when formulating a level of description that applies generally and typically'. The term 'generally' here is not meant in terms of generalising findings (which is not a preoccupation of qualitative research) but to convey to the reader a more general understanding of the phenomenon

under study – to convey a ‘typical’ experience that the reader can identify with. The overall aim of, and indeed challenge for, qualitative research then is to:

find a level of discourse that reflects both the individual particulars of ‘this’ experience or situation as it is lived and how such particularity reflects more typical and general themes and categories of human existence (Todres 2007, p9).

I have attempted to achieve this balance between typical and general experiences by inviting the reader to reflect on their own experience and by offering more familiar examples of a specific experience that the reader should be able to relate to throughout the findings and discussion chapters.

While Todres (2007) acknowledges several ways to use language to arouse understanding in the reader in order to attempt to address the challenge faced by qualitative researchers, Hogg and Maclaran (2008, p130) offer guidance on the ‘strategies and writing practices employed by [qualitative] consumer researchers to convince their audiences of the soundness of their theory-building and knowledge generation from their data sets’. And so we see an emphasis on language as a means to support data. In their paper Hogg and Maclaran utilise Golden-Biddle and Locke’s (2007) framework, developed for ethnographic research findings, applying it to consumer research and highlight three dimensions ‘that are central to arguments about how to convince audiences about the soundness of research based on qualitative data....plausibility, authenticity and criticality’ (p131).

Authenticity aims to convince readers that interpretation is drawn from the data and demonstrate that the researcher ‘has really experienced the lived worlds of the informants’ (p135). We can draw parallels with the concepts of transparency and researcher reflexivity here, as authenticity is about describing the data collection and analysis process and openly addressing the limitations of the study, especially in terms of the researcher’s presence. Plausibility concerns the ‘fit’ between the data and the interpretation of it, the purpose being to make sure that the study has something to offer (in terms of its relation to existing work) and makes sense to the reader. In a sense this is anticipating and addressing the questions or doubts that the reader might have and ensuring the participants voices are foremost. Finally, criticality is essentially an



invitation to the reader to reflect and requires that the research is able to ‘provoke a re-examination of underlying assumptions’ (p141). In achieving criticality, researchers need to offer the reader a chance to think about their own views and beliefs in relation to the subject and its relation to broader, everyday life.

I recognise that these writing conventions are not measures to be adhered to in the same way that the criteria of reliability and validity or trustworthiness and credibility are. They do, however, provide strategies that have been found to be successful in conveying the arguments of interpretivist consumer research (it is also important to note, as Hogg and Maclaran (2008) do, that these are not considered to be a formula for presenting research but serve to encourage researchers to be creative and engaging in their writing) therefore I have made a concerted effort to incorporate these dimensions throughout the findings and discussion chapters. Moreover, along with Todres’ (2007) suggestions regarding the use of language to create understanding of lived experience, I use Hogg and Maclaran’s dimensions as a further source to help guide the overall style in presenting my research findings as a ‘theorized storyline which convinces readers that it is well grounded in the empirical data’ (p132).

In terms of accountability and transparency, a number of measures have been taken throughout this study to support the findings and the research process. An audit trail of recordings, transcriptions, field notes, analysis notes and my own research reflection notes, has been kept (Bryman 2004).

## **Ethical considerations**

In terms of ethical considerations, I adhered to Bournemouth University’s Ethics Policy and Procedures for researchers (2003) and, in-line with a new policy brought in during the course of the project, completed the ethics checklist for research projects. Of particular relevance are issues pertaining to informed consent; participants’ knowledge of the study’s purpose, recording of interviews and use of interviews as the basis of the study, and invasion of privacy regarding participant confidentiality and anonymity.

Informed consent was obtained from all the participants at the beginning of each interview and they were assured of anonymity. Although the nature of the imagination is personal and private, and may evoke emotional responses, there were no issues pertaining to the cause of harm to the participants. At the beginning of each interview I made sure they were aware that they did not have to share anything with me that they do not want to.

## **Introduction to the Findings**

The purpose of this project is to develop a contextualised understanding of consumption in the imagination. Rather than taking consumption as the starting point for the research and thereby positioning it as the focus of imagining, I am interested in finding out the different ways in which consumption practices, consumer goods and consumer culture fit into broader, everyday imagining and how imagining relates to everyday life. To do this I present four chapters of findings.

In the first chapter (chapter four) I focus on the practices of everyday imagining in order to build a picture of how people imagine. I consider different levels of imagining and note a range of temporal and emotional possibilities for imagining that can be characterised according to a number of elements. This characterisation is useful in distinguishing different kinds of imaginative experience and contributes towards the creation of a taxonomy of imagination that I present in the discussion chapter. Further to individual forms of imagining a number of complex practices regarding how these co-exist and may be controlled are also evident. It becomes apparent that material reality is very much part of imaginative activity, rather than something to be escaped via pleasurable and elaborate daydreaming. I do not focus very much on the role of consumption as I present the different kinds of imaginative experiences, as I consider it in detail in the following chapter where I look at the content of the imagination.

In chapter five I consider the ‘what’ of imagining where I focus on the topics and issues that form the focus of everyday imagining and how consumption fits into these broader narratives. It emerges that consumption is manifest in a number of ways. At times it may be the central focus of attention in an imagined scenario, while at other times it is peripheral, occupying the background, and forming part of the setting within which other, more personal and relational matters, are imagined and focused upon, or it may be unacknowledged or ignored so that ideals can be imagined. The different ways that consumption features in the imagination highlights the importance of considering it in a variety of guises and roles – even when it appears unimportant or altogether absent (see for example Miller 2010 or Illouz 1997 for the need to consider material goods and consumption when it is not central or commented upon). More than this though, it

supports the need to look at how experiences are assembled. In phenomenology, Thompson et al (1989) discuss the figure/ground metaphor as a way to account for the different ways that a setting may be experienced – the different ways that something may occupy our attention – either as figural, standing out and therefore occupying the foreground, or receding into the background. The emphasis here is on the context of an experience as well as the focus of that experience, which can quickly shift, neither is independent of the other and therefore it is important to consider both and their relationship. As different objects or concerns shift from foreground to background, the quality of the experience changes (Thompson et al 1989). This metaphor goes some way to account for the different ways that consumption may feature. Miller's (2010) stance goes a little further regarding the importance of objects when they become invisible and form the frame to our behaviour, in doing so they 'determine what takes place' (Miller 2010, p50, see also Illouz 1997), here he attributes goods with the ability to act on us. Consistent with, but also an extension of this, I consider the concepts of presence, manifest absence and othering as discussed by John Law (2004) as a way to resolve the different roles that consumption takes on in the imagination. Beyond helping us to understand why certain things become focal (made present) the notion of 'manifest absence' in particular accounts for aspects of a scene that are necessary for it to take place but are not acknowledged – similar to Illouz's (1997) notion of consumers' ignored practices. While othering considers the things that disappear in order to construct or maintain a particular reality as well as other possible realities for a given experience that are not constructed, specific to this study would be the possibility of imagining outside consumer culture. I apply these notions to the imagination, and note the individual's conditional autonomy in the processes of making things present and absent.

Having addressed what happens when people imagine, in chapter six I consider the back-story to imagining, here I focus on antecedents to and stimuli for imaginative activity. I pay particular attention to the lifeworld of the individuals here focusing on the relationship between material reality and the imagination, to build a more comprehensive picture of imagining in the context of everyday life. A significant issue that arises is the social nature of imagining, which becomes apparent in a number of ways. Not only are individuals influenced by various social resources (the media,

marketplace, social norms) but they also imagine others – their feelings, reactions and opinions and so we see that the private sphere is in fact highly social.

In chapter seven I move on to consider the outcomes and consequences of imagining on everyday life in terms of specific behaviours that are engaged in; the lived experience of dream and goal pursuit and actualisation; and further imaginative activity. The stories in this chapter provide an insight into what is often a long and emotional journey of dream pursuit and actualisation, they highlight how significant the imagination is in material reality – it is not a separate entity but can be entirely integrated into daily life. Of particular interest is the significance of consumption as a consequence of imagining, particularly as a solution to our dreams. When we compare this to the apparent unimportance of consumption in the imagination, as something that is often peripheral or unacknowledged, this raises a tension to be resolved regarding the differing roles of consumption in the imagination compared to material reality, this also adds further fuel to the discussion of presence and absence based on the notion that in the imagination it seems we are able to make absent the things that may be very present, and weigh down on us, in daily life.

The relationship between material reality and the imagination is at the heart of many of the issues raised in the research. Ultimately what we come to see is that the imagination is significant in material reality, it is a fundamental part of our lives that cannot be easily separated.

As I present the participants' stories I do not only focus on their descriptions of imaginative experiences but also their discussion of them, reflections on them, and the context for imagining, as this tells us something more about the nature of imagining, especially its relationship to everyday life.

## **Chapter Four: Findings I**

### **Forms of Imagining and Imaginative Practices**

In this chapter I report on what we might call ‘imaginative practices’ – the things that people do when they imagine. Here I look at *how* people imagine, that is the different ways that people imagine and use their imagination in everyday life, where I focus on presenting the different kinds of imaginative experiences that the participant’s talked about and described, how these co-exist and appear to be controlled. I do not focus very much on the role of consumption in the experiences presented here as this is dealt with in the next chapter. The intention of this chapter is to highlight some of the complexities of everyday imaginative experiences and two areas emerge as significant and deserving of further consideration to be explored in the discussion chapter. The first is on the role, or presence, of material reality in the imagination. This develops our understanding of imagination in two ways. First, it helps to characterise different forms of imagining according to the degree of abstraction (Shields 2002) – an important element in the taxonomy that I develop, and second, it illustrates how the conditions of material reality can impose on the imagination, to the point where at times material reality ‘manages’ what and how we imagine. This notion of management is related to the next area that emerges as significant, which refers to the idea that we exert control over our imagination, often thinking about future emotion and future imagining, the notion of management has a dual nature.

#### **Levels of imaginative experience**

A variety of imaginative experiences were discussed and described by the participants as they talked about their everyday life, their hopes, plans, fears and worries for the future and their reflections on the past. As I made sense of the data and began to organise the findings it emerged that the most straightforward way to distinguish between the different kinds of imaginative experience was according to how abstract or probable they are (borrowing from Shields, 2002). In doing this it became apparent that two key imaginative modes can be distinguished. I term these ‘ideal’ and ‘materially real’. For each of these modes there are a number of ‘levels’ in terms of where they sit on the scale of abstraction. I should point out that by abstract and probable I do not only

mean how likely something is in terms of actualisation in material reality (Shields 2002), but also how much the conditions of material reality are included or upheld in the imagination. In total I identify five levels of imagining; fanciful, aspirational, anticipatory, guided and prospective. In the following section I present these in order of where they are placed on a continuum from the most abstract or idealised to the least abstract (most probable), which we could also see as most creative through to most practical.

### ***'Ideal' imagining***

The participants described experiences of pleasurable future-orientated imagining built around idealised events and circumstances. It is possible to note a difference in the level of abstraction that these experiences contain, which enables me to differentiate two forms of ideal imagining; 'fanciful' and 'aspirational'. In presenting experiences of ideal imagining I focus on Holly's stories as she provides particularly animated illustrations.

### **Fanciful imagining**

Fanciful imagining is the most abstract form of imagining that participants described.

Holly is 24. She has had a long distance boyfriend for almost a year and sees him most weekends, alternating between his home and hers. She lives with her parents in the home she grew up in and has done since she finished university, where she studied English and Drama, just over three years ago. Since she was 17 she has wanted to be a Primary School Teacher but decided she should get some life experience before training in order to make her a better teacher. Since finishing university she has worked as an Events Organiser and has recently been promoted, consequently she has decided to postpone her teacher training application for another year. She has lived at home to help save money in order to get on the property ladder, and is happy living with her parents who she is close to. When she talks, Holly is enthusiastic and lively, she describes

herself as “*annoying to some people*” because she talks so much. At our first meeting she had no figural life event to discuss. As she talked about her aspirations and plans for the future travelling, more specifically going on “*a few nice big holidays*” surfaced as something she’d like to do before settling down to have a family, and in the following description she talks specifically about her desire to visit New York:

*I’ve always wanted to go to New York...it’s probably the films, it always looks so glamorous although New York I’m sure can be dirty but it’s the glamour, Sex and the City, beautiful shops, everything’s twenty four hours, it’s the whole romantic idea of everything being open all the time, being able to go and get a sandwich at three o’clock in the morning, go to a Jazz Club, then go down the road and you’re on Broadway. It’s the whole ideal of what you see in the movies... I’ve always wanted to go to New York at Christmas time. The snow and ice skating in Central Park, but it’s all the romantic ideas you see in the movies, when you get there it’s probably, everyone I know who’s been there has loved it but it’s not going to be quite Sleepless in Seattle, not that it’s Seattle [laughs] but they do go to New York, romantic, meet on top of the Empire State building...I always have this thing on holiday, I always have to do something that I would never do at home. I wouldn’t go to a Jazz Club, I suppose for some reason I connect a Jazz Club with New York I think it’s because I know a few people who have been to some really cool ones, my friend went to, Big from Sex and the City owns one and went there. It’s Sex and the City, going out, having cocktails, listening to jazz or something. It’s being a girl as well, even though me and my boyfriend said we might try and go next year. It’s not like I’d have to go with girlfriends and be glamorous and wear my little heels. I have a whole wardrobe when I go on holiday that I don’t wear at home, like shorter skirts, because no-one knows me there. I feel like I could be anyone when I’m there because they don’t know you...you can be whoever you want...*

As she talked, Holly’s tone and fast speech carried her excitement and the description she provides builds a picture that tells us she has spent time cultivating her desire and these imagined scenarios, which have been informed by a variety of external sources and is highly inspired by film and television that provide highly crafted, idealised fictional representations that she likes to imagine being a part of and experiencing for



herself. The lifestyle and glamorous social lives portrayed in *Sex and the City* and the romantic lives of film characters have helped Holly to create her vision of an ideal New York experience and this is what marks it as abstract. It is based on the lives and events of fictional characters whose lines and entire lives are completely written for them (they are the product of someone else's imagination). This is not fantasy, as it is defined and understood for the purpose of this study, as there is a sense of possibility – New York is an actual place, and the kind of experiences she describes are not incompatible with material reality, yet it is about a different kind of life, one that is far removed from her own. Holly also recognises this herself admitting that *'it's all the romantic ideas you see in the movies'*; she knows a 'real' experience won't be like this – particularly because she is likely to go with her boyfriend – and even seems to play down the fanciful aspect that she enjoys watching and wants to be part of when she says *'it's not like I'd have to go with girlfriends and be glamorous and wear my little heels'*. Holly also says that on holiday she likes to experience things she does not in her everyday life. More than just experiencing the place, she wants to experience the opportunities it holds for being someone else, escaping her daily life in terms of place, person and lifestyle – being a glamorous socialite in New York is a far cry from living at home in a sleepy suburb with her parents.

To summarise then, at a fanciful level imagining can be characterised as; future orientated (though a particular time may not be specified – it may just be classed as an 'other' time), highly elaborated (vivid) imaginings that involve a high degree of abstraction, which means they feature aspects or events that are improbable in terms of actualisation but provides great pleasure for the individual to imagine. Their pleasurable nature also means they feature positive, usually strong, emotions.

### **Aspirational imagining**

We may see aspirational imagining as one level down from fanciful imagining. It too is pleasurable and centres on an ideal or perfect image of something, but rather than built around fantasy-like aspects that are further outside the realm of possibility (as we see in Holly's fanciful picture of New York), aspirational imagining is about a more distant

but ‘hoped for’ future. I use another of Holly’s stories to help illustrate the difference between the two forms of ideal imagining.

Holly regards herself as ‘*very family-orientated*’. She is very close to her extended family, they have had big family Christmases together for as long as she can remember and she was bridesmaid for both of her cousins recently. She tells me that she imagines a family orientated future and one of her biggest fears is not being able to have children of her own. Here she talks about her hopes for a ‘perfect’ future family life:

*...You always imagine a happy little husband and two point four children as it were, my family are really, we’re so traditional that you automatically have traditional views on the future, but you do see yourself in a nice little house, a nice garden with two toddlers running around, husband comes home from work, dinner on the table. I am a bit housewifey inclined [laughs]... I don’t think I could ever give up work and just not work, I think I’d go mad... everyone wants that perfect life, it just depends what their image of a perfect life is and yeah mine would be to be able to give my children, not whatever they want, I wouldn’t spoil them, but what my parents provided for me....it’s the way you’re brought up and that’s the norm, and I’ve had a happy childhood and happy life, I am really lucky, so obviously that’s how I’d like my life to be and how I’d like to be, my parents have brought me up pretty well, I think I’m alright [laughs], so I’d like to bring mine up like they did me. So that’s what I see as my ideal, to give my kids a life like I had...be able to do fun things, take them out on days out. If they want to go to ballet, I think I used to do something every day of the week, one day dancing, swimming, Brownies, trampolining, played instruments... I want to be able to afford to do that for them, not just buy them meaningless objects that they have, but give them something they’ll enjoy and learn and get something out of it. Live in a nice area, send them to a nice school...*

Holly’s description is centred on her ‘perfect’ life – one of happiness, marriage, children, and tradition. We can see that mundane aspects of material reality have been eliminated – the financial implications of various sports and hobbies for instance along with the day-to-day routine of housework, tiring or misbehaving children and a

scramble to get dinner in the oven in time for her husband coming home are omitted from the picture. Such practicalities of material reality may be an unwelcome intrusion on this pleasurable image of family life as she hopes it will transpire, which rather than based on fictional, crafted representations like her fanciful New York daydream, it is based on traditional values and her own memories of childhood and family life, and so this she is secure in knowing is possible and hopes to recreate. This notion of cutting out the detail of mundane material reality is probably something we all have experience of. Such as a time when you shared a dream with someone – perhaps you told your brother or sister, or a teacher about what you wanted to be when you grew up – who then all but shattered it by making you consider it in realistic terms – ‘how are you going to do that then? You need X, Y and Z to do that’ – the conditions, often constraints, of (a sometimes harsh) material reality do not always contribute to pleasurable experiences and the imagination may be one place where we can choose to remove them – if we are only imagining, we do not necessarily need to consider things pragmatically.

Aspirational imagining then is a pleasurable, future orientated form that features positive emotions, involves a rather high level elaboration and is less abstract than fanciful imagining because it is based on idealistic hopes related to our life-plans. The majority of the imagined scenarios are quite possible – owning a house and having a family are not unlikely or to be considered abstract – but they are peppered with perfection and omit many aspects of material reality that would be involved come actualisation. A description of daily life with two young children, their hobbies and classes along with housework and a part-time job would probably be quite different from the idealised imagined scenario that Holly describes for instance, and so we might see aspirational imagining as a naïve, but optimistic, view of the future.

What we should note here is that Holly can (and does) have both kinds of imaginative experience. She holds these simultaneously, so already we see that we may imagine all sorts of different things during a particular period of our lives.

In other imaginative experiences that participants described and talked about, material reality featured as significant and I now present three levels of materially real imagining.

### ***'Materially Real' imagining***

Instances of imagining where the significance of material reality's influence on, and role in the imagination were highlighted. By this I mean that current concerns (Klinger 1990) – various issues, experiences and events that are going on in one's everyday life – form the basis of what is imagined; people imagine *about* their everyday life. I have distinguished three levels of materially real imagining; anticipatory, guided and prospective imagining, which can be differentiated according to the extent to which material reality is present, which simultaneously denotes a smaller degree of abstraction. Essentially what we see is material reality pressing on the imagination to different degrees as imagining moves from creative, pleasurable and emotional experiences to more practical and matter of fact imaginative experiences.

### **Anticipatory imagining**

Participants often told me stories about things they were 'looking forward to', 'excited about' or 'worried about' – related to specific things 'going on' in their lives. These are not desires and daydreams about 'something someday' as in the case of aspirational imagining for instance, but a particular something, in the foreseeable future. The types of experiences that people talked about in this manner include; the things that are looked forward to about being a new mother, considering ways to spend time in retirement, anticipating life living with your partner, imagining the kinds of entertainment that you can put on at your wedding and equally worrying about the reactions and opinions of other people at the choices you have made. All of these are grounded in material reality, in that they centre on a forthcoming event or experience, but involve speculation in the possibilities on offer that have yet to be actualised.

I want to focus here on Patrick's story. Patrick is 40 years old with no children. He and his civil partner, Matteo, are keen enthusiasts of history, culture and the arts. Patrick works for an arts organisation and is an ardent fan of classical music in particular. Keen travellers, Patrick and Matteo often found themselves falling in love with and wanting to live in various places they holidayed. They then realised it wasn't that they wanted to live everywhere else, but that they no longer wanted to live in England, and so decided to pursue buying a property abroad with a view to slowing down their pace of life and eventually retiring there. After several years of searching for suitable locations and properties, they are now in the process of restoring a 14<sup>th</sup> century Italian Farmhouse set in forty acres of land, and will shortly begin 'phase one' which will involve splitting their time between England and Italy to help with the final stages of the restoration and settle themselves into the area and way of life. This project has been the subject of much positive and negative imagining over the last two years, since they purchased the property. Here Patrick tells me about how he imagines the Italian way of life and what it holds for them:

*....It will be nice to do more creative things, pick up the viola again properly and do some evenings where you just play the piano or just play music, or listen to music more because that's something that tends to be put on the back burner a bit and I just have a vision of being a nice balmy evening, music playing quite loud because you're not going to be disturbing anybody and you're out on the terrace, and the electrician has always said 'I'll make sure there's a television aerial point out on the terrace for you' and we go 'well why?' and he said 'well you might want to, it'll be nice evenings and you might want the telly out here, lots of people do', ok [laughs] so we might, or we might not, but I just, I feel that we will be able to be a bit more relaxed....*

See how this pleasant scene Patrick has created is based on the possibilities that are open to him when he is in Italy, these things form part of the main reason he and his partner embarked on the project – for a different and what they consider to be a better way of life. These are anticipations of something he hasn't experienced before but are looked forward to and embellished with a degree of idealism in that he imagines their Italian way of life as relaxing with more time for the things they enjoy and that the evening weather will be eternally pleasant and 'balmy'. This illustrates how actual forthcoming events (rather than just far-off ideals) can be pleasurable and elaborated in

the imagination, perhaps because there is still a certain level of distance between his current material reality and the reality he imagines in Italy.

In another story Sandra describes what she is looking forward to about having her own house. When I first interviewed Sandra she had not long been engaged and was planning her wedding to Mark, which was just four months after the engagement. They had moved from Mark's home town on the south coast of England back to Sandra's home town in East Anglia where she had been offered a promotion. The house was put on the market in July, her job started in September, they got engaged in early December and married in late March. In our interview after the wedding (May) Sandra talked mostly about the house they were now in the process of buying. After almost nine months of living with her parents, which she hadn't done since she was 22 (now 27), she is eager to have her own house again and anticipates life when they finally get one. Here visions of the future are tied together with memories from the past, as she recalls aspects of daily life in their old house that she awaits with pleasure:

*I'll lay in the morning and dream about what I would do if I was living in my own house, really little things like how I'd get up and clean the kitchen before making tea, because that's what I always did in my last house and go shopping early before Mark was up because he hates going shopping and I quite like it so I do it when it's early and not many people are there. And then I'll realise that if I did clean the kitchen, I wouldn't know where to put all my Mum and Dad's bits and I don't know what Mum wants at Tesco so I'll have to wait for her to get up, and then I just can't be bothered!....I get really excited about the thoughts about what I would do in my own house, then it depends whether I feel like it will happen soon, or if things are going a bit rubbish with the paperwork and stuff it might make me down and grumpy!*

Patrick and Sandra imagine ordinary or 'simple' things associated with forthcoming experiences, and these afford them pleasure. An air of idealism is present in that these quite ordinary, everyday things are imagined positively in comparison to how they feel about their current material reality – even cleaning the kitchen, which may be a mundane or hateful task for many people, has become pleasurable to Sandra. We can also see how there is more in the way of detail added to these daydreams in comparison to the more nebulous or hazy visions of aspirational futures. Holly for instance imagines

a rather generalised scene of family living, while Sandra and Patrick include more detail regarding specific activities that they are looking forward to, that they are waiting for. There is a sense of *real belief* that these things will happen, because their dreams are (now) in the process of actualisation – the restoration project is under way and the house sale is going through – they are no longer desires for a far off alternative lifestyle or future. So we may be able to more vividly imagine those things that are underway in terms of actualisation. We can also note how aspects of what is imagined may be idealised as a result of reflecting on their (dissatisfaction with) current material reality and in Sandra's case, past experiences which lend further detail and offer support for the dream – she used to do this and therefore knows it is possible.

This dissatisfaction with (some aspect of) material reality may become a basis for imagining certain things in an idealised manner. Monica's story nicely describes the contrast between a frustrating material reality and the ideal scenarios she conjures to escape it.

When I first interviewed Monica she was living at home with her parents after four years of renting various properties with friends. She moved home to save money so that she and her boyfriend can buy a flat, though their circumstances are not entirely straightforward. Monica's boyfriend, Owen, still owns a flat with his ex-girlfriend who currently occupies it. While he still has a mortgage with his ex, he and Monica cannot get one of their own and so they need to sell the flat. After a year on the market the flat has still not sold and so they are now trying to buy it themselves by transferring the mortgage. This is quite a compromise for Monica who had wanted to buy a house where they can lay down some roots. She has been extremely frustrated over the last year whilst living at home, she is eager for their relationship to move on but feels quite powerless, which in itself has been difficult for her as she admits to being a control freak. During our first interview she told me about their situation, her frustration and impatience with it and her desire to move closer to her imagined ideal as an engaged/married woman living with Owen in a new location – their own home. She explains that she feels her hopes for marriage and starting a family have been pushed back, or are even 'stalling':

*I would like to set up home, not a stop-gap...it just feels like it's another stalling point for the relationship, buying the flat it's not a point where we can settle down and have, grow roots...buying the flat is stalling aspects of our life because we might as well be renting and it actually gives me a fear that that's going to stop him proposing because we only live in a flat and he'll want to save money to buy a house so he can propose, get married and then we can start our life in a house rather than living in a flat, and not even a flat that we chose, well that he chose with his ex.*

Monica explains that this less than satisfactory material reality causes her to turn to her imagination where she plays out various 'ideal' proposal scenarios.

*In my mind's eye I've got ideals of when he's going to propose and how he's going to propose. I mean they're all wrong but it's just my way of controlling the situation..... we're going on a UK holiday this year rather than abroad and we're walking up Scafell Pike..., he loves walking and camping and being outdoors like that and I do it for him, and I just, in my head I've got an ideal that you know, we'll own the flat by then and we'll be on top of that mountain and have reached it at the end of our holiday... and he'll just drop to one knee and propose on top of the mountain in the sunshine and you know amazing views [laughs] but again you know I'm building up this massive picture in my head...*

Monica describes three more proposal scenarios before finally saying:

*...but to be honest if he were to propose to me in the middle of Tesco down an aisle I would say yes too and I'd still think that's pretty amazing.*

Her five re-imaginings of being proposed to provide a sense of hope and security in a relationship that is currently perceived to lack progress and stability. Here we can see how daydreams serve to construct an alternative 'better' reality that can then be actualised and how they offer disengagement from less than satisfactory aspects of real life and providing pleasurable respite from the constraints experienced in material reality. Yet even when escaping material reality Monica's imaginings and re-imaginings remain rather 'ordinary', they remain within the context of her material reality; she talks about proposal scenarios on occasions that have already happened (a previous weekend



away) or are planned (their summer holiday), or as with the Tesco example, a regular part of their routine. She does not omit Owen for a film-star or model boyfriend, or Scafell Pike for the Seychelles, nor does she imagine an outrageously expensive diamond ring. Her daydreams centre on how she wants her life to progress at a time when she is not able to control the situation and in this sense they offer compensation and a sense of control by imagining what she hopes will transpire in their relationship.

Imagining is not always pleasurable however. Participants often talked about things being ‘daunting’ or ‘scary’, that they were worried about certain aspects of forthcoming events and experiences. Therefore anticipatory imagining can also be negative and ‘worry’ can be regarded as a specific type of negative anticipatory imagining.

### **Negative anticipatory imagining – ‘worry’**

Barbara offers a comprehensive account of worry as she talks about her forthcoming retirement. Barbara comes from a large Greek family, she is one of seven siblings. Although they now live in various parts of the world they remain a close family, often going on holidays together and always having some sort of family celebration to attend. She has a husband, who took early retirement several years ago, and two grown up sons who live away from home. She has a lot of hobbies that keep her busy as well as a full time job, which she most enjoys for the social aspect. Having always thought that she’d retire at 60, once she had done “*her bit*”, Barbara found having the choice to retire quite frightening, so when it actually came to making a decision she hesitated. Finally, the decision was made for her because she and her husband booked a six week holiday, which meant she had to leave work because it exceeded her annual leave entitlement. Barbara told me about her worries and fears regarding how she will spend her time in retirement:

*That’s the bit I’m frightened about. I’m a very active person and I’ve never not worked. In my family if you didn’t work you were lazy, we always had to be doing something even if it was knitting while the telly was on...to wake up and have no structure to the day is daunting and is the bit I’m quite worried about. What am I going to go all day? To think that I’ll wake up and think ‘what shall I*

*do today?’ is something I’ve never done before...I may end up stacking shelves in Tesco ‘cos I need the money [laughs] that’s the daunting bit, you’ve always worked, been independent, always had money and suddenly that dries up, the security blanket’s gone...and I think it’s that feeling of ‘oh my god, this old age’! It’s a horrible feeling, because you don’t feel old. People I know who have retired say to me ‘you won’t know how you had time to work’, so I’m hoping that’s true...at the moment I’m nervous of not having enough to do, I’ve never experienced that, I’m always doing something because I don’t like being in the house and I don’t like my own company, that’s where the fears are...*

Barbara’s account conveys a lot of angst based on the unknown, she doesn’t know what to expect and doesn’t know how she will cope without having a job to go to and these worries and fears prevent her from looking forward to any positive aspects of retirement. Although she toyed with the idea that *‘I suppose it’s quite exciting really’* and talked about certain things she might do in retirement (decorating, voluntary work, walking, seeing family more often), these were centred on filling her time – effectively in the same way that work always has – in a bid to avoid being bored, unhappy and lost. The bulk of her imaginings focus on the things that might go wrong, such as not having enough money, or not getting on with her husband who has already retired.

The worries and concerns that Barbara describes highlight the important role that emotions play in the imagination. Participants often talked about their feelings concerning experiences they were going through, anticipating or reflecting on and these were clearly reflected in the imaginings they discussed. Talking about how they felt often naturally led on to images and daydreams they had as they described what these feelings were based on. Sandra’s description above also shows us that emotions can be felt in response to imagining. She states that she is excited at the prospect of having her own house but then feels ‘down’ and ‘grumpy’ when she reflects on the conditions of material reality (the slow buying process) which are disappointing, out of her control and prevent or slow down the process of dream actualisation. So while imagining can offer pleasure, we also see that it may cause angst and negativity, especially when the realm of material reality intrudes.

As well as positive and negative forms of anticipatory imagining, it was also apparent that there is a past-orientated form of a similar nature where individuals recalled memories of experiences from the past, reflecting on them in a positive manner. These provide pleasure but also often inform imaginings of forthcoming events. I refer to these as nostalgic imagining.

### **Nostalgic imagining**

For some of the individuals there was an apparent desire to rekindle and attempt to recreate a prior state or experience. This was most apparent in Jim's story of a forthcoming holiday. Jim is married and has two grown up children. As a young man he joined the army where, amongst other things, he travelled, taught abseiling and won trophies for rally driving during his 16 years in service. He talked about having reinitiated contact with a number of old colleagues from the army days through online telephone books and more recently Facebook. The fact that he and his wife are about to celebrate their 30<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary and soon after he will be turning 50 has caused him to think a lot about the past lately. To mark his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday they are going on a family skiing holiday, during which he hopes to recapture an experience he had previously, which he has very fond memories of:

*...I want to ski on my actual birthday. It's a very active holiday, I love it. I dream of it. One of the really happy memories I've got is of my 47<sup>th</sup> birthday. We went to Italy with Dan [son], Susie [son's girlfriend] and Claire [daughter], and me and Dan went off on my birthday, got out of our lessons and just went off skiing and I've got such fond memories of that. This year, on my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, to go off skiing and have all of them with me, to get a photo of that, I'd clutch it for the rest of my days [laughs]....it's the physical aspect, you get a buzz from exerting yourself there's just nothing like it, the speed, exhilaration, freedom, adrenalin, the burning in your legs, it's amazing and the scenery is incredible, breathtaking...it's daunting to be turning 50...it's the onset of age, that's why I want to go skiing, ski for as long as I can...*

Although Jim talks about the thrill of skiing, which makes him feel young, the holiday is a chance to get together with his family and he expresses his joy in remembering the previous holiday, which he wants to recapture or re-experience on his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Throughout the interview Jim also reflected on family life when the children were younger explaining that he misses them being young and how quickly time goes when they grow up. So perhaps the holiday is not just about an experience a few years ago, but recapturing the togetherness they had a long time ago before the children grew up. Added to this is the idea that for Jim, the skiing holiday is used as a way to negate '*the onset of age*', to make him feel young and active but also a way to recapture his youth more generally where he was active and fit in the army.

Anticipatory imagining, in its positive, negative, future and past/reflective forms, is grounded in past, current and forthcoming actual events and the possibilities that they hold. In this way it could be seen to sort of 'straddle' the border between ideal and materially real imagining. It features some level of elaboration and abstraction which can provide pleasure, but equally when they are based on fears and worries over things that are forthcoming (such as growing older, which we cannot escape) or could happen (such as lacking purpose in retirement), we can see that there are a number of temporal and emotional possibilities for imagining. We might consider that the imaginative 'detail' comes with the knowledge that an event or experience is assured – it *is* going to happen and so we can imaginatively 'play' with the possibilities.

There are also imaginings that are more closely guided by the events and circumstances of material reality.

### **Guided imagining**

At times it was apparent that the circumstances we face in material reality may be imposed on the imagination, setting parameters within which we (can) imagine. This type of imagining was most apparent when individuals had specific goals to fulfil or events to organise within certain constraints, such as financial or time restrictions, thus associated imagining also operates within these constraints. Guided imagining can be positive or negative in terms of the felt emotion.

A positive form of guided imagining is illustrated by Monica in her second interview. She and Owen now own the flat where Owen used to live with his ex-girlfriend, after they were able to sign the mortgage from his ex-girlfriend over to Monica. They have decided to renovate the flat before they move in and have given themselves three months to fit a new kitchen and bathroom, remove a false ceiling in the lounge, install a fireplace and after these big jobs they will re-plaster, re-carpet and decorate throughout. They are doing most of the work themselves at evenings and weekends. In the following story Monica describes how she “*fell in love*” with a display kitchen in a DIY store. This kitchen exceeded their budget and rather than imagine it as an ideal kitchen that they may aspire to have ‘one day’, she describes how the budgetary constraints they were under – their material reality – guided her imagination, keeping her ‘on track’ as it were:

*...I fell in love with a kitchen there but it had you know a wood work surface and I think, no it was oak doors, again the oak wood, so it would go with the table, and the granite work surface which was just really nice and obviously very expensive... it would have been the ideal kitchen there and then you know, it just had everything but obviously the best of the best of everything so that would be like, oh god if we had an unlimited supply of money we'd go for that kitchen but that's going to be a base of what we could have and Owen and I just need to get the cheap version you know so it's like 'oh god we can do this' and it gave me ideas of how we could do it so with the base units, we've already got the base units so we don't need a whole new fitted kitchen we just need the doors, which is eighty-five pounds per door, so but then there's eBay and there's auctions, there's alternatives, but it's given us a starting off point of what is feasible for that room... I don't feel sad about it because it's something to aim for in the future and it's something that OK it might not happen in the flat with us but no biggy because I have no aspirations of living there forever...*

Monica's budget and space constraints directed her to imagine how she could have a piece or version of the kitchen she fell in love with, and consider alternatives regarding how they can go about this. Here imagining takes on a more practical function, helping to weigh up and make decisions and imagine the outcomes. We can also note that in dealing with practical issues, the market (consumer goods and the details of consumption specifically) seems stronger, it has a presence in the imagination based on her material reality that requires her to consider it now. So there may be certain times

and situations when consumption is prevalent in the imagination that we need to be aware of.

The parameters set by material reality limit the possibilities for embellishment and abstraction and therefore pleasure. This does not mean the possibilities for pleasure are completely eliminated, but planning and decision making become the focus and purpose. For Monica, it also seems as though this isn't the 'real' dream, but something that has to be done *en route* to achieving the ultimate aspiration of owning a farmhouse complete with a farmhouse kitchen like the one she saw on display; because that lies ahead in the future, the less satisfactory conditions of material reality in the present are more bearable, as she says the flat is not their 'forever home' and so she is happy to make-do. It is therefore possible to see how Monica's imaginative experience is goal based; they need to buy and fit a kitchen in their flat and have set out to do so, this is not based on a desire for the perfect kitchen but one that fulfils their current needs and budget. So we can see when goals are set and need to be fulfilled within certain specifications, imagining becomes more planful.

In a different kind of situation, Tim who is soon to graduate from his computer animation Masters course has an idea of what his ideal first job would be, but this is negated by his knowledge of the industry – as one that is difficult to get into – and the fact that he has limited experience. Despite working hard for the last year, he is fearful of not being good enough:

*I think working, at least starting in adverts sounds like a very, it seems quite nice because they're quite short projects and they're quite diverse and you're quite hands on in every respect...if I could choose I'd like to work on adverts... I'm quite nervous really... I think the insecurity of always looking for a job is a bit, I don't know, scary almost, when you don't even have a job and you might have to look for one more than once a year it's a bit daunting really because you don't know where you're going to be... I'd be happy just having a reasonably good entry job into some company and that's all I'm really concerned about. We have this conversation that comes up...like, by the end, will we have enough to show*

*for anyone to employ us? It sounds silly but we all feel that that's our biggest fear...*

Here material reality (of the computer animation industry) has caused him to tone down his hopes for a job – rather than dreaming of getting his ideal job he is happy to settle for a “*reasonably good entry job*”. The ‘daunting’ prospect that most work in the industry is on short term contracts has become an overriding issue that also prevents him creating pleasurable daydreams about his future career – he not only has to worry about landing his first job, but also subsequent jobs. On some occasions then, material reality can be a source of angst that requires us to be down-to-earth in our hopes and expectations. Material reality has restricted Tim’s imagination and he has set low expectations as a consequence – material reality manages his imagination here. We can see that this negative form of guided imagining acts as a form of preparation for potentially disappointing outcomes – by preparing for the worst we may be pleasantly surprised and this means we avoid future disappointment. So it seems that we anticipate future emotions and may alter our imaginative activity as a consequence.

To summarise then, in guided imagining material reality comes to bear on our imagination, whether in terms of specific personal circumstances such as money, family or time constraints, or the broader conditions of material reality such as the job market. This is less about what might, or could happen and more about what is likely to happen. In this form we see a different function of imagining; one that concentrates the imagination, helping us to better plan and equip ourselves.

### **Prospective imagining**

There were also occasions when people talked about the things they imagine and expect in very matter-of-fact terms, with very little detail, emotion, elaboration or abstraction. Much like Campbell’s (1987) ‘imaginative anticipation’, we might not even consider this to be classed as imagining because it is so diluted, yet that people talked about things that exist only in the future – which exists only in the imagination – means it may be regarded as imagining.

Sheila is married with two young children. She leads a busy life, working several jobs and studying part time at college. She is very close to her sister and for the past nine months their two families have been considering emigrating from the UK to Australia together. Sheila has conducted a great deal of research and describes herself as the kind of person who likes to “*fully know*” what she is getting into. She is currently planning a trip to Australia with her sister to do some primary research on the country and to get a feel for things such as the cost of living, schools, public transport and residential areas. The main aim is to help them decide whether they will pursue the idea of emigrating there. When I asked her what she expects the trip to be like, she described it in very matter-of-fact terms, which was quite different from her more elaborate descriptions of how she imagines family life in Australia:

*Weather-wise I'm expecting it to be warm. I think Adelaide will be bit more of a hick town. I'm anticipating friendly people, a slower pace, the pace here is mad so I anticipate the pace there to be not so mad. I have an expectation of more time for people and relaxation...*

Sheila offers a rather factual account of her expectations. It is as if existing thoughts and images are condensed into brief visions or lists and in this respect the imagination becomes a kind of holding pen to help organise thoughts. The difference between expectations and hopes or idealisations is more apparent when contrasted with her more elaborate description of how she imagines family life in Australia:

*In our spare time here it's 'what can I do? What can I achieve?' there it's more like 'have a beer in the garden' instead... It's an opportunity for me to start again and not get so caught up in 'what job can I do now 'cos I've got a spare three hours'. It will be more like 'what can we do as a family?' Spend more family time together. Australia gives the opportunity to start a total fresh. Here it's hard to slow down the pace we're going at. I think it will just be more family time...just spending more time together, more outdoor lifestyle... barbeques with neighbours, here we'd never invite our neighbours round for a barbeque and most of the time the weather's so rubbish that you can't have one anyway...I'm looking forward to going back a bit like I said where there's no 24 hour society... I think a typical day would be much more outdoor existing and having fun rather than just going through the motions. I know there will still be routine but there's so much to explore over there...*



There is a substantial difference between her two descriptions. The expectations she reels off are based on research she has conducted and what she has learnt about the areas she is going to visit, as if she has condensed these into a list. It seems that when the term expectation was used, people's descriptions were more rationalised, therefore it may be that the term itself conjures a more rational and less detailed consideration of events. Her more detailed anticipations of the lifestyle on offer in Australia is more idealistic and is informed by a variety of external sources, particularly media representations from television, travel books and online research because she has no firsthand knowledge or experience of life in Australia. She told me that she had watched 'Wanted Down Under' (a reality TV show where families thinking of emigrating spend a week experiencing the Australian way of life to help them decide whether to pursue their dream) over and over, putting herself in the situation of the people on screen and imagining how she would feel.

The forms of materially real imagining that I have distinguished here revolve around material reality in different degrees. 'Anticipatory imagining' is *grounded in* the events and concerns of material reality but is loaded with possibility and speculation. 'Guided imagining' is *guided by* material reality, the times when we imagine 'within our means' – within the constraints and circumstances of everyday life that we need to adhere to – and when we set more realistic expectations based on the conditions of material reality. Sometimes this becomes very matter-of-fact in the form of expectations, when the imagination seems to help organise our thoughts. Ultimately it appears that imagining is not only about fantasy and ideals, material reality has a varied and significant role to play in guiding what, how and why we imagine. While the role of consumption is not of prime concern for the moment, as it is dealt with in the next chapter, we do begin to see that it may become prominent in the imagination when the conditions of material reality involve it and may therefore require that it be thought about, particularly when rehearsing and planning.

There is, of course, greater complexity to imaginative practices than differentiating modes and levels of imagining from one another. As the participants talked about their hopes, dreams, plans and worries for the future it became apparent that individuals

imagine various versions of a particular event or scenario, each offering different possibilities for actualisation, I refer to this as ‘degrees of imagining’.

## **Degrees of imagining**

When it comes to future orientated imagining, it seems that there are degrees of imagining – that individuals create and hold onto different versions of the future simultaneously. University student Jez dreams of being a racing driver. He began driving carts at the age of ten, after getting a set of lessons for his tenth birthday, and has competed in various national championships for a number of years now. It is an important part of his life and something that he has always done with his father. It is an expensive sport to take part in and Jez worked 25 hours a week as a bartender whilst doing his A-levels to raise money to compete, and his father contributed an equal amount. As Jez talked about his career aspirations he described three versions of his potential future, each one more ideal and abstract than the next:

*...I always had, like I suppose every British young racing driver, wanted to be a Formula One driver and win the World Championship like Jensen Button but, now that I know more about it, I'd be very content to race so that I could support myself and even if I went home in the week and had a part time job in a bar, like I did before, having enough to get by, not having to worry about financial implications and racing at weekends, I would do happily. I suppose any sort of professional racing I could do and even if I could be involved in it, I know a bit about engines but I could never take an engine apart and put it back together. But I suppose with PR I'm hoping to take it into a situation where I could work for a Formula One team or another racing team, be spokesperson or something for them....[in ten years time] if I was to progress in racing then I would be a racing driver and I would be very competitive and earning a living but realistically I would like to be working for a racing team, being a Press Officer or something, going to all the races... if I didn't get my ideal future I would be very content because I know that my ideal future is very longshot... everyone who's made it has had a certain amount of luck to fall into that position but equally I would be very happy to have a job that was comfortable and I enjoyed that I want to do everyday...*

So Jez realises that reaching the epitome of his dream is a ‘longshot’ and his knowledge of the industry, particularly the need for luck to succeed, has caused him to create a reduced version of the dream in which there is more hope of actualisation. So rather than a formula one racing driver, like Jensen Button (a ‘fanciful’ imagined future), Jez would settle for being able to compete as a driver in a different racing series and be able to have that as his main profession, even if it meant only ‘getting by’ and working alongside it to support himself (anticipatory imagined future). As well as this ‘toned down’ version of the dream, he also has a third, ‘realistic’ backup plan; to work in PR in the motorsport industry and even this he recognises would be his dream PR job and realises he may need to settle for something not related to motorsport or even the broader car industry (guided daydream). Jez has thought about the likelihood of dream actualisation and consequently revised his aspirations so that if his number one dream does not transpire, he will be able to avoid future disappointment – much like computer animator Tim, who set lower expectations for his first job.

Material reality may not only impose itself in terms of one’s current concerns and circumstances as the basis for imagining but also more generally, it seems individuals consider material reality when creating and modifying their hopes and aspirations for the future in order to make actualisation more likely and avoid disappointment.

The notion of degrees of imagining raises the idea that we give thought to what we imagine, and like Holly earlier acknowledging that her New York daydream is not likely to transpire as she imagines it because it is based on romantic media representations, it seems we recognise quite easily what is and what is not likely to be actualised. Yet we continue to create, modify and carry with us ideal and fanciful versions of events and so we have to ask why, if we know they will not be actualised, do we continue to imagine in this way? Is it for pleasure as Campbell (1987) argues? Is it for compensation? – if we know that some dreams cannot be actualised, that some transformations are not possible, do we imagine them because imagining is better than nothing?

Not only do we think about imagining in terms of different degrees, but in some circumstances we exert control over our imagination to the extent that we may prevent ourselves from imagining altogether.

## **Controlling the imagination**

In my conversations with people it was evident that at times we exert control over our imagination, that is to say there are certain (material reality based) conditions under which we restrict what, or to what extent we imagine and this may mean not allowing ourselves to imagine at all.

Samantha is 30 and has been married for two years, when I first interviewed her she was four months pregnant. She and her husband currently live in a two bedroom flat and since being pregnant they have been “*galvanised into action*” and focused their efforts on DIY and decorating to get the place ready before the baby’s arrival so that they can put it on the market and move into a house, which will be their family home, soon after. She had a happy childhood herself and often reflected on it as she talked about her own future family life, which she hopes will be similar. Samantha talked to me about her birthing plan, explaining that she is reluctant to “*get too obsessed with how I want things*” because she is aware that the actual experience could become something quite different; “*because everything changes and you can’t predict what’s going to happen*”, so she intends to be open-minded about it so that she is not disappointed or upset should the birth not go according to plan:

*I don’t want to plan it too much because if it doesn’t go the way you want it I think that could be more stress on the day itself but also, I don’t know I’m no expert, but I wouldn’t be surprised if it could be something that could trigger like post-natal depression as well because your hormones are all over the place and you’ve planned your perfect birth, however that might look to you, and then you have to have a C-section or something else happens, or your husband’s away and he can’t get there and that might just be, especially if it’s your first I think you might think, ‘I’m never going to have my first child again, it was a*

*one-off and it didn't go the way that I'd planned' and I think perhaps even in a normal hormonal state that could make you think 'oh that's not fair' or whatever, even at a very subconscious level, but when you've got all your hormones flying around as well I don't think it can be any good for you at all to be too obsessed with a certain way of it happening...*

Here, Samantha is deliberately preventing herself from imagining in-depth her idea of a perfect birth. She is also imagining possible future emotions (and potentially serious emotional and mental states) that she thinks could occur if the birth did not go according to the ideal plan and these possibilities have caused her to limit her imaginative activity related to it. So *not* imagining an ideal means we can make sure we do not fail in reaching it.

At other times, particularly when we have much riding on a particular event or scenario and there is no guarantee that it will transpire, we may prevent ourselves from imagining altogether. To illustrate this I focus on Holly's story about her career aspirations.

Having wanted to be a primary school teacher since she was 17, Holly (now 24) has been looking at the various options available to her to train as a teacher. The second time I interviewed her she told me she had decided to apply to do a one year PGCE course because she is unhappy at work (despite a promotion) and does not want to wait another year to apply for her teacher training. She hopes to be accepted by her first choice university that is close to where her long-term, long-distance boyfriend lives – the idea being that they can then live together – so not only will she be embarking on her dream career but their relationship will also progress because they will be living together. When I asked her how she imagines life in this new place she tells me;

*The thing is you don't think about all the in-depth things... I honestly don't know, I haven't thought, I don't want to think really too deep into it because if I don't even get an interview or don't get a place [on the PGCE] then I don't want to sort of dash all my hopes and have all these plans and things and then not be able to carry them out...*

Holly explains clearly that imagining her ideal life in Brighton, where she will essentially be starting a new life, or more precisely embarking ‘properly’ on her life-plan, is something that she tries not to do. It seems that, for Holly, imagining the wonderful possibilities that the PGCE course and living with her boyfriend may bring is dangerous. If she does not get accepted onto the course her disappointment will be all the greater – with it goes her hopes of ‘moving on’ in terms of her career, relationship and larger life plan (house, marriage and babies). The conditions of material reality mean she is not allowing herself to imagine in an ideal form.

What we also see in this imaginative control is that individuals often imagine in-line with their current circumstances or life-stage; that is, certain conditions have to be met in material reality before allowing themselves to imagine beyond this. And so it emerges that imagining occurs in stages, which tend to be linked to significant life events, experiences or milestones. Here one’s current existence influences what you imagine in terms of how far into the future you imagine. So although an individual might have a general ‘life plan’ or hopes about an ideal future, this is likely to be broken down into individual dreams or goals that are imagined and sought after one by one – as and when they fit into the context of your material reality. This notion – that wherever you are, whatever stage you are at, you think ahead and aspire to have or be at the next – was particularly manifest in conversations about relationships and related issues or events. For instance, when (like Monica when I first spoke to her) you have a boyfriend and are not living together this is what you aspire to and imagine. Once you are living together you imagine getting engaged, and like Monica imagine various proposal scenarios. Once engaged, like Sandra and Simone, you imagine and plan your wedding, and once married you imagine and plan for having children like Catherine and Samantha. So our imagination often focuses on what we consider our next step to be, the next thing we desire, as articulated by Simone; *‘it’s that next exciting stage that you can think about and I suppose that will lead onto the thought of having children and it all sort of comes in blocks’*.

This idea is further illustrated when we consider that under other circumstances, individuals may be imaginatively ‘open’, that is, they allow themselves to be stimulated by almost anything that they come across. Such stimulation was most apparent for

individuals who had a dominant current concern, such as planning a wedding, expecting a baby or buying a new home, which occupies not only the imagination but their material reality as well. We can see that this is the case with Simone who is planning her wedding.

Simone is 28, she has been with her boyfriend, Rob, for five years and living together for two. Although she trained as a Social Worker she now runs the office-side of the Dental Practice they set up together two years ago. At the time of our first meeting she had been engaged for three months and was in the early stages of planning the wedding. Marriage was never really something Simone had given much thought to and certainly not something they had talked about as a couple, though they had talked about having children in the future. She explained that a happy relationship was more important to her than getting married, but now that they are engaged, the wedding has become “*the be all and end all*”. She told me how everything and anything sparks her thoughts about aspects of the wedding – she is imaginatively ‘switched on’ to stimuli and constantly looking for ideas for it:

*When I get home from work I put the Wedding Channel on [laughs] that is quite a big prompt. It’s turned into a reflex now, as soon as I sit on the sofa I type in 266 and it’s Bridezillas and stuff like that...*

It seems that individuals who are in the process of actualising their dreams are ‘allowed’ to imagine and look for inspiration, while those who restrict their imaginative activity tend to be in a situation where they may lack control and the outcome is not in their own hands.

That we can intentionally choose *not* to imagine, or limit the extent to which we imagine (e.g. remove idealistic qualities) may be quite significant. It not only suggests that we intentionally avoid engaging in imaginative activity in order to avoid future disappointment, but that we consider and plan for future emotion and try to avoid negative ones. So at times imagining seems to take on a protective quality. Moreover, when we consider the situations in which individuals exert control over the imagination it seems that it may be when we have little control in material reality (e.g. nature may

take over or the decision is in someone else's hands) or when we strongly desire something, as in the case of Holly who has her entire life plan riding on being accepted onto the PGCE course.

Beyond imagining various contingencies, beyond limiting what one imagines, at times of doubt, or worry, or when one's control was lacking, it was also the case that people would relinquish agency altogether by placing their future in the hands of fate. So if their hopes and dreams were not realised, then it is not down to failure or reason, but down to fate.

In her second interview, Sheila for instance, who is considering emigrating to Australia, and has now visited the country with her sister to get a feel for it, is more keen than ever but knows it is a long process and that it might not transpire – they may not be granted visas. She explained how she usually goes for things 'hell for leather' but has to sit back and take this slowly:

*It isn't going to be that easy, but if we really want it we will find a way and it will work, and if it's not meant to be, and I'm an 80/20 believer in that, I mean a lot of it you make yourself but sometimes things just aren't meant to be no matter how hard you try and we'll see if this is one of those things, but one way or another we will end up doing something major.*

For Sheila the fact that ultimately being able to move to Australia is not in her control (though she can and is doing things to make them more 'appealing' to fit the country's entry requirements) maybe what causes her to turn to fate and if it doesn't happen it can become another 'one of those things'. The specificity of the dream is also negated somewhat by the end line 'we will end up doing something major', it is not necessarily Australia that has to be this 'something major' and so she is allowing herself the option to modify the dream should the Australia option not be possible.



In another story, this time Patrick's, we can see how fate can also be used when reflecting on things not having turned out a certain way – here fate is held to account for certain events unfolding as they have. Patrick told me about a Medieval town house they had seen and fallen in love with a year or so before embarking on the Farmhouse purchase and restoration. As he talked about what might have been he sounded regretful, I asked him about it:

*A tiny bit of me has [regretted it] because like I say it would have been quite nice, however it might have, I think there was always a certain amount of 'things happen for a reason' and certainly I've had a lot of experiences of things seemingly not going to what you wanted to happen and six months later or a year later realising 'oh actually I'm glad that didn't happen like that because this is much better'. So I don't really regret it...there's lots of things that could have been wrong about doing it, so no I don't regret it, I never regret anything ultimately because it eats you up.*

It seems that fate offers a kind of comfort. If things do not transpire as we had hoped, we have not failed, it just wasn't 'meant to be' and so may reduce, even prevent, consequent negative emotional experiences and reactions, such as regret. Effectively, fate is an all-embracing contingency that we can rely on before things come to pass, or turn to afterwards.

More than allowing, limiting and disallowing what and how much they imagine, or using fate as a cushion for preventing negative emotional experiences, it also emerged that individuals plan for future imagining. They may attempt to create pleasurable future imaginative experiences and avoid negative ones by acting in certain ways in their daily lives.

### **The creation of future imagining**

Earlier I presented stories from Tim and Samantha that illustrated how we may limit imaginative activity in order to prevent disappointment and negative emotional experiences in material reality. If you remember, Tim set low expectations for his career ambition and Samantha did not want to imagine or create her perfect birthing plan in

case it did not transpire in the same way. Yet it is also the case that individuals behave in certain ways in material reality to ensure, encourage or avoid particular imaginative experiences in the future.

In Jim's previous story about recreating and capturing in a photo a cherished experience on a forthcoming holiday, we can see how he desires and plans to create future nostalgia imagining. Similarly, Monica told me that she worries about the fact that she and Owen will be living in a place that he chose, bought and lived in with his ex-girlfriend. She explained that she felt the redecoration and substantial changes that they were making to it meant that it would be a different flat – 'their' flat, and doing the work themselves meant they were creating their home together, but more importantly it was the memories that they were creating that will really make it a home:

*When we're not here we want to be here...Friday night for example we're going to be working [on the flat] and Owen's really excited about working later in the evening, having a few beers...and us having a laugh doing it and us working hard and building our home and having a beer together, so that's special and it goes to back to you asking about making it a home, it's having memories of the place already and we've only just got it but, you know, we do, we've got loads. The first night here was an absolute riot, you know, we were absolutely wetting ourselves laughing the entire time. And we do have stroppy minutes about the flat, but I can tell you every time one of us has got stroppy the other one's pulled us out laughing you know, and it's all here, it's all memories already in the flat.*

Monica has already started reflecting on the memories they are creating as she recalls their first night in the flat (she told me in more detail the events of that evening too, which involved sitting on the floor, drinking champagne, the sun pouring through the lounge window, 'christening' the various rooms and sleeping on a blow-up bed with sleeping bags) and this affords her great pleasure. It is not only that we plan for pleasurable imagining, we may also act in such a way so as to prevent the experience of negative imaginative and emotional experiences in the future. This is illustrated by Holly, who explains that although she is keen to save as much money as possible in order to get on the property ladder, she does not want to have regrets to look back on:

*...I could probably save a good two or three hundred [pounds per month] more than I do. But I don't want to ever have regrets and I've got a friend who has been saving and saving and saving for the last three years but she's now got, she's living with her fiancé and they had a target and now got to it and she said to me yesterday 'I've done nothing for three years, we haven't been out and gone for coffee, we haven't been out for dinner the only sociable thing we do together is go for Orange Wednesdays [a two for the price of one cinema ticket deal through mobile phone company Orange] because it's two for one' and she said 'I haven't done anything, no social life for three years' and I don't want to have that at all. So I'd rather save less but still go out and have fun. I don't worry about money to the extent that it stops me doing things...*

In this instance the possibility of feeling regret in the future, which is heightened by the miserable experience of her close friend, motivates Holly to make the most of her situation and not sacrifice too much for the sake of saving money for a house that remains a rather distant aspiration.

So the things we do and the experiences we have in material reality provide imaginative fodder for the future, and people are particularly keen to create pleasant memories for nostalgic imagining. Moreover, when deciding on something – a holiday, doing our own DIY, general socialising – it is apparent that we may also consider the kinds of imaginative experiences that it may offer us. The familiar phrase ‘something to tell the grandkids’ comes to mind here – we often reflect on moments and experiences in the knowledge that we will look back on it in the future, and so we begin to see links between the different locations of the imagination and that individuals seem to be aware of them and indeed work on them.

## **Summary and emerging areas of discussion**

By exploring the imagination in the context of the everyday it emerges that a range of imaginative experiences are engaged in, and this range of experience brings to attention and enables greater insight regarding the complex nature of the imagination and imaginative practices. One of the key insights generated is the role of material reality in

the imagination; imagining is not only concerned with pleasurable, consumption based ideals but also the stuff of everyday life. It is apparent that the many circumstances and constraints that individuals face in material reality seep through to the imagination helping us to cope with and manage daily life. The role of material reality is also manifest in the more complex practices that are presented; the control that individuals exert over their imagination when creating different imaginative versions of the future, in allowing oneself to imagine, and the consideration of and planning for future imagining and emotion. These practices come together to suggest the notion of a meta-imagination – the idea that we think about and imagine imagining – and an overarching theme of management; management of material reality through the imagination but also management of the imagination through material reality. That is, we are able to prepare, protect ourselves (our emotions) and cope with material reality by imagining (or not imagining) various possibilities that could transpire, but material reality also influences what, and how we imagine as we attempt to manage our emotions and possible outcomes. So we see that materially real imagining can be conditional on our own material reality.

## **Chapter Five: Findings II**

### **The ‘What’ of Imagining**

I now want to consider in detail the things that individuals focus on in the imagination – the things that dominate the everyday imagination and the different roles that consumption takes in the imagination. When we review the kinds of things that have been the subject of imaginative activity this far we see that the issues of family, home, and lifestyle changes (including personal transformation) prevail. On closer inspection it emerges that the focus of the everyday imagination (ideal and materially real) is indeed the ‘stuff’ of our everyday lives, not just in terms of current concerns and aspects of daily life, but a number of common scripts that refer to traditional roles and lifestyles, which we might refer to as ‘everyday aspirations’ (Pettigrew 2005). The participants’ also prioritised relationships with friends, family and loved ones and they recognised the value and importance of ‘simple pleasures’. In terms of consumption in the everyday imagination, a varied narrative can be noted. Sometimes consumer goods and a concern about the broader consumer culture were central and in the foreground, but it was also the case that consumer goods were often in the background and formed part of the setting for an imagined scene, while the details of consumption were often manifest absent (ignored but necessarily there). Overall, however, consumer culture tends to provide the dominant narrative for imagined scenarios.

#### **Traditional roles and scripts**

Participants’ descriptions overwhelmingly emphasised non-material aspects of life and it became apparent that there was a common stock of everyday aspirations that are orientated towards traditional western cultural values, roles and life scripts that dominated the conversations with participants. These centred predominantly on family, love and happiness. Not only were such roles and scripts present but a great deal of pleasure was obtained from imagining and talking about them as expressed by Catherine.

Catherine, 26, who has been married to Michael for nearly two years is four months pregnant. They live in a two bedroom flat, which they bought four years ago, in a quiet suburb of Surrey. Catherine attended a private girl's school from the age of four. She and Michael have been friends since they were at secondary school but didn't get together until Catherine's first year at university, when she was 19. Despite going to university to study Business Management, she has never had very strong career ambitions; family was always her most important goal in life. Here she talks about wanting to fulfil the traditional role of mother and housewife. She told me she is looking forward to:

*...just being at home with it and going out for walks. I feel horrible calling it 'it', but I don't know what it is [laughs] yeah just going out like to places with my mum and the baby, and with Michael's mum as well....Just being at home and baking and cooking, looking after the baby, all of that... so yeah I just think it will be really nice.... I think that's why I got married quite young and am having a baby quite quick...From when I was about 14, I was going to get married at 24, have my first baby at 26 and my second one at 28. That was always what I wanted...*

Here Catherine focuses on what she anticipates will be pleasurable aspects of conforming to a housewife role. She imagines taking part in traditional 'motherly' and 'housewife' practices such as cooking and baking, as well as enjoyable, leisurely activities with other members of her family. The focal point of her anticipations is on *being* a housewife and the activities that will entail. A desire for such a housewife and mother script was echoed by a number of other women that I talked to. If we return to Holly's aspirational future from earlier, you will recall that her 'perfect life' centres on a happy marriage and family life, with the traditional two point four children, nice house and garden and her assuming a housewife-inclined role, and this is more important than climbing the career ladder. This traditional family aspiration is also shared by Samantha who expresses the personal importance of social relationships within the local community now that she is expecting a baby, which she anticipates will be more rewarding than her paid work:

*There's lots of stuff I could do and throw myself into in the village and things to keep me socially active and involved...if you had a church and a nursery network you could make quite strong links...even our relationship*

*with people in this block has changed since I've been pregnant...we've been a bit more social with people, so you get into a different mindset about the value of having your neighbours around...*

While she is not describing an imagined scenario here, Samantha talks about her desire for and the importance of relationships and her prioritisation of these – developing existing ones and creating new ones – now that they are starting a family and she will be spending more time at home. Once the baby had been born she talked about his christening at the local church and reflected on her own childhood memories of family events at their local church and how she wanted to recreate that kind of childhood and family life, again, prioritising social relationships within the wider community.

For those women who had strong ambitions outside the family script, it was evident that they still felt a pull towards motherhood and family life but this was sometimes a cause for concern – that they wouldn't be able to do everything they want if they are to have a family as well. For instance, Lisa is a single 35 year old postgraduate student whose career is very important to her. She knew she wanted to do her Masters five years ago but waited until she had acquired a good amount of work experience in the industry before embarking on it. She told me although she needs to establish a career for the first time *'I'm 35 so I've kind of got concerns about starting a family like soon-ish'*. Likewise Eve, aged 27, expressed a sense of pressure to do everything, which for her includes re-training as a teacher, working for a number of years to develop professionally, living abroad, saving money to buy a house *and* have a family before she gets too old. While we may be told that we can 'have it all', it seems that while this could offer lots of pleasurable opportunities for daydreaming, it may in fact be problematic and a cause of angst when it comes to imagining and planning the future; as we are exposed to more possible scripts the need to manage the imaginative possibilities becomes pressing.

Wanting to have a family is not only a dream that women hold. A number of the men I talked to placed emphasis on their desire for a family in the future and on the importance of family in their lives. Chris, for instance, a 19 year old university student has specific career ambitions to work in the music industry – much like Jez, who wants to be a racing driver, he has various versions of this dream – but his career ambition exists alongside having a family. He talked about the value of family as central over and above consumer goods:

*Having a family is the only thing that I think, well it gives life meaning...your time in this world is so short that I think the only thing that validates it is passing something on, creating something, I suppose that's the reason why I love music and art because you're creating something that will endure, so I've always wanted to have a family... that's the main goal in my life at the moment, I know it sounds really weird for a 19 year old to be saying...whilst I'm as guilty as any for loving material goods, at the end of the day they're not worth anything if you haven't got the simple things in life like family...*

So here Chris acknowledges the importance of family over and above material goods and this prioritisation or recognition was apparent in a number of descriptions. Here we begin to see that individuals may reflect on consumption and this is something I will consider in more depth when focusing on the roles of commodities and consumer culture in the imagination shortly.

## **Simple pleasures**

Many of the individuals I spoke to shared a desire for 'simple pleasures', showing an appreciation for working on their relationships, having a better relationship with time (a work-life balance), and improving the quality of their life and the lives of those close to them. For example Patrick who is planning his move to Italy, describes in detail how he imagines this move as a happy escape from his current unsatisfactory material reality:



*This is a change in the lifestyle, better healthier diet and more activity in the lifestyle, whereas here I get to work about 8.30, 9 o'clock, I don't even take a lunch, someone will get a sandwich for me so I'm pretty much sitting down until 7 o'clock at night, then I go home, because I'm so knackered I fall asleep and I go to bed by 10 most nights, that's my life now and that's just not good, mentally or physically...Certainly there will be a lot more activity, such as chopping wood and all those things, I think it will be a more outside existence because the weather's so much nicer as well, so I'm hoping just by being more active I will lose a bit of weight and be fitter from that point of view. Dietary wise, yes I think their food is better... we're going to have a big vegetable patch, like I say we've been experimenting with tomatoes and courgettes and things here and I just love the idea of doing that...I think there will be some interesting changes, so we're definitely not going to be as glued to the television and those sorts of things, not that I'm saying we watch a huge amount of television, but more than we will do in Italy, mainly because there's nothing else to do.*

Here Patrick focuses on a simpler, more natural life free of stressful, money-making materialism, he recognises the value of leading a healthier and more active lifestyle where he grows his own vegetables and if we return to his earlier anticipatory daydream, we remember that he is also looking forward to a more relaxed way of life where he has time to revive neglected hobbies such as playing instruments and listening to his vast music collection. On top of this, part of the Italian dream is to become as self-sufficient and have as few bills as possible and to this end they have installed solar panels on the house and have a well to supply water. Again there is a notable sense of being at the centre of the imagination. Considering consumer culture here, we can note that Patrick reflects on it, he makes it present by seemingly holding it to account for his current discontent with material reality. For him, escaping the alienating aspects of consumer culture, such as passive television viewing and eating pre-prepared meals, and embracing simple pleasures holds pleasure and a better quality of life. We might note a moral level to consumption here, certain forms of consumption are considered the 'right' kind and present us as moral or good individuals as we push against other forms.

The most significant simple pleasure that the participant's imagined and valued was centred on spending more time with and improving the quality of life of family and loved ones, as well as working on and progressing in their relationships, and this came across as central in the stories they told.

## **The primacy of relationships**

In the interviews personal issues were considered to be of greater importance than material possessions. Desires for strong and happy relationships, facing personal challenges and imagining achieving them were particularly prominent. To illustrate this theme I focus on Monica who gave heartfelt descriptions about moving in with her boyfriend, what living together means to her and her hopes for their life together.

Monica, who has now bought the flat with her boyfriend Owen and is near to completing the renovation, describes what she is most looking forward to about moving into the flat and living with her boyfriend for the first time:

*Do you know what? It's the simple things like planning our shopping meals, you know so you plan your meals and then you do your shopping around it, so this is what we're gonna have Monday night, Tuesday night, Wednesday night. Coming home to him every night, knowing, just knowing that he's going to be there at the end of every day, even when he's working away, knowing that at least I'm going home to our home and there's that security for us there, it's like it's our home, it's not anybody else's, we can do what we like in it.... Of course I'm gonna have to put up with his stinking socks and his farts and feet and you know our mood swings with each other and living in a one bed flat, initially I think it's going to feel palatial because we live in a bedroom in either house at the moment, but I know that soon, very soon that will feel small. But I know, I'm a realist I see him for what he is, you know, I smell his farts, I know that he can be messy or at other times he can be completely anal and want everything really clean so I'm under no illusions that it's going to be hard but at least, again, we'll be dealing with it together, so it will be hard together.*

Being together and starting their life as a couple is the most important thing to Monica and this attitude emerged as central every time that I saw her. Although consumption practices are mentioned here when she talks about planning their weekly meals they are involved as a part and parcel of everyday life. Their relationship, togetherness, is what is the focus, food shopping and cooking their meals is just one part of what they will do together now that they will be living as a couple and this ordinariness – the minutiae of daily life – is what she is excited about and means the most to her because it is part of a relationship and life stage milestone.

Monica also expresses her delight in having achieved so much during the renovation and focuses on what the things in the flat mean and the kinds of feelings they arouse;

*I'm so proud, I'm so proud. I can't believe it...we've done really well with the [kitchen] units ourselves, which ironically was one of the hardest jobs to do but one I most enjoyed...building it was just such a sense of achievement, I mean we built that, no-one came in and did it for us, we did that and that was brilliant, I love it, I absolutely love it...*

Again goods are important here but it is the feelings and memories that they arouse that form the focus of Monica's description and are important to her. This feeling wouldn't exist if it weren't for consumer goods, but nor would it exist if it wasn't for them doing their own DIY. Here it is as if goods and the consumer practice of DIY are a gateway to other, emotional, experiences; achievement, pride, and satisfaction that we can take pleasure from.

In instances where we might expect daydreams to consist of elaborate details of consumer goods, such as a wedding, significant relationships surfaced as an overriding concern. For example, when talking about the plans for her wedding day the first time I interviewed her, Sandra who has imagined and re-imagined her wedding from an early age, describes the importance of ensuring her fiancé is happy with all aspects of the day, and iterates the 'real' meaning of marriage as a commitment to each other, beyond the social competition of the ritual and associated objects:

*I don't really know if I want people going 'wow, look at that dress', I want people going 'doesn't she look happy? don't they look in-love?'... I would hate that Mark resented any part of our wedding, for anything, you know... I think a lot of weddings...especially this expensive wedding that I went to, it was so much about 'I've got to have this dress, got to have this and this food' and I just didn't want that. I just wanted a day that was about getting married and plus Mark's, Mark doesn't like being centre of attention at all, which is I think probably part of the reason why he didn't really want to get married at all when we first met... he's just quite happy to shy away in the corner, so I didn't want it to be this big flashy thing. I didn't want people to go away and go, 'God didn't they spend a lot of money on that wedding', do you know what I mean? I wanted people to go, 'oh wasn't that a nice wedding'.*

Here we may contrast the perceived materialism of a wedding Sandra attended – the paramount reality of weddings – with her own imaginings that are not preoccupied with, even resist, such a reality. She does not reject a material wedding altogether, indeed she experienced a great deal of joy organising the various elements of the wedding, but she seems to recognise that material aspects may detract from the true meaning of the day. Again, consumer culture is reflected on and made present but as a cause for concern, and as a way to present herself as a moral individual.

It was not just when talking about their own lives and anticipated futures that relationships and simple pleasures took precedence. Even when talking about lottery wins and ideal lives these themes and values dominated. For instance, Jim who you will remember is soon to turn 50 and wanted to celebrate by going on a family skiing holiday, explained that he would only want enough to know he and his family would be financially secure and has often thought about helping elderly people:

*I don't look at mega bucks. I don't aspire to be as rich as Richard Branson or anything like that. I want to be comfortable, so I don't have to worry about paying the bills, the mortgage, have nice holidays. But that's rich in itself isn't it? I think too much money is a burden. But how much is too much? If you've got*

*enough to keep yourself and your family going that's fine.... I always thought if I won the lottery I'd have a little coach company, go round old people's homes and take them out on daytrips. That came about from where we used to live, we drove past an old people's home on the estate and see them sat in there day after day thinking they're just waiting to die and it's so sad. Give them something to live for, just daytrips, something to look forward to....*

So the focus is on having financial and material security (mortgage payments covered) as well as the luxury of nice holidays, but the potential for consumer culture as something negative, a 'burden', is also acknowledged and 'doing good', caring for others, with one's wealth may be a way to negate this. Again we see the moralising potential of the imagination where consumption is concerned.

## **Consumer goods**

Consumer goods were also central to the imagination at times, though this was less common than the focus on traditional roles, simple pleasures and relationships. Desire for consumer goods came across as the focal point in both ideal and materially real imaginings.

A common object of desire that ran through the descriptions about ideal lives was for a home – either buying a new one or paying off the mortgage. The desire was not for a particularly extravagant home but somewhere that offered security and happiness. Holly described how she would spend a million pounds and here her fanciful imagined future is still grounded in her everyday aspirations for marriage and children:

*If I suddenly got a million pounds the first thing would be a house... a detached house with a big garden, not on a main road, in a nice area where there are nice schools, three bedrooms...nice interiors, you'd have to get a really nice posh interior decorator to do it really homely but quite modern but at the same time decorated nicely. I want my house, I always want people to come in and feel at home, be comfortable. I love entertaining, I have an ideal of being older and having friends over for dinner and having a nice big wooden table with candles in the middle, that and being able to cook a really lovely roast or something*

*[laughs] all these people in my grand house [laughs] no it doesn't need to be grand, just comfy and homely...I love cooking. I really want, I want to be able to cook a lot of staple nice dishes so I have a repertoire...quite often I'll be on the BBC food website looking up recipes, at the moment the only thing I'm really proud of is my Spaghetti Bolognese... I want to be a mum that bakes, so when kids come home there's fairy cakes, I'm going to have really fat children aren't I [laughs] but cookies and brownies and things...*

Note here, that although the first thing Holly would do is buy a house and have it decorated nicely, she doesn't go into detail about colour schemes or styles beyond it being 'homely' and 'comfortable', she is more entertained by the idea of hosting dinner parties for friends and this leads onto her dream of having children and her image of the kind of mother she'd like to be. Much like the dominant conceptualisation of consumption daydreams (e.g. Campbell, 1987, McCracken 1988), in which goods are all important, we see a notable focus on their symbolic meanings and the experiences to which they lend themselves. The house is important for what it enables and provides – it is a place where friends can be entertained, children can be raised, the role of housewife and talented cook can be fulfilled.

In another story, this time one that is materially real, Holly highlights that at the heart of her consumption dream for a new dress is a desire to impress her boyfriend's friends. She has been invited to a wedding as his guest and he has said he will take her out to buy a dress. Since he offered to do this Holly told me she has spent her lunch hours looking online at various clothing websites trying to find a dress she likes:

*It's Steve's friend's wedding and I've never met them, I'm going as his guest but...I really want to have a gorgeous dress for his friends to go like 'my god Steve, your girlfriend's amazing!' and to really make an impact and for them to go 'your girlfriend's really pretty, doesn't she dress well?' so there's always, you want to make a statement at a wedding and look your best, especially with your partner you'll get drunk and at some point go 'oh I love you, this is so romantic' at some point in the day you go 'oh isn't this lovely?', so I want to look really nice for Steve, the only other wedding [we have both been to] was my cousin's and the [bridesmaid's] dresses were not what I'd have chosen so it'll be really nice to get something that's really me and look like myself, if I think I*

*look nice I'm always in a better mood and feel more confident than if I know I'm looking scruffy, I know I'll be chirpy and Steve's cool girlfriend that looks lovely [laughs]..I'm very much looking forward to going dress shopping. I don't want to look young cos I'm four years younger than Steve, I'm quite conscious of being the young one... I've lost a bit of weight... first impressions always count, you always make an opinion...*

Although choosing the right dress so that she feels good is important to Holly, she describes that she most wants to impress her boyfriend's friends and make a good impression, so while the dress is central and the 'object' of her desire, the underlying theme here is the social dimension. This also brings to attention the inseparability of goods and meaning, she knows what the right dress will do for her and without it she feels she will not be able to make the impression she wants.

Jayne offers another account where consumer desire for a particular object, in this case a pair of shoes, is central. Jayne is 49, she is married and has a teenage son. They own a large house in a desirable area of Dorset, though she grew up in the North of England and is from a working class family where money was scarce. She moved to the South for a job in her early twenties and met her husband several years later. In the following story she told me about her desire for a pair of shoes that occupies her imagination at the moment. She told me how she regrets not buying them when she saw them on holiday;

*I don't really buy lots of stuff, I'm not really a mad shopping girl so I when I see something I really like I think 'why didn't I buy that?' because I could have it. I really know that I want something if I dream about it a lot afterwards. I regret, I regret not purchasing. Sometimes I do that, I think 'I really should have bought that'...I'm dreaming about a pair of shoes at the moment. We were on holiday at half term in Majorca... I saw the most amazing pair of shoes and I've been dreaming about them ever since... I see them as they were in the shop, I see them on me, I think next Wednesday it's my birthday and I'm going to Ascot and I think if I'd bought those shoes I'd have worn them and bought a plain black dress to go with them because the shoes would have been the focus... isn't it weird how you feel about something like that?...*

This description clearly shows how the shoes occupy her imagination and it seems that Jayne's desire is made stronger by the fact that she missed her opportunity to purchase the shoes coupled with a specific event, where fashion is considered important, that she would have worn them for. What may be noteworthy here is that Jayne was one of the interviewees who did not have a figural life event to discuss. During our conversation she talked about her family, her home, her job and the fact that she feels very contented and happy with 'her lot', how she wouldn't want for anything. Consumption came up as a topic initially when talking about her home, what they had done to it since moving in several years ago and what they still had to do and a number of desires and imaginings where consumption was central emerged, including a desire for a freestanding bath and this one about the shoes. With this in mind, it suggests that there may be particular circumstances when consumption becomes central in material reality and consequently in the imagination.

We might also consider here that the two previous stories are not necessarily on a par with idealised consumption dreams built around longed for objects of desire, but are much more ordinary – if we are going to a wedding or special event it is a good excuse to buy a new suit or dress or accessories and this becomes a focus of our thoughts and imagination for a time because it is prominent in our material reality. Holly's ideal house example is more typical, where the house is seen as the 'bridge' to a desired lifestyle.

## **Consumer culture**

It is not only consumer goods specifically that may be central in the imagination. We have also seen throughout the stories presented that the broader consumer culture is also made present when these individuals reflect on – usually negative – aspects of a consumer lifestyle. For instance, in Patrick's earlier description, about the lifestyle change that he desires and imagines experiencing in Italy, we saw that he regards certain aspects of consumption as responsible for his current dissatisfaction with material reality. He imagines a more pleasurable simple life in Italy where they will be self sufficient, more active and more relaxed and acknowledges that consumer culture cannot provide what he considers to be the 'good life'. We also saw that Sandra



described her caution when it came to the material aspects of her wedding. While she did not reject the material aspects of a wedding she was careful not to let these dominate and detract from the meaning of the day and commented that she didn't want it to be about 'things'. In another story Sheila explained how the consumption based (house, pool) aspects of moving to Australia were 'superficial' and although they offered her pleasure initially when imagining life over there, she then thought more seriously about the lifestyle and benefits for her family.

Such acknowledgements of consumer culture as dissatisfactory or negative demonstrate that consumption may be focal in the imagination in different ways – not only in terms of consumer desire for particular commodities, but more broadly, in a reflective manner and in a negative light when moral positions appear to be taken in the imagination.

So consumer goods can be the focus of the imagination in experiences akin to consumption daydreams, in addition the broader consumer culture may also be made present in the imagination, often in a negative, reflective manner, and so we begin to see that the consumer imagination is not only about pleasurable daydreams centred on *objects* of desire. Moreover, other things – relationships, simple pleasures and lifestyle scripts – also assume the focal point of the everyday imagination and when this is the case, we see that consumption, commodities and consumer culture feature in ways other than being central. It is to these other roles that I now turn to more fully account for the different roles of consumption in the imagination.

### **Non-central roles for consumption**

When consumer goods are not the focus of imagining other things are central, yet rather than focus only on what is central, it is also important to acknowledge and explore the things that may be peripheral, 'hidden' or absent so as to develop a fuller picture (see for example Illouz 1997, Miller 2010, Law 2004). Indeed, we might see how the symbolic meaning of goods and the social nature of consumer desire comes to be understood in this way (e.g. Campbell 1987, McCracken 1989, Belk et al 2003).

Some of the stories so far have illustrated the non-central roles of consumption and consumer goods; specifically how they may be an habitual aspect of imagined everyday life and living (such as meal planning, food shopping). In such instances they form the context and setting for imagined scenarios and this enables other values and experiences to be imagined and understood (e.g. family life, homeliness). It is also the case that aspects of consumer culture may be a 'hidden', unnoticed or entirely absent aspect of imagining, and in addressing this last theme it is useful to contrast imagined events with material reality.

In the majority of descriptions that people gave, consumer goods often tended to recede into the background while other, more personal matters, came to the fore. In such circumstances, we see consumer culture as the context within which we imagine, consumer goods become 'props', sometimes quite peripheral, where they form part of the setting for the 'action' or focus and the details of consumption are manifest absent (largely unacknowledged or ignored).

Returning to Monica's story we can see that she imagines a certain way of being, when she and Owen are living in their new flat that they have nearly finished renovating;

*Home is the way I think about it, I feel home because I can see myself walking through the front door, chucking my keys down on our front door dresser that's going to be by the front door and walking in, probably with food bags and you know sorting out the kitchen and stuff like that, just normal and homely...*

Here the goods that she mentions; a dresser, groceries and kitchen, which she and her partner have just had fitted, form part of the setting and her expectations for daily life in their home, they are present because she acknowledges them, but desiring them and what they represent is not the focal point of the imagined scenario, which instead centres on the notion of 'home'. These goods help her to envisage 'home' and are an assumed part of the setting, they are just one part of her imagined everyday life in the flat. Likewise, doing food shopping is not elaborated, but 'bringing food home' is part of how she imagines life and homeliness in the flat. The details of consumption that are required for this scene to take place are largely ignored, such as the stress of

supermarket shopping on the way home from work and the need and use of the car – the aspects of daily life that are prominent in material reality are not so in the imagination. Like props in a film or on stage goods form part of the background for the action, they provide the context in which she imagines – as if home wouldn't be home without certain consumer goods filling it or certain consumption practices part of it. This is further illustrated in her description of imagining their ideal family future:

*I think that's one of the images and kind of a memory and a future that Owen and I both had is when we've been lying on a bed, in my room and the sun's coming through the window and we've just been lying on top of the duvet, reading a paper or just chatting and the sun's come through and, this has happened, and Owen has turned to me and said 'I want this, I want us to be lying on a bed with a white duvet, and I want the sun coming in and I want to be able to hear our kids and our dogs playing in the back garden' and to me, that's what home is. It's like us being comfortable, knowing that we're all safe, it's a cosy place, and we've just built on that every time you know, we both love the outdoors we are getting more outdoorsy but we do like to walk and we like camping and you know we're getting into our gardening and we're very, we've always cooked together, so cooking and doing all of those kinds of things together is what we love to do so I think that's kind of, we've thought why can't we always do that?... I personally don't visualise anything more other than a nice big farmhouse type exterior but always a big kitchen with a great big oak table and a pot of food, like chilli or soup, always cooking so whenever anyone knocks on the door there's always food to give them and a table to welcome them at and they can just walk through the back door and go 'Alright [Monica], alright [Owen], how are you? Bob here' or you know 'just coming in to say hi' and make them a brew and they sit down and there's kids playing out in the garden with the animals and the dog's barking and running around and we just make our lives by being in the country you know by selling veggies or having our campsite.*

Again, we can note that Monica does not desire the white duvet or oak table but they are part of how she symbolises a happy home, yet the home is in the background rather than as the focal point of this aspirational daydream. At the fore is a broad set of emotions; the anticipated pleasure of loving and being loved, of comfort, relaxation, harmony, the

cosiness and security of family. Clearly consumption is included here, goods are part of the description she provides and form part of her imagined future, but these are not laboured, what is laboured is the activity that goes on within the home – friends calling in, food being enjoyed, children and pets playing, the togetherness of her and her partner. She doesn't dream of *the* house, she dreams of family life, happiness and security. Goods are necessarily 'there' but in their role of providing the context within which we imagine, they are the setting for imagined events and scenarios. We could argue that the house is a 'bridge' to the way of life she desires, but in our conversation it was not as though the object (the house) was the gateway to imagining this way of life, it was simply part of an imagined family life.

The fact that relationships and emotional experiences are acknowledged as a priority and form the focal point of many imagined scenarios supports the notion that individuals desire, imagine and prioritise the things that goods may help to symbolise over and above their possession. These experiences and meanings were what the participant's talked about most when discussing their imaginings for the future. For instance, they quite happily talked about the fact that they wanted to settle down and have a family, that they were looking forward to being a Mother, or embarking on life as a couple 'warts and all', or escaping the rat race to enjoy a quieter life – even the younger men who fancifully imagined being a racing driver and a musician held more realistic aspirations about mainstream careers and family life – and we can note that there is a significant focus on a desired state of being within these positive imagined futures. These topics were not discussed as a result of asking about consumption dreams, but asking about imagined futures. Where there is a focus on such a state of being it is noticeable that consumer culture may not necessarily be recognised by individuals and the details of consumption are not present in the way that it is or would be in material reality if and when a given scenario transpires. At the same time as consumption may disappear from imagined scenarios, so too do other routine details of material reality, yet consumer culture still remains as the context within which we imagine.

If we refer back to Holly's earlier description of her aspirational family life we recall that she talked about wanting her children to do activities that they will get something

from rather than buy them meaningless things. In this story she rejects some aspects of consumer culture – buying meaningless objects for her children – but simultaneously, she embraces others – hobbies, activities and classes for her children to attend. Such activities are not seen by her as consumption but part of being a good parent, yet they are very apparent consumer scripts. What we also see here is her moralising over ideal forms of consumption; meaningless goods are seen as negative and rejected while consumer based activities that provide opportunities to learn are seen as positive.

In another example, this time anticipatory imagining (the most ideal form of materially real imagining), Samantha illustrates how in the imagination consumer practices may disappear along with the mundane or less desirable aspects of the material reality of being a new mum, and we see how this differs from her current everyday life.

At the time of the first interview, Samantha and her husband were expecting their first child. Since being pregnant she explained how they had been ‘galvanised’ into action to renovate the flat for the baby’s arrival. Consumption has been a figural aspect in terms of preparing for the baby. They have redecorated throughout their two-bedroom flat, had new flooring laid and installed a new bathroom suite. Consumption is very much present in everyday life. However, Samantha explained that it was so they didn’t have to worry about doing anything other than parenting once the baby arrived and this enabled her to imagine a pleasurable life as a sociable mother:

*I’m quite excited because my parents both retire [soon],...we’re all off and if we want to see each other then we can whenever, it’ll be really nice I think...they’ll be down here a lot and I’ll be able to go down there in the week if I want and stay with them a couple of nights, or meet them somewhere for a day, as I say my cousin’s wife who’s had her baby this last weekend they live not far from Guildford so we’ll be able to meet up once in a while. So that’s all I’ve thought about really, I picture this very easy lifestyle where I have this baby and I just meet up with people and socialise and do lunch [laughing].*

Samantha talked about enjoying time with the baby and her family; desire for goods or other consumer activity is almost entirely absent in her imagination in favour of socialising as a new mum. However, when I spoke to her again once the baby was born,

she admitted how the challenging aspects of motherhood alongside the difficulties of preparing for Christmas had been absent in her prior imaginings:

*I'm not doing as much as I thought I would because, I think I thought that when I stopped [work] I would be a housewife but actually you're a mum first and a housewife second and actually being a mum first doesn't leave a lot of time for being a housewife, so the number of nights that John comes in and cooks dinner is probably the majority of evenings in the week...*

Earlier in the interview, at a point before recording started, she explained that she felt like she had effectively been pregnant for 12 months because a small baby is so dependent and she couldn't envisage finding the time to prepare for Christmas. Just getting the tree into the car with a baby in-tow seemed difficult. What is significant here is that both before and after her daydream about ideal motherhood routine aspects of life, including mundane aspects of consumption, force their presence on her and so in material reality there are times that require consumption. Only in her imagination is she able to avoid this.

## **Summary and emerging areas of discussion**

The context of the everyday offers greater insight with regard to the things that occupy the imagination and the various roles that consumption takes within it. We see that consumer desires are not always central to imaginative experiences as the majority of existing consumer behaviour theory and research suggests. Sometimes it is central, but more often it is apparent that consumer goods form part of the setting and context for imagined events, as an assumed part of everyday life where other, more emotional experiences are the focal point. At other times consumption seems to 'disappear' almost altogether and we also see stories where consumer culture is reflected upon as unsatisfactory and responsible for discontent. For the most part the participant's stories centre on desires for traditional scripts, roles and aspirations such as loving, successful relationships and a happy family life, which raises the profile of the social behind the personal and private realm of imagination, in a similar way that Belk et al (2003) consider a desire for sociality always underlies consumer desire. We also see the beginnings of a tension between the role of consumption in the imagination – where it is often secondary to other experiences – and material reality – where its presence is more

pressing. I develop this theme in the fourth chapter of findings where I consider consumption as a common outcome of imagining.

## **Chapter Six: Findings III**

### **The back-story to everyday imagining – antecedents and prompts**

Having established the kinds of scripts that occupy the everyday imagination and the various imaginative practices that individuals engage in, I now want to look at the back-story to the participant's imaginative experiences in order to develop a better appreciation and understanding of imaginative activity and its relationship to everyday life. The focus of this chapter is on the personal and social antecedents to imagining in terms of things that feed into, guide and stimulate the imagination.

We have already seen that material reality can be the basis for imagining, whether it is current concerns that form the focus of imagining, the various circumstances and constraints of material reality setting parameters for and guiding the imagination helping us prepare and plan, or such conditions being too restrictive and prompting us to turn to the imagination to escape and indulge in ideals. Now I want to consider the personal lifeworld more broadly in terms of past experiences and future life plans and how these come to bear on the imagination. In particular I consider how memories from childhood may form the basis of our hopes for life, as something we want to recreate or make-good. There are also specific experiences that individuals recalled and used as reference points to provide inspiration for the things they imagine. I then consider the wider environment in terms of the media and the marketplace as imaginative resources that seem to be well embedded in our daily lives and our understanding of the world, before moving on to consider the roles of other people as sources of inspiration for the imagination, but also as an integral part of what we imagine. On a more immediate level I turn to the moment of imagining and consider various cues, prompts and situations that may trigger imaginative activity. We come to see that far from the private and personal domain that it is, the imagination is highly social, the role of other people is particularly pertinent both in and on the imagination.



## **Personal experiences informing ideals**

In relation to personal experiences I address two areas; memories and experiences from the past, often related to childhood, and specific experiences more frequently from adulthood. Reflections on childhood, usually related to family life, were common in the stories that people told me and it became clear that there are often significant aspects related to one's upbringing that become a source that guides an individual's life-plan and what they want and imagine for their future. References to specific experiences on the other hand act as sources of information and learning tools, they are the kinds of moments when we make a 'mental note' to remember for the future, from the stories I collected these experiences often relate to specific events such as weddings.

### ***Re-creating and making good the past***

Personal experiences from childhood played a part in forming hopes and plans for the future in two key ways, one of recreation and one of avoidance. In wanting to recreate her own childhood and family life Catherine, who is married to Michael and four months pregnant with her first child, offers a strong account regarding how her own childhood established her aspirations to have a family of her own.

*Well my life plan was always...from when I was about 14, I was going to get married at 24, have my first baby at 26 and my second one at 28. That was always what I wanted...I think I've had such a nice home life, home and family life, my parents spend all their time at home, they don't go out much they like being at home which is obviously where I get it from, I just want exactly the same thing and Michael has a lovely home life, a lovely family, we're both just really lucky. I suppose because we're both like that we've ended up both wanting the same.*

On a slightly more specific level, Samantha's memories of family and social events through the local Church she grew up with have influenced her aspirations and decisions for her own family. Although as an adult she has not attended church on a regular basis, she recognises the important part it played in her upbringing and wants to

recreate the same kind of foundation for her own children that she had while growing up:

*I've been meaning to go up [to church] before the baby's born...I remember when we were younger some of the things we used to do three or four times a year, like Harvest Festival, Christmas Bazaar were all done through the church and that was quite a lot of the social life that we had as kids at the weekend, even things like Guy Fawkes night it would be that group of people that would get together and if you had a church network and a nursery network you could make quite strong links... we've been here five years now but I've not really felt the impetus to go and do anything...*

When I visited Samantha after the baby had been born she told me about the plans for his Christening, which was to be held at their local church rather than at the church that Samantha grew up attending and where they got married. Samantha's decision to christen the baby at their local church, which she intends to attend is prompted by her positive reflection on her own childhood and suggests how important this re-creation is, not just in her imagination where she remembers fondly the church-related aspects of her childhood and envisages her ideal future, but by christening the baby at their local church she is starting to make her hopes and plans part of her material reality, we can see that certain behaviours may be engaged in as a way to actualise larger ideals.

Naturally, when expecting a child of your own (as both Catherine and Samantha were) you are likely to reflect on your own family life and childhood and it is inevitable that your own experience informs your understanding. It could be said that what Catherine and Samantha actually desire is a return to their own childhood, after all, they both reflect on family life in a positive manner and essentially want to replicate it. However, they do not reflect in a manner that demonstrates a longing to rekindle their past, to be children again; Samantha does not recall a particular Guy Fawkes night, Harvest Festival or Christmas Bazaar when something significant occurred that she wants to re-experience, Catherine does not wish to be a child again at home with her parents, but rather in circumstances like this when we are embarking on a new script, perhaps we look to our past for guidance. It's not about *re-creating* or *re-living* a particular moment or period, but creating something (similar) of your own based on your own experiences.

Of course this is not always the case and a number of people I talked to told me how they want to avoid aspects of their own family life and upbringing. Some individuals expressed that they wanted to avoid some aspects of their own childhood and create something for themselves and their future family that they did not experience whilst growing up. In this sense they want to 'make good' their own experiences. When discussing how she envisages her future home and lifestyle, Monica talks about creating a welcoming home where people can always come, she imagines this as a place where there is always a pot of food cooking and a cup of tea awaiting any visitors and she contrasts this with her and her boyfriend's own lives, both now and when they were growing up;

*Both of our parents are quite, you have to arrange to see them. His mum and his step-dad are less like that, we tend to phone as we're on our way to them so we arrange it a lot less but with my parents, if family or friends knocked on the door sometimes they would say 'shut up kids, pretend we're not in' [laughs] and I always thought that was more rude than you know, not, and it's just like, god it's five minutes out of your day you can say 'come in for a quick cuppa but I've got plans', or 'I need to do this' and you can just tell them that, I just thought you know you, it's only going to be the people that you generally want to see that would pop round to your house anyway, so just welcome them in....*

Even though they did not experience the childhood and family life or environment they want to create in the future, both Monica and Owen witnessed the kind of life they envisage through friends – a kind of family script that they were exposed to but did not experience firsthand;

*...he's seen it a lot more with his friends because he's got a very close friend that, basically that's his parents life other than, minus the campsite but they have their farm up on a hill, they have people popping by and you know Owen grew up with that and where he didn't have anything like that in his, effectively a single parent, part of a single parent family, you know his life was not leading him that way at all and I think he's just realised when we've been together that's more and more what we want, we want to create a family unit, we want to create a welcoming home for people to come to if they don't have a home to go to, like he didn't really and I think I probably get that from one of my oldest friend's*

*Sarah and her home, it was like I could, I've always felt like I can always go there even if she wasn't there I can just knock on the door and her mum will always put the kettle on and make me a sandwich if I wanted it... so I think we've both seen lives that we both thought 'that's nice, wouldn't that be a nice foundation for our home and our family'...*

In this case, Monica wants to avoid her own experience and pursue something she experienced from a distance. Monica's image of the future is highly structured by something 'other' than what she had as a child and although she cannot change her own childhood experience, she can create for her own family the life she desires. A temporal issue arises here, our desires are not necessarily centred on the here and now – a transformation from who I am and where I am now – but may be further in the future (and indeed based on the past – what I wish I had had). Clearly Monica's ideal is vastly different from her current material reality (at the time she was essentially a single woman living with her parents), but she does not desire this *now*, it is part of what she imagines and hopes for in the more distant future – part of her long-term life-plan.

### ***Specific past experiences informing ideals***

There were also occasions when participants told me about specific events that were used as a resource for informing their hopes and decisions – informing imaginative activity. This is especially noticeable in relation to significant events, often where there is a strong emotional element involved. For example, Sandra, who you will remember has moved back to her parental home in East Anglia and is planning her wedding, reflects on previous weddings she has attended and how her experience of those has impacted what she wants for her own wedding;

*I haven't been to hundreds of weddings, I've been to a few but because I used to work in weddings I saw so many different versions of wedding, and you see it from a different side, cos you don't, as the bride and groom I think, everybody says they're having a lovely time whatever and everybody, but as like staff you can see when people are really pissed off and when they're like 'I'm bored' or when it's just a hassle and stuff and I just think, I just wanted a day that everybody looked back and thought 'oh wasn't that a lovely day' and I just think, often, like I went to this beautiful wedding and it had an absolute fortune*

*spent on it. It was a Hindu wedding and an English ceremony as well all in the same day and it was in this beautiful place in the middle of nowhere in October...and I remember that we had like the Hindu ceremony and that was fine and then we had something to eat and then we had the English ceremony and then there was this time when they had photos, but it was literally an hour for photos and there wasn't anywhere inside that we could go, there was no inside space cos it was all being used for something either being changed into something else or whatever, so we had to stand outside for an hour having coffee, and it was freezing. And that's all I remember about that day. I remember she spent loads of money and she had this really weird dress [laughs] that I didn't really like and it was freezing cold [laughs] and I don't want people to remember my wedding for it being cold or uncomfortable or whatever. I went to a wedding at the end of October maybe about a year ago, yeah a year ago and it was really lovely, it was in a hotel and we only had to go outside for our photo and then we were inside, and everything was in the same place, you didn't have to worry about getting from the church to the venue or anything like that, and there were loads of chairs everywhere and you could sit and have a drink with people, it was just really nice and there was nothing that I was like 'Oh I wouldn't do that if it was my wedding'. I've kind of modelled it a little bit on that one I suppose.*

So Sandra is keen not to create an experience for her guests like the negative ones she has had in the past and has modelled her day on a wedding she remembers as enjoyable. It is as if in planning her own wedding she has trawled her memories and experiences of weddings, comparing good and bad elements using them as reference points for her own wedding, as later she tells me; *'I was like 'right I want the shortest possible time between getting married and eating' because I really hate it, sitting at weddings, while they're off having their photos, bored and usually there's nowhere to sit and you've got high heels on [laughs] and you're standing there like 'oh I just wanna sit down!'*. In another story, Jayne told me how her own positive experience in the past has motivated her to pursue more goals and things she has only ever imagined. Now 49, as a child she would spend Saturday afternoon's at her Grandmother's flat which was close to Leeds Football Ground. She always thought it looked exciting and wanted to attend a match and finally did it a few years ago. She told me that it was so exciting to be there that she

is motivated to experience other things that she has wanted to do, especially going to Wimbledon and the Royal Opera House.

So general experiences from childhood and more specific experiences from adulthood help to structure what we imagine for the future, whether these inform our general life plans and scripts or particular events that may be part of those scripts. Our past, our own experiences, play a role in the type of things we imagine and want or do not want for the future. I now want to move on to consider broader influences on the imagination, specifically the media and the marketplace as imaginative resources.

### **The media as an imaginative resource**

As a source of information and indeed imaginative inspiration the media was often referred to as responsible for ideas and images that individuals had. This was particularly the case when the participants talked about things they had no direct experience of, such as Holly's fanciful daydream about New York that was highly inspired and structured by film and television portrayals and Sheila's visions of life in Australia, which she has based exclusively on television; *'all I can tell you is what I've seen on the TV'*. Beyond offering idealised images that arouse the imagination, media sources also make dreams seem achievable thereby providing hope and at times even motivation to pursue them; television programmes were commonly referred to in this context. The majority of these were lifestyle based programmes following 'real' people, such as *Grand Designs* (a programme that follows the trials and tribulations of people who design and build their own architectural masterpieces) and *Wanted Down Under* (a programme that sends families to Australia and New Zealand for a week to experience life there in a bid to help them decide whether or not to emigrate). These kinds of programmes were discussed in the context of particular dreams, some that were in the process of being pursued. For instance, Patrick's story offers a good account of the way that the media, in his case a number of television programmes, can fuel a dream and make it seem possible and achievable.

Patrick and his partner had wanted to live somewhere else for a number of years, it was the influence of television programming that mirrored a growing trend in society that really spurred them on to think it could become a reality for them. So their dissatisfaction with England and English society (much of which is arguably projected by the media) was at the heart of the dream and impending decision but the media was key in confirming that it could be done and consequently motivating them:

*You kind of see the programmes of people kind of dreaming of living abroad and you think 'if they can do it, we can', we haven't got any family ties really from our point of view, we've comparatively good disposable income, we're not in a bad place financially either, you know if anyone can, we can and the big thing is just taking that first step of doing it, and I tell you it was scary...*

Here seeing other people take the plunge encouraged Patrick and made them realise they were in a good position to embark on their dream.

What may be significant with these kinds of programmes in particular is that they feature people actualising their dreams. For the individuals watching them, seeing their (similar) dream being pursued by other people on TV not only makes it a 'norm' or socially acceptable but also makes it more achievable, providing a sense of hope that it can be done. While on the subject of specific programmes related to specific dreams it should also be noted that these are often sought out because they are relevant to an individual's material reality or dream. These are not 'random' influences but intentionally chosen and indulged in to nourish dreams. For instance, Sandra told me how she read a lot of magazines and watched TV shows on homes and interiors whilst waiting for their house sale to go through, and Simone automatically turns on the wedding channel every day when she gets home from work. This notion is what Belk et al (2003) refer to as 'self-seduction', which considers that consumers actively fuel their own dreams and desires rather than being at the whim of media and market-based seducers. Self-seductive activities will be considered in the next chapter in relation to the consequences of imagining on behaviour.

It is not just about providing inspiration for the imagination, it also came to attention that the media can mar the imagination. Barbara explained this notion when talking

about a previous holiday to Barbados, a place that really surprised her in terms of beauty and affordability compared to the image she had conjured from media representations filled with rich celebrities showing off and little else:

*You see Cilla Black and Dale Winton and all those, Simon Cowell, with their boats and houses there and I suppose that builds up this image of that's what the whole island's like. That section is quite small compared with the rest of the island and that's where the media mars your view on things, or takes away your imagination because they give you theirs, and that's why it's good to travel, see for yourself, make up your own opinions*

So the media informs our general understanding and perceptions of things, it creates and sustains desires and provides hope, showing us that our dreams are achievable in material reality because it shows similar people actualising their dreams. It can also be too prescriptive however and may mar the imagination, perhaps preventing us from wanting to experience certain things as a consequence. Sometimes its presence is obvious and referred to as such, at other times its presence and influence is more implicit in the phrases people use. There are of course other influences at work that inform our understanding and provide inspiration for our hopes, desires, fears and worries that I now consider.

## **The marketplace as an imaginative resource**

There were also stories about particular aspects of the marketplace as a purveyor of desires informing peoples' ideas and consumption practices. For example, when talking about her current home, Jayne told me about her bedroom in her first that was based exactly on the pictures and products featured in the Laura Ashley (a home furnishing store) catalogue:

*The other thing I really like, and I know at my other house, if I see a picture of something, so my bedroom at my previous house was identical to a picture I had seen in the Laura Ashley brochure. That season I got their brochure and I just, it was beautiful and it's really weird because I love sweet peas, and sweet peas were in a vase, casually in a vase in the brochure in blue and pink, lovely really kind of girly summery colours and then the room was themed around those, all*



*incorporated in it, and I decorated my room exactly like that, I had to have a bowl of sweet peas too....I'm not very good at visualising things, I like to see something together and then do it myself.*

Here being able to see a themed room not only spoke to Jayne's taste but helped her create something she knows she would not be able to do without such inspiration. In the interview she also talked about seeing displays and ideas in stores such as Habitat and then trying to recreate the same theme on a lower budget.

There were other similar stories regarding store displays, especially DIY stores that set up desirable showrooms, which informed ideas and created excitement about the possibilities on offer that had not been thought about independently and Simone explained how attending a wedding exhibition prompted her to book and purchase services she had not previously considered simply because they were 'there'.

So the marketplace offers ideas that we may recreate or alter to our own taste and budget, but may also cause us to choose things we hadn't intended. These stories all illustrate how individuals look to the market for inspiration and guidance, seeing these things influenced their image of their home or wedding. The market therefore seems to 'invade' dreams and add practical detail to them. But also suggests there are certain times when we are susceptible to and invite such invasions, which the market is well placed to accommodate.

### **Wider environmental resources stimulating the imagination**

In the previous chapter, in relation to controlling the imagination, I considered circumstances under which individuals may be imaginatively 'open'. In such circumstances virtually anything can become a resource or stimulant for the imagination. For some of the people I talked to, especially those with a significant life event or experience that dominated their material reality and indeed their imagination, we see how all sorts of environmental stimuli may prompt us to imagine. It may also be the case that we look for such stimuli intentionally.

Simone, who is currently planning her wedding explained how the wedding has become the *'be all and end all'* and is so much a part of her daily life that she automatically watches the Wedding Channel whenever she switches the television on so as to surround herself with fodder for the imagination. She goes on to say how all sorts of things that she comes across cause her to think about the wedding:

*Colours do, certainly if I'm looking in magazines I'll look at what people are wearing and pick out ideas, there's lots of things. Nice car drives past I think 'that's a nice wedding car' you just get in this wedding bubble... The Wedding Channel certainly has given me ideas...*

The 'wedding bubble' she finds herself in highlights that all sorts of things in the environment can spontaneously trigger her thoughts about the wedding, and all sorts of things that she sees are seen through the lens of her imagination – her imaginings about the wedding. This is likely to ring bells with most people, that familiar syndrome when you buy a new car and suddenly see the same model everywhere – your attention to it (whether it's a car, a wedding, pregnancy or something else) is heightened and everything and anything can trigger a link to a 'current concern' (Klinger 1990). It is also easy to see that if one's current concern is a significant event or experience then your preoccupation with it and the importance it holds means you are even more likely to take notice of anything even remotely associated with it.

In another story Sandra told me about an occasion when she was driving from her home back to her parents and on the journey a song prompted her to enter into a pleasurable daydream about her wedding:

*I remember a couple of times, it always seemed to be when I was driving, I suppose because I was on my own, and it'd either be on my way home from work or a couple of times when I drove up to Ipswich... I would sort of, I don't know like a song would come on the radio and I'd think 'that'd be a really good first dance' and then that would spur me on and I'd think 'oh I wonder what sort of dress I'd have' and I'd imagine the dress and I'd imagine all the people that I love there and what we'd eat and how, as in would it be outside? would it be abroad? would it be here? it was probably different every time and I remember*

*like one time, I don't know why I remember that time, I was coming here and I suppose it was because I always imagined I'd want to get married up here when I wasn't living in my home town, so I always, when I used to come back, I, it always brings back memories of like tradition and family and things like that and so I thought 'oh imagine if I was driving up for my wedding day' and I came in and it was like I had planned my wedding in my head and I was all excited [laughing]...*

This example shows how Sandra connected with and elaborated an environmental stimulus, in this instance a song that was associated with her desire to get married. Even though Sandra was not in the process of planning her actual wedding – this daydream took place before she was engaged – it was something that occupied her mind a lot. Marriage used to be an ‘issue’ in her relationship because her boyfriend and she had different feelings about marriage, for him it was not important or something he particularly wanted to do, but for Sandra it was important. In this we might see that not being able to have what you want makes desire stronger – wanting what you can't have is a familiar feeling for most of us, and when we can't have or do something we'd like we may feel more strongly about it as a consequence. As with Simone's situation, Sandra's story shows how we can turn anything into a resource to support our imagination. We may even come to make sense of the world through the thing we desire so that everything we encounter is compared to our ideals.

### **Significant others as imaginative resources**

The influence of other people, within one's social network, is a noticeably strong resource for the imagination. Consumer research often focuses on observation of others consumption as a source of desire and competition (e.g Veblen 1899 [1994], Simmel 1950, Girard 1977), yet the stories I heard illustrated that other people inform our imagination in more ways than this, as sources of inspiration and ideas rather than conspicuous consumption.

Other people's life-plans, experiences, hopes, goals and worries expose us to and familiarise us with things that we might not otherwise consider. Other people become a bank of information and a source that helps to shape our own dreams, base our ideas on and influence our expectations and attitudes towards things, in both a positive and negative manner. In a positive manner, experiences of or influences from other people might provide hope and demonstrate that something is indeed possible. While negative experiences and influences of others may be a source of concern and worry about our own hopes and goals, especially those that we are in the process of embarking on. Think about the things you have learnt, bought, done or might be hoping or planning to do, or have decided to avoid doing, as a result of the influence of other people. Perhaps you've picked a particular holiday destination based on someone's stories about their experience, or chosen to avoid a particular manufacturer or retailer based on a friend's previous bad experience dealing with them. Other peoples' stories form a significant part of our understanding and this in turn influences the kinds of things we may imagine, whether positive or negative.

Jayne provides a good story that demonstrates the way that other people's consumption can inspire our own:

*It's really important to me to have a nice bath. I would like a really traditional free standing bath that I could lay in for hours and hours and hours...I've always liked the look of them. Have you ever been in someone's house and thought 'ooh I want that' and even ten years down the line you still dream that you'd like that? My neighbour has one of those baths, a reclaimed one, she's painted the outside of it beautifully and I always wanted to go in her house and have a bath...I used to feed her cat when she was on holiday and I always used to go upstairs and dream about this bath...*

Jayne still longs for a bathroom like her neighbour's, she wants to create for herself the bathroom she has always wanted and admired. Whilst this indicates that she wants to emulate her neighbour, Jayne's expression and description came across as admiration for her neighbour's style and taste, as well as wanting pleasure from her future bathroom – something quite different from the dated, avocado green suite she currently has and doesn't even clean very often because she detests it so much. There is no sense of envy here but pleasure and inspiration provided by another person's consumption.

Beyond mimesis, which is used here to mean imitation, there are other ways that other people inform the imagination. Sheila, who is hoping to emigrate from the UK to Australia with her husband, two children and her sister's family, gives a good account of how someone else's influence – her sister – gave her the impetus to consider emigrating. Living abroad had been something Sheila and her husband had dreamt about in the past, but it was her sister, more precisely the thought of leaving her sister, that prevented them from taking the dream further:

*Although I don't know whether I would actually have ever done anything about it, me and my husband have always been a little bit 'wouldn't it be great to', 'could you see us living here' when we go to Spain or anywhere...but I didn't want to think about leaving my sister particularly and she's got two young children, we spend a lot of time together...one day we were at my cousin's house in London and my sister just sat me down and said 'just in case someone mentions it to you, me and Steve have just talked about moving to Australia, it's nothing definite' and my jaw dropped on the floor...for me it came out of nowhere, like I said for us it wouldn't have been out of the question to move somewhere foreign, but it wouldn't have been too far away and I would want my sister to come with me...and in the same breath she turned around and said 'we thought maybe you'd want to come with us' and that changed everything and from there we looked at whether our skills were on their list and ways that you can get in.*

Here the dream of a significant other, and invitation to be part of it, has made what was previously considered to be un-doable a goal to pursue. What is more interesting is that, after almost a year of organising and researching, following a two week exploratory trip to Australia together, it is also her sister that has now forced Sheila to consider emigrating without her, something she never considered previously:

*What occurred to me was whether we would do this without them, because I hadn't considered that before. When we went it was all about 'if we go, we'll all be together, it'll be great, it solves a lot of problems' and while I was there I thought 'right', I had to have a conversation with myself and think about 'if they don't come, will we still go?' and that hadn't really occurred to me before... as much as I wouldn't want to [leave her here] her not going wouldn't stop me going if we wanted and I would not have thought that before we went... she gave*

*me the opportunity of thinking about it, before hand I thought 'I couldn't possibly consider that' it would be awful for her to think that I wanted to leave her, but she kind of made it ok for us to think about it.*

Sheila's sister essentially gave permission for her to do more than just imagine initially and her consequent attitude also made Sheila consider the possibility that she would not have thought about before the experience and her sister's change of heart.

As well as sowing a seed and encouraging someone to dream, other people can also be a cause for concern. Patrick provides a good account of how other people's negative experiences and failures have caused him to worry. Since embarking on the Italian Dream almost three years ago now, Patrick has got to know several people who have embarked on the same dream and failed, which has made it very clear that his plans and hopes might not work out. Although he's always known it was a risk, that there are no guarantees and it would be by no means easy, other people's experiences are concrete, compared perhaps to what is represented in programmes like *Grand Designs*, which he considers to be '*judiciously edited I'm sure to make it more sensational*'. So other people's experiences here essentially provide ammunition for his worries and doubts:

*I'm madly looking forward to it but there are many many hurdles that you start flagging and you think 'oh not another one', another disappointment or another shock, so there's a lot there kind of going against it and also there's a lot of people I now know who the dream hasn't worked out, so a little bit of me is worried thinking, this is a big change in our lives and I'm not saying there's no going back but that I now know these three or four people who have either come back to England and haven't yet sold in Italy either or another person who's been out there for 19 years, he's also just a tiny bit shaky at the moment and I just wonder, there's this sort of halcyon dream that people have of Tuscan countryside living, it is hard, because it is a very different lifestyle...*

This kind of worry, or negative imagining, as a result of other people's bad experiences makes the possibility of your own failure or misfortune all the more 'real' or possible and this is something we have to imaginatively 'deal with'. So while their positive experiences and influences can motivate and inspire us, their negative experiences can force us to consider things we might have been trying to avoid and hope will only exist

in the imagination. Other people's experiences then, as well as providing hope through achievements and setting examples, may be a source that contributes to us losing hope.

The role or influence of other people, particularly significant others, takes a variety of forms. Their general influence may be part of your broader life-world in that their knowledge, experience and general 'being' informs your understanding and can shape your imagination of things, but more commonly as shared by the people I spoke to, other people inform specific dreams at a number of levels, whether it be through observation of their consumption or life experiences, making you face an unappealing possibility that your dream may fail, or setting your sights on actualising a dream you thought would only ever be something you experienced in your imagination.

It is also the case, however, that other people are present in – part of – our imagination. That is, beyond being a source of information and inspiration informing the nature of our desires and worries, other people can also intrude on and feature in our imagination.

### *Other people in the imagination*

We think about other people, not just ourselves, in the imagination. We often reflect on how our behaviour might affect other people. The attitudes, opinions and thoughts of other people are significant and feed into our imagination, essentially giving us something (more) to consider. When making decisions it may be important or quite natural to consider the opinions and reactions of those close to you; 'what will doing this or choosing this mean for them?', 'what will they think?'. This is part and parcel of the planning and rehearsal quality of imagining – by playing out several scenarios and imagining their various consequences we can make decisions (Klinger 1990). However, I find that it seems to be more the case that other people's attitudes and expectations (of us and of wider societal norms) infiltrate our imagination in a negative way and become a cause of worry or angst; 'what will they say?', 'what will they think about me?'. Sometimes this may be considered and at once dismissed but there are times when other peoples' opinions and expectations may be so influential that they lead you to pursue a

certain path. In considering the attitudes and opinions of other people, a need or desire for social approval is revealed.

The impact of other people is particularly prevalent in my conversations with Simone about her wedding and I focus on her story in discussing this theme as hers offers the most complete account. Simone considers her own expectations for a typical wedding and transfers these to other people whose expectations and judgements are anticipated in the imagination and catered for in the actual arrangements for the day. Simone talked at length about the importance of other people (guests), in relation to the budget, ideas and plans for her wedding on both occasions when I met with her, to the extent that she considers it more important for the guests to have an enjoyable day than her and to this end they have doubled their budget. In particular she spoke about creating the ‘wow factor’, surprising guests throughout the day so as to exceed their expectations and the need to be original:

*I wouldn't want to do it on too much of a low budget... I am quite content to spend that much on it because I am only going to do it once. And when you peel away the edges it is quite horrendous that, not that people expect you to spend that much but when you invite people to your special day if it doesn't live up to their expectations either I think I'd be a bit worried, like a couple of the hotels that we saw looked a little bit like nursing homes [laughs]... you didn't walk in and go 'wow' whereas if it wasn't for other people's expectations then maybe that would have been fine, we'd have said 'yep that's perfect', I think my expectations of other people's weddings and what I'd want to see, I think that's also sent me down the path of how much [to spend]...*

Here, peoples' expectations have had a strong influence on Simone's image of the wedding, so much so that they have caused her to dismiss some perfectly good venues simply because they do not have the ‘wow factor’ that she feels must be present, even though they would suffice for her and her fiancé. As well as seeking social approval it seems likely that Simone is experiencing a social pressure to put on a spectacular wedding. Later, she goes into more depth about the idea of creating the ‘wow factor’:

*I've kind of got an image of everything kind of simple but with the wow factor, somehow, I need to create the wow factor on a small budget... I suppose, even*



*when approaching the hotel I want people to go 'wow, this is a nice venue' and as I walk down the aisle 'wow that's a nice dress' or 'wow she looks lovely' and the meal, to walk into the room and have the candles lit, I don't want, people can be quite rude can't they? Not to your face but they can be quite judgemental of what's going on so I'd hate the thought of someone going 'ooohhh what's she done there?' I'd hate that... I don't do it, I don't think I do it! I think the only time is when, I've not been disappointed in a dress that a bride's chosen but, I think there was one wedding where the dress was so plain, and I think there is an expectation for people going to the church to see what the bride looks like they, I've certainly got an expectation that they're gonna look completely beautiful and their dress stunning, that was the only time I was, I wasn't disappointed but... I'm not a very critical person because I hate the thought of people being critical of me so I'm quite non-judgemental of things like that so, I do know a few people that might 'oh what's she done that for?', I'm not the sort of person who can say 'oh it's my day I'm gonna do what I want' because I know that come that day I'd worry that other people wouldn't enjoy it or frown upon something I'd done.*

Not only does Simone want her guests to be impressed but she is worried that she won't be accepted if she doesn't conform to what would be expected. The desire to impress people continues as she describes how she wants to surprise people and exceed their expectations, which she compares to her everyday life:

*Once somebody's done something, you don't want to repeat it, like with the cupcakes for wedding cakes, initially I thought that's a brilliant idea and really cute but I think maybe now it's been done too much so you've got to think of the next thing to do. I personally want people to be surprised the whole way through rather than expect 'oh it's going to be this now, this now', we want a bit of quirkiness to our day...in normal life I'm very text book and stick to what is expected, maybe I'm using this to rebel [laughs] I don't do anything that would be out of the ordinary... I'd never wear anything that I thought people my go 'oh my goodness what is she wearing' or if I do it's an accident [laughs] I try my best to be very mainstream rather than be a bit crazy, I can't think of any time that I've gone out of my way to do anything differently or unexpected.*

Here it is evident that Simone's understanding of conventional wedding norms, as well as general day-to-day conduct in social settings (where she tries to be 'mainstream'), have set parameters for her and we can see that the pressure or need for social approval underlies this. Yet her desire to inject some originality, create the 'wow' factor and generally exceed expectations points to a competitive element and a potential desire to be unique and held in esteem.

Simone's need for social approval (her worries that people may frown upon the decisions she makes) have caused her to carefully consider the potential expectations and reactions of other people. It should be remembered that when it wedding industry social approval and competition may be inevitable. While there are lots of decisions to be made, Simone is extremely conscious of other people and their expectations, her concerns are not related to anyone in particular but people in general. So when she is viewing potential venues she is imagining what other people will think and say about it, what their reaction will be. Anticipating this informs her decisions and by considering other people at this stage, Simone seems to think that their expectations and opinions will not become a cause for worry or concern at a later date.

Other people also invade the imagination in a way that causes worry. Monica describes the concerns she has about the critical reactions of other people over decorating decisions that she and her boyfriend have made:

*We're both a bit scared of that, like, is it going to be 'us'? Because although we've done it to the flat, is it still our taste? Is it still us? Is it going to look to other people that we've just gone, they're looking at it going 'who the hell do they think they are having a chandelier in the lounge and look how, why have they got a blue ceiling?...This is the first time we've had the opportunity to decorate somewhere and make it ours and I just don't want it to be that we're looked at trying to make ourselves something that we're not...we just thought, 'no let's make things stand out a bit', that's again that's what we're scared of, that people will think we're showing off 'look at them with all their money' and it's like actually, we've spent all our money and we've been really bloody careful with everything...*

Here, Monica is concerned that they are presenting the wrong image to other people, and is worried that people may be envious and damning rather than pleased for them and what they have achieved. Interestingly, although she is clearly worried about what other people might think and imagines what their reactions may be like, she goes on to say that other people did not enter into the decision making process:

*It was all about us then...when we were discovering the colours of the flat it wasn't about anybody else it was just about what we really liked and what went and it didn't occur to me, us, until afterwards when we had a second to think and thought 'god, is this going to look really pretentious? Are we going to look really up ourselves and think we're great and we've got loads of money?*

It seems that Monica is actually afraid of people being envious of them and this has become a source of anxiety. Now that the flat is nearly finished and they have put their mark on it, this visual display that is an extension and expression of the self, is daunting when you sit back and realize what it might say about you and what others might think. Here other people are a source of anxiety.

It seems that other people are as much a part of our imagination as they are our material reality. We want to please other people and be approved of. We consider what others may think about us, our actions and choices and may act in certain ways as a consequence. This points to another dimension of meta-imagining – not only do we think about and imagine imagining but we think about and imagine what others will think as part of our imaginative experiences. This may not always be in relation to specific individuals, which suggests a broader desire to 'fit in' and abide by social norms.

## **Summary and emerging areas of discussion**

By looking at the back-story to imaginative activity we are able to garner a more contextual understanding of the imagination. We see that it is not isolated or separate from material reality but very much about it, and informed by it. The things we imagine for our future are a result of the things we have been exposed to in one way or another, whether it be our own upbringing and experiences, the influence of other people as

sources of information or inspiration, the media or the marketplace. More broadly we also see that under the 'right' circumstances all sorts of environmental cues can prompt the imagination, compared to other times when we may restrict what and how we imagine. We might see how the marketplace is particularly well placed to engage the imagination under these circumstances and to an extent already does so, as the wedding exhibition that brides-to-be attend and catalogues picked up by individuals contemplating redecoration and looking for inspiration. Such resources may help us with regard to the amount of imaginative elaboration, providing material for us to imagine or imaginatively adapt, adding detail to our imagined scenarios. The findings presented in this chapter highlight the significance of the social world along with social desires for acceptance and approval by others, in shaping the things we imagine. What is a personal sphere is apparently very social.

## **Chapter Seven: Findings IV**

### **Outcomes of imagining**

In this chapter I report on what happens after imagining, in terms of the outcomes on behaviour, material reality and the imagination. Behavioural outcomes relate to the activities that individuals engage in as a consequence of imagining. In terms of material reality, this relates to the lived experience of pursuing and actualising a dream or goal, with regard to the imagination, I address how imaginative activity develops over time, especially once a dream or goal is actualised.

Overall, the findings from this chapter illustrate that the imagination is significant in material reality. It is not confined to inner activity but has very real effects on one's daily life. Consumption emerges as a particularly significant outcome of imagining in terms of behaviour, demonstrating that it has a prominent role in material reality when pursuing and actualising dreams and goals, consequently we can note a tension between the role of consumption in the everyday imagination, where it is often peripheral or manifest absent, and its role in everyday life where it makes its presence more known. It is also apparent that there is a gulf between what may be imagined and what is experienced in material reality upon actualisation, highlighting a further aspect to the relationship between imagination and material reality. Finally, we are left to consider the role of the imagination in everyday life more generally, not in terms of particular types of imaginative experience and their purposes, but our apparent need to have something to engage the imagination, to aim for, aspire to, plan and actualise.

### **Outcomes and consequences for behaviour**

In considering the behavioural consequences of imagining I discuss the behaviours, activities and strategies that individuals engage in to bring their dreams and goals closer to actualisation. The context of this study, which follows individuals – their imaginative activity and lived experience of actualising a dream – over a period of time, offers insight into the way that different kinds of daydreams (ideal and materially real) are approached in material reality.

A variety of consumption and non-consumption based behaviours are identified and discussed, before considering in detail the prevalent role for consumption as a consequence of various kinds of imagining, particularly negative imaginings.

### ***Approaching Behaviours***

In line with existing research I find that individuals ‘act’ on their imaginings by engaging in a number of behaviours to help bring their ‘dream object’ closer. d’Astous and Deschênes (2005, p8) refer to these as ‘approaching strategies’ and here I extend this idea to acknowledge two categories of these; ‘complementary behaviours’, that are inherent consequences of both ideal and materially real imagining, and ‘actualisation behaviours’ that are mostly related to materially real imaginings. In addition, there are two ‘levels’ of actualisation behaviours, the deployment of which is dependent on the stage of the dream actualisation process.

### **Complementary behaviours**

I use the term ‘complementary behaviours’ to attempt to capture the notion that these are behaviours that accompany our imaginings. They serve to help us ‘live out’ aspects of our imagined experiences, making them a little more tangible and materially ‘real’, they also stimulate the imagination, helping us to continue to elaborate our imaginings.

The kinds of complementary behaviours that participants discussed include; making associated purchases (such as buying paint ‘tester pots’ or specialist magazines); window shopping and browsing online and in the highstreet; compiling scrapbooks, mood boards and electronic ‘folders’ to collect and organise thoughts and ideas; engaging in online activities provided by retailers (such as Ikea’s kitchen and bathroom design programme); watching television programmes; and talking to other people about their experiences, hopes, plans and worries related to their dreams and goals, in fact participants often commented that taking part in the interviews was “*great because it means I get to talk about it!*” (Sandra).

You will remember Sandra, who was planning her wedding to Mark and had relocated from the South coast back to her parental home in East Anglia while they were waiting to sell their first house before being able to buy a new one. Living with her parents again only made her more anxious to have somewhere of their own and after the wedding Sandra talked about the house they were in the process of buying. If you recall, the slow buying process and associated paperwork often frustrated Sandra and made her grumpy. The experience she describes here offers a typical and particularly full account of the kinds of complementary activities that individuals engage in as a consequence of imagining and for Sandra this was a way to “*get started*” and make her dream a bit more tangible:

*I have been looking at lots of my Mum's magazines on homes and I'm a bit obsessed with house programmes like Grand Designs! I have made a scrap book of cuttings from magazines that I like, bits of furniture and whole rooms and stuff, geek!... I thought I would start it and then keep adding to it, I did it about a month ago, maybe longer, I was all excited about the house and wanted to get started so it was sort of a way of doing it. But then I felt like it was still a long way away and it was almost a bit depressing, I haven't looked at it since!...because I can't do anything about it yet so I'm trying not to get too excited about it because that makes the wait seem even longer.... and I also used one of those online 3D planning things to plan my bathroom and kitchen [that was] lots of fun, then I saw how much I had spent and the dream cracked a little! not broken though...*

Sandra told me how these activities added to the excitement she was feeling about getting her own house, and she describes how these activities performed compensatory functions, that enabled her to ‘do something’ while she was out of control, unable to progress things herself. Not only are they compensatory, but by intentionally watching DIY television programmes, reading home magazines, making a scrapbook to collect ideas and using online tools to act out and develop her daydreams, she is performing what Belk et al (2003) refer to as ‘self-seduction’ – she engages in these things to add to her own excitement and stimulate her imagination. Sandra also mentions how she sometimes has had to stop taking part in these activities because they can serve to disappoint when she reflects on the fact that her dream cannot be actualised yet and doing these things ‘for real’ appears to be a long way off. Once again we can see how Sandra is exerting a degree of control over her imagination, preventing herself from

indulging too much in these activities so as not to get too excited because this may result in her feeling depressed or disappointed that actualisation is not close enough. So we can manage our dreams by engaging in certain behaviours in material reality.

Complementary behaviours add a tangible dimension to imaginative activity – they enable us to ‘do’ something about our dreams. In turn these activities further cultivate our daydreams and function to aid planning and decision making. This function is prevalent in Simone’s story. Simone is in the early days of planning her wedding and has given a lot of thought to the ways that she can impress her guests. In the following description she talks about deciding on a colour scheme for the wedding that has been reinforced by wedding magazines:

*...There’s been a lot of magazines at the moment and they’ve gone with pink and green so again every page I turn I go ‘oh I like that colour and I like that colour’, it’s just a theme that every time I stopped, it was pinks and greens. I don’t know what sort of shades but at the moment that’s what I want to do [...] if I’m looking in magazines I’ll look at what people are wearing and pick out ideas... Mainly at the moment it’s just colours I think, reaffirming that they’re the colours I want, every time at the moment it’s what I’ve gone for...*

There are two functions to these behaviours. In making decisions they help us prepare for material reality; in compensating they help us escape from a dissatisfactory material reality to the more pleasurable realm of the imagination. As compensation such activities help to part-actualise the dream, making it more ‘real’ and developing our ideas and images. We can begin to see an overlap or merging of antecedents and consequences here. We may intentionally indulge in activities to feed the imagination, as a consequence of imagining.

### ***Actualisation behaviours***

When it comes to materially real dreams that individuals are in the process of actualising, or particularly strong aspirational daydreams, individuals engaged in more significant behaviours in order to make help make a dream happen. I refer to these as ‘actualisation behaviours’.



The first level of actualisation behaviours are planning based. These behaviours are income based and involve saving money, decreasing consumption and increasing income. A number of income based strategies were described that individuals undertake in order to actualise their dream. For instance, when I met Simone for the second time, she told me she had taken on a second job to help fund her wedding, which has almost doubled in cost since setting their original budget, she is even on the second wedding dress because her first dress, a bespoke design, did not turn out as she wanted it. In another story, Monica has reduced her spending and gives herself just £10 per week pocket money after bills and essentials have been paid while they are trying to maximise savings for the flat renovation and has even prevented herself from spending gift vouchers that they received as a Christmas present in case they need them for DIY related purchases:

*I've sat and worked out our finances... I've just tried to account for every penny, even vouchers that we've got, you know put to one side so that's an extra £200 that we can spend on furniture or we can use to get a screwdriver if we needed to rather than go to B&Q and pay cash for it, we've got a voucher that we can, you know manipulate that to be able to be used and my parents have given us £150 from Christmas and that in my head is already spent on a dishwasher and, but we've got it there just in case we need that extra cash just to pay for a plasterer or you know something else and it's just like it keeps me awake thinking we're never going to have enough money to do what we want to do [...] On our Christmas list we said to people that we wanted vouchers for our home, and some people still bought us things like wine glasses for our home, and we haven't decided on any colour schemes yet so that's why we didn't ask for anything really, but we got some champagne flutes from his Mum and they're like black at the top, black glasses with where the wine, you know that the wine actually goes in, the vessel, with clear stems, and we've seen the opposite of that in wine glasses, in red wine glasses where it's black stems and clear vessels, which we quite like... they're in Argos and we nearly bought them we like totted up all our money and everything and we thought we better not actually, because we might need that voucher to buy you know, some equipment or bedding or something that's more practical than wine glasses...*

The importance of Monica's dream is paramount here and has significantly changed the quality of her life. She spends very little money on herself and they have stopped

themselves from spending vouchers they received as gifts in case they need money for necessities whilst renovating the flat. So in order to actualise one dream we may have to forego other things, and this is accepted by individuals when they are in the process of actualising a significant dream – the dream becomes the priority. We can compare this approach to a slightly diluted form of actualisation behaviour in relation to ideal imaginings. If we return to Holly's earlier aspirational daydream about owning a home and raising a family, her image of the future is a traditional one that involves having two children, a happy husband, a nice garden and herself in a house-wife inclined role. In order to bring this aspirational daydream closer, Holly regularly saves money towards a deposit, and has continued to live at home with her parents so that she can do this rather than as she puts it "*waste money on renting*", however, there is a noticeable difference in her attitude and approach to this more distant dream in comparison to Monica's forthcoming experience of home ownership or Simone's second job to fund the wedding because she says that she knows she could save much more money but realises that she also needs to live for now so that she doesn't regret anything later. So when it comes to ideal imaginings, although individuals may engage in behaviours to help actualise it in the future, the intensity with which this is done is not as strong, because the timeframe is bigger and therefore the need is not so great.

There were also other significant 'actualisation behaviours' that individuals engage in as a means to help actualise a 'significant' materially real dream (relating to significant life events and experiences). In some instances, individuals engage in certain behaviours that equate to 'giving things up' to pursue their dream. For instance, Monica moved home with her parents – essentially giving up her independence – to be able to save money towards the flat renovation and Patrick and his partner sold their immaculate five bedroom detached house and moved to a smaller property in a less desirable neighbourhood so they could release some capital and have a much smaller mortgage to fund their Italian Dream. Patrick has also given up on pursuing other career opportunities, which is something he told me he feels he could have achieved more in:

*Italy has stopped me from doing other plans as well, I've had opportunities of possibly running a small orchestra and I've had that, not totally handed to me on a plate, but I've certainly been invited to apply for some jobs and I haven't*

*because I've always known that ultimately my destiny is in Italy and I don't want to jeopardise that.*

So in pursuing one dream, it may be that we close the door on others and it appears we are well aware of this. As well as being excited about the dream we are pursuing this may also be accompanied by an inevitable disappointment that other alternatives may not now be possible or at least, are being postponed. So Monica realises she has to wait longer for the Farmhouse, and Patrick has (to) come to terms with the fact that career opportunities do not necessarily fit in with the Italian dream and way of life – we can't have it all but have to choose between dreams.

It may well be the case that when actively pursuing dreams, we must engage in certain behaviours and take action in order to make it happen and I note that these more significant behaviours were regularly engaged in by the interviewees and this is likely to be due to the fact that many of the individuals I talked to were in the process of pursuing and fulfilling their dreams. Moreover, many of the 'dreams' were significant life experiences and events and the importance that is placed on these is evident in the steps that individuals take and the things they are prepared to do or sacrifice to actualise their dreams. We are faced with a tension here – the focus of the participant's daydreams did not prioritise consumption, yet when it comes to making a dream more tangible or actualising it, consumption becomes more prominent – are these less material dreams really about consumption after all? Or does consumption present itself as an 'easy' or perhaps the only way to make our dreams a reality? Is consumption so ingrained in our daily lives that it becomes the answer to our hopes and fears?

With this in mind I now turn to focus specifically on the role of consumption as a consequence of imagining. I identify three roles for consumption here; as a safeguard, as a new start, and as an escape from the dream.

## Consumption as a safeguard

It became apparent that consumption may be turned to in order to eliminate or reduce potential negative outcomes. This coincides with the rehearsal and preparation function of imagining, as based on rehearsing various scenarios and their outcomes in the imagination, individuals are able to make decisions that prevent or reduce the likelihood of negative outcomes occurring in material reality. Simone provides a good account of how consumption can safeguard against the worries and stresses she has imagined could occur on her wedding day. Simone attended church regularly until the age of 16 and this is the main reason why she would want to get married in a church, however, her worries over potential stresses related to this have overthrown her preference for a church ceremony because she wants to eliminate logistics-related stress and worry:

*I'm quite a stressy person so for me to get ready, then get to the church and be here there and everywhere, I'd be a complete nightmare so I thought keep it under one roof.... what draws me to a hotel is that I'd only have to walk from the bedroom, not have a stress attack of 'I've got to get here there and everywhere on time'. I think if I wasn't so stressy, church would definitely be my preference but I don't want on the day to be a worry wart, that might tarnish the day for me [...] Just having a massive panic attack probably, not being able to breathe or the car breaking down, I just want to eliminate all that stress 'cos I know when my sister got married she was in the hairdressers at about 12.30 and she was due to get married at 1 and they still hadn't finished her hair, so to get back to the house, get in your dress, get everything else done it was just such a stressful time that I thought 'I do not want that' because the day starts off on the wrong foot I suppose, so that would be my idea, keep it under one roof.... we've planned it for October because I don't want the stress of 'is the sun going to shine or not', I'd prefer to wake up and if it's sunny that's a bonus rather than planning your day around the sunshine and then opening the curtains and see it's tipping down. Stuff like that I just want to eliminate all of that so we can have as much fun, stress free fun as possible...*

It is clear to see that the key aspects of the wedding, including the venue (and with that comes the type of ceremony) and the time of year, is based on Simone's desire to avoid

certain things that would cause her stress on the day, as well as angst in the lead up to the wedding (knowing she has reduced or eliminated certain possibilities also eliminates the number of possible negative imaginings). So we can see that choice in consumption – and in the wedding industry there is a vast proliferation of choice – offers an opportunity to reduce risk, worry and stress, consumption choice allows us to manage our imagination. For Simone it stops her worrying and allows her to imagine positively. Not only is she anticipating future emotion and trying to limit the experience of negative emotion here, she has used consumption as a means to accomplish this. We can also see that Simone’s decision to have her wedding under one roof has been informed by her memories of her sister’s wedding, along with her own self-knowledge as she admits that she is a “*stress person*”. Here we can see a link back to the kinds of things that influence and feed into the imagination; her memories of her sister’s wedding are so prevalent that she has acted upon them, so as not to repeat what she witnessed as a negative, stress ridden experience.

In a similar vein consumption can also be used as a means to help us come to terms with the past and mark a new start.

### **Consumption as a new start**

It became apparent that when individuals were apprehensive about something new that they had not experienced before, consumption can be looked to as a means to mark a new start or a new chapter. For example, by going on a six week holiday a few weeks after retiring, Barbara was able to look forward to and prepare for that, rather than worry about what she will do with her time once she’s retired – here consumption serves as a distraction so that she doesn’t have to confront her fear about retiring head on, booking the holiday also made her realise that she was ready to give up work:

*I always wanted to do Machu Picchu that was something I wanted to do when I was 60, before 60, so we decided we would do South America and the Amazon and all of that so when we went in to book it, I suppose in the back of my mind, when I got to 60 I had almost made my mind up that I would stay for another year, so I’d stay until I was 61 which would be November and I think that was in*

*the back of my mind, but I never felt ready to go. Anyway we booked two weeks for South America and I said 'well it's so close to North America we should go and see my brother for a few days'...and he said 'why don't you come for a few weeks?' so it ended up we booked it for six and I said 'we'll come for a month and I'll give up work', very flippant. So we booked it and then I thought 'oh my god' [laughs] so I went in and told my manager thinking I didn't have any options....in my head I'd got it all straightened out but when I spoke to Personnel about it they said 'well you don't have to leave, there's other options you can take sabbatical, you can take three weeks unpaid leave, you've got all these options you don't have to leave' so that put the cat among the pigeons....but it turns out I'd have to request for it to be approved and there's policies and procedures and I've had it up to here with procedures and policies...and I just thought 'if I'm away six weeks do I really want to go back?' You know you come back on whatever day it is and you've got to go back to work on the Monday, do you really want that? And I thought no! I think it's the right decision and I think it made it easier booking the holiday.*

Although the holiday has not stopped her from thinking about retirement and how she will spend her time, it has eased her into it because rather than envisage a seemingly endless retirement, she will have to prepare for her holiday and can look forward to not having that 'back to work' feeling when she returns. She also talked about Christmas being a further distraction to keep her busy on return from the holiday, which reassured her knowing she will have plenty to do and will have more time to enjoy doing it without being rushed as she usually is because of working full-time. So the holiday signifies a new chapter and the freedom that retirement offers opens opportunities for travel that she could not do while she was working.

Beyond marking a new chapter, Monica describes how she feels consumption, specifically buying new things and decorating to 'put her stamp' on the flat would also help to erase the past – a past that she doesn't want any links to, a past that she was not part of – her boyfriend's past with his ex-girlfriend in the same flat they are going to be moving into, and doing this means their life and their future together can begin:

*...Owen doesn't want to live there unless we can make at least some small changes to it because otherwise it still feels like his and Sarah's place and I*

*don't want to live in his and Sarah's place, so there are certain things that need to be done. Toilet seat changed for a start [laughs] damn straight, you know ideally I'd like the whole bathroom changed before I go in there because the bathroom, to me, as much as kitchens are personal to me because I love cooking and things like that, bathrooms are hygiene and personal, so it's double whammy, I don't want her hair in our bath plugs [laughs] you know it's like I probably wouldn't want that in a stranger's house but let alone somebody that he used to love....the other thing with the bathroom, Owen and Sarah before, they'd put a new carpet down in the lounge and the bedroom recently, probably within the last 12 months, 18 months, and I was making a list of everything that needed doing, DIY, and we've got about five lists, one list for every room and then a DIY list so everything we're gonna need for each room so Kitchen you know, gonna need kettle, toaster, blah blah blah, bedroom we need a bed, possibly a small TV, wardrobe, drawers and we're putting a budget down, well I've done it all, put a budget down for every item and then we've got a DIY file, so I said we need carpets for every room, paint for every room and he's like 'well actually we don't need carpet for those two because they're relatively new' and because I haven't even viewed the property officially yet then I'm like 'well, I don't know if I'm going to like those carpets' so I need to make sure you know, plus it's a carpet that they chose so, so it's not ours and although it's a neutral colour, because he showed me it in a shop, it is a neutral colour and it is quite nice, it's a waffle you know weave, and I probably would have chosen it myself, but it's not like something I would choose now, so there's like little changes, there's big changes that we want to make, there's little changes that we need to make before we move in there.*

We can see that in buying new things, Monica felt the memory of Owen's ex-girlfriend would be cleared away and to her that means the flat would become 'ours' rather than 'theirs'. Here consumption becomes a way to escape the past and we are able to see how the disposal and replacement of goods may be considered by individuals as a way to clear the mind. The meaning of things is important here as Monica acknowledges that to her even utility based 'things' such as cutlery, a microwave and carpet, represent a previous time and relationship that she wants to eliminate. Disposing of goods helps to distance her (and Owen) from the past and replacing them marks a new chapter. Her insecurities are revealed in the way she talks about goods, she feels they can't properly

move on or start their life together – untarnished by his ex-girlfriend – until every last (material) piece of the past is removed. It seems that dispossession promises an escape from an unsatisfactory past which is acting on Monica’s present and future. Material goods help to manage the imagination here – changing the flat helps to prevent thoughts about Sarah.

### **Consumption as an escape from the dream**

The participant’s described situations where consumption may be turned to when negative aspects of pursuing and actualising a dream become too much and there is a need to escape from the material reality of it - consumption therefore becomes a means to escape. This was particularly prominent in long-term, ongoing dreams because they become so embedded in daily life, to the extent that life becomes focused on making the dream a reality and little else – life can revolve around pursuing a broader dream.

Patrick’s story highlights just how demanding the actualisation of a dream can become. The ‘Italian dream’ has existed, in one form or another, for over five years since he and his partner first realised they didn’t want to live in England and began to pursue a property search. Since buying the property two years ago their aspirations for restoring the farmhouse and embarking on the Italian way of life has dominated their lives. The financial implications have been the most testing, with the collapse of the Euro, many additional unforeseen costs, extra building work and the resulting time delays have all taken their toll. Further to this Patrick has also reduced his work commitments, cutting his hours and therefore his pay to be able to be more involved in the project and spend more time in Italy during the latter stages of the renovation. Patrick realises he needs a break and must continue to live his own life alongside pursuing the dream, which is still a year or more away from completion. To get away from the seemingly endless trials and tribulations of the restoration project, he has decided to go on holiday to New York where he and his partner will stay with a friend to escape:

*...and that will be my first proper holiday I think for 4 years, since looking and searching in Italy...since 2005, 2006 when we started looking seriously for the house, we’ve never been on a trip now for the last 3 years, except to go down to*



*the house which is not really a holiday.... so you're either here working flat out or you're over there working but also sorting out problems and paying tax bills and all those other horrible things and thinking 'oh my god' you know, and doing silly things like having to buy a car which was not a simple thing and sorting out the bank account, all those things that do take a lot longer in Italy because, it's a nicer way of doing it but it's a much more personal way of doing it but it takes longer and so we can't ever relax... so I'm looking forward to going somewhere which isn't here and isn't Italy and have some fun... it's a big city experience which I, very rarely do I even go to London, you're kind of sitting at home or you're in Italy sitting at home [laughs] so I'm looking forward to having a proper break and I actually think I might even switch off my blackberry, which I've never done since I had it...A break in New York hopefully will be a bit of fun, see Gavin, do a bit of drinking, do a bit of culture [...] and just do something slightly fun and just slightly silly possibly, a bit expensive but at the same time I just want to enjoy life a bit more and go 'hey you know I'm not just working my guts out for nothing at the moment' which is, I don't think that but at the moment there is a slight imbalance in the thinking of 'we've worked this hard but we're actually not enjoying life', what's the point of living if you're just working?...I just need to refresh my batteries a bit I think.... Do a bit of shopping possibly, just do some chill out stuff and no doubt, Gavin will take us to some clubs anyway and some bars so that'll be fine, we'll go to the cinema and stuff and just do something that I haven't done for a long time, me time I think... I'm determined not to worry about it and what will be will be and ok we've got to put our plans a little bit delayed, but it will happen. But in the interim perhaps I'll have a bit more fun and a bit more of a life again rather than waiting until it finishes, because otherwise we might be waiting, sitting here, get some hiccups and it might not be the spring after all and then the summer will get in the way and then it will be this time next year before we're moving out there so, and if that's the case that's the case, but don't keep waiting for that to happen otherwise, you could die, people do. ....which is why I still believe you've got to seize the moment, don't keep delaying things because you don't know what's going to happen...*

Patrick describes how his forthcoming holiday offers an escape from everyday life that has become something of a frustrating, work-ridden existence that until now has been

centred on waiting for the renovation to complete. Consumption is also an escape from worrying about the Italian renovation and so again, consumption becomes a way to manage the imagination. The big city experience of New York offers a chance to experience otherness by offering time to himself to engage in consumer experiences that he has denied himself since the renovation began. And so we can begin to see that not only does everyday life begin to get mundane, thereby provoking a desire to escape it (through imagining) but pursuing a dream can also become mundane or unsatisfactory, precisely because it too becomes part of everyday life – the dream becomes ‘the norm’ – and that also needs to be escaped (Cohen and Taylor 1976; 1992). So while the end-result and everything they have been working for remains pleasurable and may keep us going, sometimes this is not enough, and stronger, more tangible measures are required to escape the material reality of pursuing a dream. So it seems there are layers of escape. Not only do we turn to the imagination to escape from an unsatisfactory material reality, but we also turn to consumption scripts to escape when the imagination is no longer enough of an escape attempt. In its escape role, consumption performs a compensatory function, compensating for the dissatisfaction experienced with the process of dream realisation and indeed when imagining no longer compensates to help us get through the more mundane aspects of material reality. Arguably, imagining is still at work here though, as in Patrick’s case the holiday to New York provides something new and different to imagine, however, it may be that there is in fact a need for a material (tangible) escape rather than imaginary and it is actual consumption that offers this.

Patrick’s story also illustrates that waiting for a dream to be actualised can be dangerous, for it might be delayed, or worse it may not ever happen, and so it is apparent that ‘living life’ – which entails consuming – rather than pausing it for the sake of a dream is a way of avoiding future regret(s). Again we see a managed quality to the imagination here; he is finding things to provide pleasure and respite from the Italian dream that is too often a source of negative imagining.

### ***Summary of consequences for behaviour***

So imagining has particular and rather significant effects on behaviour. Some of these are ‘complementary’, concerned more with indulging in and developing imaginative

experiences to make them feel more 'real', while others are concerned with aiding the actualisation process. Moreover, when in pursuit of significant dreams we engage in more significant behaviours throughout the actualisation process, which may involve sacrificing things now in the hope of reaping rewards and benefits later. We can also see that numerous behaviour related consequences involve consumption and this marks a tension between its role in the imagination and material reality where it may be more prevalent, particularly as a way to manage the imagination and actualise dreams.

Not only does imagining influence specific behaviours, but in pursuing and actualising our dreams imagining also impacts our day-to-day life, as we have seen in Patrick's need to escape from the mundanity of the Italian dream, and the acknowledgment that life has to continue whilst in pursuit of the dream. This leads me to consider the consequences of imagining on daily life – the lived experience of pursuing and actualising dreams.

### **The lived experience of pursuing and actualising dreams**

There are two key issues to address with regard to the lived experience of pursuing and actualising dreams. First is the impact of dream pursuit on (other areas of) everyday life, the second pertains to the differences that individuals acknowledge between an imagined situation and the material reality of that situation.

#### ***Living life alongside pursuing a dream***

While we are pursuing and actualising our dreams, they become part of our everyday life, in many cases they may dominate our material reality (as well as our imagination) and this can be problematic for other areas of our life. Participants tended to express this as a tension between enjoying imagining various possibilities on offer and realising that ordinary life has to continue, which gets in the way of or detracts from imaginative pleasures. Sheila expresses this tension as she describes how the possibility of emigrating to Australia, which was initially an exciting and enveloping prospect, has to

be 'lived with' and has very real effects on their current material reality because as much as she may want to put some things on hold until a decision is made – *'life still has to go on'*. A particular problem with regard to Sheila's dream is that although they are taking steps towards actualising it, emigration is not yet confirmed, it has not even been applied for because they are waiting for her husband and brother-in-law to visit the country and make a judgement like she and her sister did on their trip previously. So although the dream is part of their material reality they do not know whether it will transpire and this means it is even more imperative that they continue to live 'as normal' until such time as they know what the future holds:

*I'm maybe not in such a rush as I was before...what I realise is life still has to go on in the meantime and it isn't a 'let's do it next week scenario' it's a much longer process and part of the process is actually just living with the idea for a long time and often I find myself thinking 'right I've had a good day today' or 'not such a good day' and 'how would I feel if we were going next week?' or what sort of things will influence me? It's difficult when you think 'well we might not be here then', like with Lucy moving up to secondary school, and we've got to put everything in place as if we were still here, because even if we want to go we might not get granted a visa and if we get granted a visa it might take longer than we think, even if we know what we want, it doesn't mean we get it, it's not like if you want to go to Spain you just up and go, you've got to go through this whole massive process, so I guess there's a little bit of protection going on because even if we decide we want to go there might not be a visa option for us, things change, we might think we fulfil their criteria, they might reply and turn us down, so you've still got to live your life. If it was something that could be done within a month I think you can literally just go hell for leather, 'that's what I'm dealing with', with this we're having to live our life as normal anyway, and everything that goes along with that and planning for the kids, everything really...It's difficult because you stop, you think, 'well maybe I shouldn't do that then', like if Australia wasn't on the cards we'd probably think about getting another car, everything we think about, if it's short term it's fine, if it's a long term commitment or investment, should we think about it? should we consider? and you're weighing it up, any medium to big decisions anytime, whereas when you live life normally you make decisions based on now, you don't have this big thing hanging around in the future. So things like cars and*

*we've just been camping and I was thinking I'd love to get a caravan but we can't be spending money, money that we don't really have, but I don't want to be putting our lives on hold for two years on something that might not happen, whether for our reasons or anyone else's. So it is a bit difficult with that hanging around, but that's kind of part of this major process.*

Sheila's description highlights how dreams can interfere, or 'hang over' everyday life and needs to be considered in any decisions they make, but equally they need to operate as if the dream isn't part of their material reality, and for Sheila in particular, living life alongside pursuing the dream is as much about protecting herself and her family if emigrating doesn't happen as it is about continuing with life while waiting for the dream to actualise. So they don't want to spend any 'unnecessary' money, on a caravan or new car for instance, but they need to ensure they continue to live 'fully' in the present as if Australia wasn't an option so that life continues as normally as possible, especially for the children, and so things are in place if emigrating doesn't go ahead.

And we can see how Patrick's situation is similar, he's realised how much he has paused other aspects of life and realises this is wrong because of the potential delays and problems that may prevent the dream from being realised as imagined. In a slightly different light, Monica explained to me that she realised she had neglected other aspects of life, including her friends and her health and fitness, particularly her back which she has suffered with and not visited the chiropractor about because of her commitment to the flat, but she felt this was ok because it was only temporary, for a fairly short period of time, and the flat renovation was the most important thing. Once it is finished then she will 'repay' people by having them round for dinner and so on.

As well as living with a dream on a day-to-day basis, there were also instances of more specific consequences that imagining can have on the individual. Some participants described negative aspects of living life alongside pursuing a dream, in relation to the kinds of detrimental effects that worry and angst can have.

Patrick, who you will remember has been pursuing the Italian dream for several years and needed a physical escape from the material reality of it, described his experiences of being kept awake at night and having anxiety attacks as a result of worrying about the big lifestyle changes and financial implications of the project after they took the plunge to buy the property:

*...the big thing is just taking that first step of doing it, and I tell you it was scary you know and I was, when we first put the offer in and thought 'there's no going back now' and I was lying awake for weeks thinking 'have we done a mistake?' and it was a long time before that disappeared, but you know, I'm glad we did and it was so easy not to have done it, I can see why most people don't follow their dreams, I can absolutely understand coming from the other side now that it's so far easier to just say 'oh no let's forget about it' or 'let's leave it a year' or whatever and I think ultimately you could keep saying that for the rest of your life... it would have been the easier option to have just gone 'oh this is too risky' and bought loads of arguments around saying 'we shouldn't be doing this, it's an awful lot of money, we're moving away from our families' everything was sort of being negative and all those arguments of the downside were coming through to the fore and it was trying to keep on going 'no this is our dream, we've got to go for it', and so it was very much an active thing to do it rather than allowing it to happen because everything was telling you not to do it, so it was those arguments in my mind really, keeping me awake....*

Being kept awake at night by worries and stress related to pursuing a dream was echoed by a number of participants who were pursuing ongoing dreams. Other consequences of working to actualise a dream involved neglecting friends and family for a period of time whilst pursuit of the dream took over one's life, as well as neglecting the self by taking very few breaks from a dream-dominated material reality, which causes individuals to feel a range of negative emotions towards their current (dissatisfactory) material reality and may result in needing a complete escape from it. But it does not end here, pursuing a significant dream can take its toll, as Patrick experienced when after a big downturn in the exchange rate, his financial worries got so bad that he ended up in hospital because of stress:

*Throughout the whole of the year I have had anxiety attacks and worries about money and like I say the exchange rate collapsed from 1.46 which was where we*

*bought the house, so at least we bought the house for 1.46 but then, and I did all my budgets on 1.35 thinking well it might fluctuate a bit, then of course it dropped to 1.25 just after we bought the house and then it dropped again to pretty much equal at the end of last year... so I was getting very worried and at one point I did have to go to the Doctor's because my heart was going a bit funny and they took an ECG and discovered it was racing at 180 beats a minute and it stayed like that for 3 days so I was taken to hospital and they were quite worried for a little while and I was quite worried, but I knew it was stress but it was still obviously, it wasn't just mental stress, it was physically. So it was quite a down period over that and I suppose that was about a year ago now, I suppose that was probably the darkest time because I was seriously worrying that we just didn't have the money to do it.*

The sheer size and importance of the dream is foregrounded here. Of course this relocation, restoration, and altered lifestyle dream is vast, and such health related consequences may be at the more extreme end of the scale, or at least limited to certain types of 'big' dreams. Nevertheless, his mental and physical reactions were a result of pursuing their dream. The weight of his worries regarding the collapse of the euro and its repercussions on their financial situation, which had further repercussions on being able to complete the project, were vast and elaborated in the imagination. More than just worry we can also see a fear of not being able to realise the dream, a fear of failure. What is slightly ironic here is that the Italian dream centres on a slower pace of life and a healthier lifestyle but the effects of the actualisation process cause the opposite – more stress, more worry and greater imbalance. These sorts of consequences go to show that imagining cannot be confined to the realm in which it takes place, it is part of our wider material reality and as such research needs to address how we live with our dreams and how the process of dream actualisation impacts our everyday life and even our well being.

In spite of these negative consequences on the individual and daily life, there was an overwhelming acknowledgement that participants consider their dreams to be 'worth it'. That the ends justify the means and if they had to they would do it again, simply because the dream, to get what they've been working for, is worth everything they have had to go through to get there. If we recall the notion of personal challenge and

achievement, which is found to be an important element in the ‘what’ of imagining, it leads us to consider that perhaps the journey, or ‘rollercoaster’ as it was more often referred to by participants, makes actualisation an even bigger achievement and makes us even more grateful and appreciative when we reach our end goal. Satisfaction then seems to come from the range and strength of emotions involved in pursuit and actualisation. When we reflect on the nature of desire, it seems that it is not just about getting your heart’s desire, but working for it, and this notion adds further nuance to the phenomenon that we might be wise to consider.

### ***A gulf between the imagined and the materially real***

The second issue to consider relating to the lived experience of dream actualisation pertains to the differences between an imagined situation and the material reality of that situation.

Samantha, who is expecting her first baby and is keen to recreate a family life similar to her own upbringing, offers a clear account of the gulf that can exist between what is imagined and that situation as it is experienced in material reality. She talked about several experiences where her imagined scenarios, or aspects she considered to be important when she imagined a certain scenario, were quite different from “*the reality of that situation*”. In chapter four I presented Samantha’s story about her reluctance associated with writing her birthing plan. She talked about not being detailed and rigid in her ideas because when the time comes, uncontrollable factors are likely to determine what happens and so being flexible is important. She explained how her attitude towards this is based on previous experiences of differences between what she imagined and actually experienced:

*Through the whole of our wedding preparation as well as this pregnancy what I’ve found is that when you’re actually in a situation that you anticipated for a long time in your life, whether that’s being engaged or planning the wedding day itself or being pregnant or having a baby, I think a lot of the, perhaps just personal things, but a lot of the things that I was absolutely sure I wanted or very dead set on before I was in the reality of that situation, when I was there*



*then all of a sudden a lot of them didn't seem as important as I thought that it would do and it was more important not to get hung up on the little things so that actually you could enjoy the process, whether that was planning the wedding or being pregnant....things like, how the invitations looked, at the end of the day the most important thing for me was making it easy to produce them and get them out so we didn't spend a lot of time doing them and also we didn't want to spend a lot of money so we did want to do them ourselves but I'd always imagined like putting loads and loads of time into it and having them absolutely perfect and doing them, actually when it came down to it actually it was more important that we had more time not sitting around and tying bits of ribbon or whatever we were doing, yes we had some nice invites, but we didn't spend forever doing them and I think it's that balance between having what you want and the reality of actually living your life alongside all of those things basically, and keeping that balance.*

She then described other experiences of this associated with her pregnancy:

*And although I didn't know what I would want to do, I always thought I would feel very strongly whether I wanted to find out the sex of the baby or not and actually it turns out I didn't feel strongly one way or the other and it came down to more the practical side of things as to whether I wanted to find out or not... I also used to think that I would be very very particular about what I ate, sticking to a, almost like a diet plan of you know 'must have fish twice a week, must have this' and don't get me wrong, I eat healthily but if I've not had fish in a week then I'm not counting it at all, it's not something that I've got hung up on. I thought, I really thought I would, I thought I would be planning everything to the nth degree and making sure the baby's getting all the nutrients but I think you just sort of, rightly or wrongly I don't know how I feel about it, you know people have been doing this for years and years and actually maybe if I gave it fish once more a week it would be a cleverer baby but then maybe it wouldn't and maybe it's not worth worrying and maybe the worry of trying to do all of that is worse for the baby than actually giving it whatever and maybe it's better that you just have what you want and ok eat healthily but not worry about it too much.... And one of the things that I thought I would want to do is have like a proper nursery all kitted out with things like the cot and set of drawers and little baby wardrobe and things but A, we haven't got the space for it and B, to get a*

*set like that, that I like, you're spending £500, yeah babies can be expensive but they don't have to be. The only furniture that we're gonna have for the baby is a Moses Basket that we've borrowed off a friend [laughs] so that saves us £500 really, you know depending on which route you choose to go down. I think I've been surprised at how little of what I guess I'd imagined you might need you actually do need, I've been quite minimal...*

We can see here that actualising a dream, which is often an ongoing or long term process (such as having a baby or planning a wedding), involves altering what was once an ideal to the parameters and conditions of current material reality. This is not to say that individuals have to modify their dreams *per se*, but that in the process of actualisation attitudes and priorities change because all aspects of life have to continue and life is about more than our ideal imaginings incorporate so we have to adjust our ideals because we can't live up to them. So she imagined that the wedding invitations would be extremely important to get right but when the time came, other aspects of the wedding and indeed other aspects of their daily lives presented themselves as more prominent – practical issues rather than ideals dominated material reality. Likewise, Samantha became more focused on the practical points of finding out the sex of their unborn baby (which came down to making it easier to choose a name) because her imagined strong attitude did not materialise, she decided it was more important to enjoy her pregnancy than worry about sticking to a diet plan, and money and space dictated that they wouldn't have a fully kitted out nursery, which is something she always thought she would want. However, the 'reality' of their situation is that they live in a two bedroom flat, where the second bedroom operates as an office due to her husband's work commitments and once the baby arrives it will double as an office come nursery and this situation does not lend itself to her previous ideal image of a perfectly kitted out nursery. The conditions of material reality have also combined with Samantha's realisation that the baby doesn't need a full nursery and this points to the notion that consumer culture paints a picture that becomes the norm, that the market may encourage us to get carried away with how we imagine things should be actualised – once again we see consumer culture reflected on here and quickly rejected as unnecessary, while for others it may be accepted and adhered to. Catherine, for example, tells me that her Mother has bought an entire Mama's and Papa's nursery range, from furniture to bed linens, wallpaper, wall clock and rug.

So it seems that the process of dream actualisation – the material reality of living life alongside actualising a dream – can vary greatly from earlier ideal imaginings and this is a result of the detail and conditions of material reality that are not incorporated in ideal imaginings but are central to everyday life in which we pursue and live out our dreams. Once again we can note that the role of material reality is key here and wonder at the way we deal with this experience. Do we modify dreams so as not to be disappointed and feel we have fulfilled them? Do we simply ‘write’ them off as unimportant or even farfetched? Do we just ‘get on’ and deal with life as it presents itself rather than reflect on what we had imagined previously?

### **Imaginative consequences**

Throughout this chapter so far I have touched upon several ways that consequential behaviours can be seen to have an impact on further imaginative activity. For instance, complementary approaching behaviours involve developing imaginative experiences with the use of various external resources and activities. Certain acts of consumption and specific consumer goods and experiences enable us to manage our imagination, for example as a safeguarding technique the act of consumption helps to protect us from negative imaginings in the future because it enables us to prevent these being possibilities in material reality. So we can see that certain behaviours and the impact of material reality on dream actualisation can alter the way that we imagine and may help control future imaginings.

Beyond this, there are further consequences for imagining related to what happens once a dream has been actualised, and here there are a number of issues to consider. With some of the participants in this study I was able to follow their stories over a period of time as they actualised their dreams and therefore gain an insight into the consequences of dream actualisation. A brief return to a notion identified in chapter one of the findings tells us that individuals may control their imagination by imagining in stages, allowing themselves to move on to the next stage as and when the conditions of material reality allows them. This notion re-presents itself upon actualisation of a dream, and does so in two ways. When individuals manage to actualise a dream they begin to think ahead to the next dream or next project that they want to work towards. It is also the

case that when an ongoing dream becomes the norm we may be spurred on to desire and imagine something else because the dream becomes mundane, it is part and parcel of everyday life and no longer so satisfying to imagine so we must find something else to occupy the imagination.

For instance, when talking to me about married life, Sandra explained that she felt as though she had gone through a rite of passage and now her life could ‘really’ start. Whilst in the planning stages, the wedding dominated her imagination and material reality for the four months that it was being planned, now that it is over, she has moved on to imagine life in their new house. While they are waiting for the sale to complete she takes part in lots of complementary behaviours and told me that she thinks about life in the new house “*all the time*”, moreover, she explains that this is just one in a series of projects and hopes for the future:

*I think about how it will look when we've finished doing it up, but I also think about how things will be, like when people come and visit, or when we're just watching TV in the evenings, how nice it will feel.... [we want to] move the bathroom upstairs is the first major job, knock down some walls downstairs to make a bigger kitchen, redecoration throughout, maybe add a porch on the front of the house, replace a window with French doors, the list is a bit endless... but it's liveable, so we'll just do it in our own time, which is within 6 months with my patience...I don't imagine living there for too long, it's a short term plan, hopefully do it up, make a bit of money and equity so that we can buy something bigger that will last us longer, like when we have kids and stuff.*

So the transformations they intend to make occupy her imagination now where the wedding used to and we can see how this move is part of a longer-term life-plan as she already anticipates moving when they have renovated the house so that they can get somewhere bigger where they will be able to start a family. This attitude was conveyed by a number of participants, particularly younger participants who are essentially ‘starting out’, so Monica who now owns a one bedroom flat with her boyfriend is eager to have a house and rather than live together is keen to be engaged – perhaps so that she can start imagining and planning the wedding. Now that the baby has arrived Samantha and her husband have put their flat on the market and want to upgrade to a house where they will raise their son and plan to have another child when he is two. So we get a

picture of a constant sense of moving on, finding something else to imagine and pursue. Perhaps then, it is the case that we understand progress through life goals and consumer trade-up. This idea was captured by Monica who told me '*we were saying the other day, why can't we be satisfied with the flat? Why isn't it enough? And it's because we know there's something better out there that we can have*'. One year ago the flat was everything to Monica, it symbolised a new life as a couple, which at the time was all she wanted – to know that their relationship was moving forward – and was the first stage of her larger life plan to settle down and have a family with Owen. A year on, and just six months of living in the refurbished flat, she is in search of something else (currently amounting to a 4 bedroom house further in the countryside) or in her words, something 'better'. For Monica, moving into a house brings with it greater hope of getting married and having children, whereas the one-bedroom flat does not hold the same possibilities. So we can see that our current life-stage determines what we imagine, for it is what we are working towards. But she was thinking about the house even *before* the flat was completed and they had moved in, so might it be that, where long-lasting dream pursuit is involved, a point of actualisation and fulfilment may not ever present itself?

## **Summary and emerging areas of discussion**

In unpacking the behavioural, lived and imaginative consequences of imagining four key issues emerge as important areas of discussion. First, the details of consumption appear more prominent in material reality than they are when we imagine. This raises issues for discussion in relation to the role of consumption in the imagination and in material reality, highlighting a tension between its roles in each domain and further highlighting the notions of presence and absence. Could it be that consumption is so deeply embedded – and therefore present – in everyday life that we take it for granted and consequently its role in the everyday imagination (particularly in relation to broader imagining) is peripheral – it is assumed and therefore may often be made absent? Second, develops the notion raised in the first chapter that we are able to exert control over our imagination, that we anticipate future imaginative activity and emotional experiences and act accordingly. Here we extend this by seeing consumption as a possible solution, it seems that consumption offers a way for us to avoid or even eliminate negative forms of imagining and so may be the answer to many of our worries and fears. Third, the context for this study highlights the often long term, ongoing

process of actualisation and as such may be more complex than the cycle of desire for consumer goods might suggest. We can see that the journey to achieve desire is something to be considered here and although this does not always run smoothly it seems that individuals would not want to change the process or give up on it. So there are more properties at work in the realisation of desire than we might have previously considered. Finally the possible issues that underlie dreams may need to be considered more carefully. It is evident that we continually aim for more, not necessarily in terms of acquiring more but doing more, pursuing and achieving something in hope of improving the quality of our lives and on the understanding that the future holds more and better. Is this progress for progress sake? Or is it more deeply bound to a desire for desire, like Campbell (1987) and Belk et al (2003) state?

## **Chapter Eight: Discussion**

In the findings chapters I have described the experiences and begun to highlight and unravel some of the complexities and contradictions of the imagination and of imagining, not only in terms of imaginative practices, but in relation to various contextual influences, precursors and consequences. In doing so we are able to start building a fuller picture of how consumption practices, consumer goods, and consumer culture feature in the everyday imagination and how imagining relates to our everyday lives. We come to see that consumption in the imagination is not restricted to pleasurable daydreams centred on consumer desires but is more complex in terms of the range of imaginative forms and practices that we engage in, the varied roles for consumption, and in terms of the significance of the imagination in material reality.

In the following discussion I address the issues that emerged as significant throughout the findings chapters, unpacking these in light of existing theory and research and considering their broader implications for consumers and everyday life. The imagination is by no means a 'neat' subject area. There are a number of complex, interconnected and overlapping issues that can be difficult to articulate. My aim here is to bring these together in an attempt to build a more cohesive story and understanding of the role of consumption in the everyday imagination. To this end, I start by dealing with the different kinds of imaginative experiences, I then focus on how consumption features in the imagination, before considering further complexities of imaginative practices, particularly related to the relationship between imagination and material reality, and finally I consider the social nature of the everyday imagination.

I begin by addressing the range of possibilities for everyday imagining that were apparent in the participants' stories and present a taxonomy of imagining that considers the various components that help to define and differentiate the levels of imagining that have been identified, essentially mapping out the imagination.

I then consider the role of consumption in the imagination. Here I focus on the different ways that consumption, consumer goods and the broader consumer culture, feature in imaginative experiences. As an extension of the notions of foreground and (back)ground as recognised in phenomenology (Thompson et al 1989), and identified roles for consumer goods and consumption practices acknowledged elsewhere (e.g. Miller 2010, Illouz 1997), I use Law's (2004) concepts of presence, manifest absence and othering to capture the variety of ways that different aspects of consumption feature in the imagination. Although there were examples of 'consumption dreams' where goods were made present and focused upon, overwhelmingly it was the case that goods were relegated to the background, and consumption practices were largely unacknowledged, while emotional experiences, relationships and ways of being formed the focus. Yet it was apparent that consumer culture provides the dominant narrative, so overall we see that consumption is ever present in the imagination. In contrast to consumption in the imagination I then turn to consider its role in material reality, particularly as a consequence of imagining where it often becomes the solution to our dreams and fears.

I then focus on the complexities of imaginative practices that tell us more about the nature of imagining in everyday life, specifically in relation to the way that we negotiate and manage daily life, our emotions and future imaginative experiences. I consider the reciprocal relationship between material reality and the imagination, where we see the everyday constantly asserting itself on the imagination and the imagination as an important factor prompting us to act in certain ways in our daily life; the two are a negotiation. As an outcome of this relationship we also see that individuals have an awareness of their imagination and its role in their lives, adopting strategies to negotiate and manage their emotions and their material reality, here I consider the notion, or presence, of a meta-imagination – the idea that we think about or imagine imagining. Essentially, we come to see the imagination as managed; we exert control over our own imagination and thus we may see that it offers us a felt sense of autonomy and control in our everyday lives. Yet it is also the case that material reality – what is possible or likely in everyday life – acts on our imagination and appears to be the source of management, guiding and constraining what we imagine. So the autonomy we experience is incomplete, it is conditional on imagining remaining ideal, when material reality does not impose on an imagined scenario. With regard to the imagination acting



on material reality it becomes apparent that the pursuit of our dreams and desires may become something life encompassing; it is not only about attaining an object of desire but the journey involved in its pursuit.

Finally I consider the social nature of imagination in terms of other people as a feature in and influence on our imagination, as well as the wider social and cultural environment. I note that despite being a private and inner-directed activity or realm, the imagination appears to be highly social, in that involves relationships with others but is also inspired by the social world.

### **Exploring forms of imagination**

The participants' stories reveal the range and scope of imaginative experiences in everyday life, making it apparent that individuals experience more forms of imagining than the current dominant conceptualisation of the imagination in consumer behaviour acknowledges (e.g. Campbell's 1987 modern imaginative hedonist, or 'dream artist'). We see instances of people talking about how they imagine their ideal family life or alternative lifestyle; pleasurably reminiscing over family holidays; being worried about the potential pitfalls of retirement or impressing the guests at a wedding; considering the dull but very 'real' aspects of living with a boyfriend, and more and we see consumption, in some form, as a part of all these scripts. While many of the stories and descriptions of ideal imaginings could be equated with the kinds of daydreams that Campbell (1987), McCracken (1988) and Belk et al (2003) discuss – i.e. where the promised transformation to an ideal way of being is at the centre and the goods are seen as bridges to access such desired states – the experiences and desires I heard were not elicited through asking about consumption dreams specifically, and while they may involve consumption or be shaped by consumer culture goods were not necessarily a bridge to, but an assumed part of certain ways of being. It was apparent that consumption became more prominent when attempts at actualisation were made. So while existing conceptualisations see goods as the starting point, around which daydreams are crafted, 'the focal object of fervent longing is all important' (Belk et al 2003, p327), like Pettigrew's (2005) study of ideal lives and Schiebe et al's (2007) study of lifelongings, a prioritisation of consumption is less apparent in the context of

everyday imagining, though as we shall see, this does not mean it is unimportant (Miller 2010).

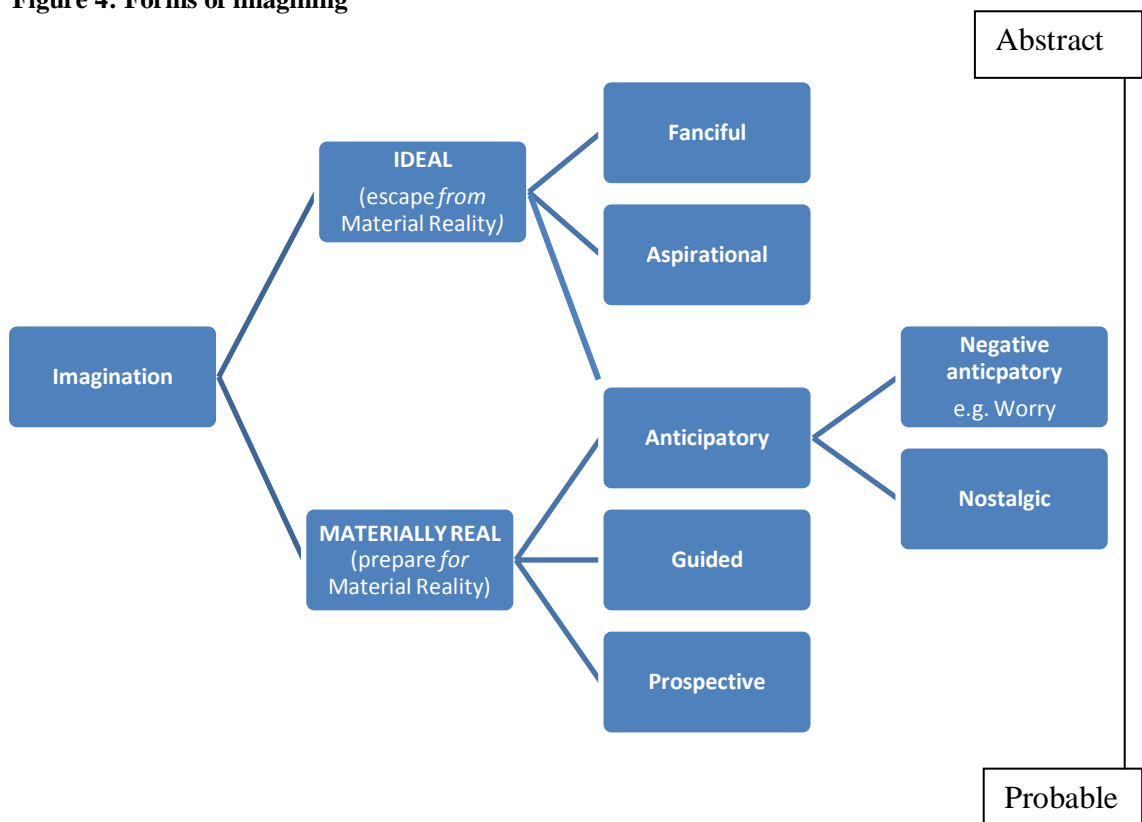
Some of the kinds of imaginative experiences, particularly ideal imagining, align with forms of imagining acknowledged in existing theory and research, while others – materially real forms – add nuance to our understanding or suggest an extension of the range of imagination as it is considered in consumer behaviour theory. In particular we see a number of emotional and temporal possibilities in addition to the degree of abstraction and elaboration that has previously been acknowledged (e.g. in Fournier and Guiry 1993, Belk 2001, Campbell 1987). We also see that different forms of imagining have different purposes. While this too has been noted previously (e.g. Christensen et al 2004) the focus remains on the functions of consumption dreams specifically, and the desire based view of imagination recognises pleasure and escape as dominant in terms of function (Campbell 1987, McCracken 1988). In terms of everyday imagining, we see that it is not restricted to or necessarily even dominated by pleasure but is, perhaps, more fundamental to our everyday lives. This fundamentality becomes clearer as the discussion develops and we consider the relationship between imagination and material reality and see that the ‘materially real’ forms of imagining shed light on what is perhaps an overlooked area of the imagination.

I do not want to simply restate the characteristics of individual forms of imagining relating them to theory one by one, but rather draw out the central insights that develop our current understanding of the imagination in consumer behaviour. In the findings I organised imaginative activities according to two key modes; ‘ideal’ and ‘materially real’. These can be positioned on a probable/abstract scale (Shields 2002) – the degree of abstraction being a key characteristic that helps to distinguish them from one another. I set these out visually in figure 3.

From the diagram we see the two key modes of imagining – ideal and materially real. From these stem the five main forms of imagining where we note that ‘anticipatory imagining’ may take three forms – positive (anticipatory), negative (particularly worry) and past orientated (referred to as ‘nostalgic imagining’). We also note that anticipatory

imagining straddles the ideal/materially real border, this is because they may involve idealised scenarios of actual events and circumstances of material reality – so they are based in material reality but are less planful and restricted than guided or prospective imagining. On the far right of the diagram is the abstract/probable scale with ideal imaginings situated as the most abstract while the materially real mode – those daydreams and imaginings that are grounded in the events and circumstances of material reality – are more probable in terms of actualisation but also in relation to the events and issues featured within them.

**Figure 4: Forms of imagining**



Ideal imagining centres on our hopes, desires and aspirations *for* life, their content is not influenced by the conditions or details of material reality. While materially real imagining is grounded in the events and circumstances *of* life – they are focused on material reality. Each mode has a different purpose, but both serve the same overall function. Ideal imagining acts as an escape from daily life, where we can indulge in ideals and pleasurable scenarios that material reality cannot provide, which is what has tended to be covered elsewhere (e.g. Campbell 1987, McCracken 1988, Belk et al 2003). Materially real imagining performs a more preparatory function, helping us to

manage daily life and deal with its various circumstances and constraints. Both however, enable us to cope with everyday life, either through temporary escape or through preparation and planning (Cohen and Taylor 1976, Leonard 2005, Klinger 1990).

If we look at the two modes we see a likeness to existing work that distinguishes on the basis of abstraction. For instance, Fenichel (1945) distinguishes between daydreaming fantasies (abstract/ideal) and creative fantasies (probable), as does Singer (1966), and in their study of consumption dreaming, Fournier and Guiry (1993), pick up on these, observing a scale between these two poles from fantastic to realistic. They note that different kinds of daydreams may be based on either wishes (pure daydreams) – those things that are hoped for – or wants (planful daydreams) – those things that are prioritised or expected to be actualised. We also see this fantasy – reality distinction in Campbell's (1987) thesis, which is supported with empirical data by Christensen (2002), and Belk (2001) notes 'hopeless' and 'hopeful' fantasies at opposite ends of the fantasy spectrum.

We may also see a similar argument in Belk et al's (2003) work when they state that desires can be turned into goals as a means to help us actualise them, this is when they change from wishes to wants, hopes to plans and expectations or according to the modes I note, imagining would move from ideal to materially real – when we begin to pursue a dream and it therefore becomes part of our material reality.

While the two modes that I note are similar to existing distinctions, my research adds further nuance in terms of degrees of idealism and realism, which we come to see is related to material reality that may provide the context for imagining, as well as various emotional and temporal possibilities – consumption not only features in positive future orientated daydreams but also past orientated and negative forms, that become a common part of everyday (materially real) imagining.

It is difficult to neatly and systemically categorise imaginative experiences because they are highly situated and therefore there may be problems in being too prescriptive. For instance, considering that anticipatory imagining straddles the border between ideal and materially real modes we see that actual forthcoming or past events form the basis of an imagined scenario, but they remain somewhat idealised because the full weight of material reality (in terms of all the things we (would) have to consider related to a scenario in daily life) has not presented itself – there is still distance between the here and now and the actual event, consequently it is open to imaginative indulgence. What makes them materially real is that the pursuit process has begun – the dream is becoming or has become part of everyday life, or in the case of nostalgic imagining has already occurred. So where precise defining is difficult, because of the complex nature of imagining, broader terms of reference may be useful. For instance, fanciful, aspirational and positive anticipatory imagining can all be classed as ‘positive imagined futures’.

In attempting to capture and distinguish between the different forms of imagining I present a taxonomy (figure 4), which helps us to map out the imagination. Essentially it elaborates on the earlier diagram (figure 3), that set out the various modes and forms of imagining, by providing details regarding the characteristics that help to define and distinguish forms from one another, specifically; the degree of abstraction; the temporal location; the level of elaboration; kind and level of emotion; the roles of consumption, as well as the main causes for imagining and the purpose it serves for the individual. I have also noted relevant literature that each level of imagining shares similarities with.

On the far left is the mode of imagining, followed by the specific forms, which are ordered according to the degree of abstraction, starting with the most abstract. Next is the temporal location, where we see the past, present and future as possible locations. The level of elaboration refers to the detail in terms of mental imagery and thought, here we are able to note that while ideal forms of imagining may be elaborate, it is not the

Mode of imagination	Form	Degree of abstraction	Temporal location	Level of elaboration	Emotion	Assemblage (role for consumption)	Cause	Purpose	Similarities and links to literature
Ideal	<b>Fanciful</b>	<i>Very high</i>	<i>Future or other time or space</i>	<i>High-Very high</i>	<i>Positive</i>	<p><b>Present in foreground:</b> ways of being, emotions, relationships (in consumption daydreams consumer goods made present)</p> <p><b>Present in background:</b> consumer goods</p>	<i>Dissatisfaction / boredom</i>	<i>Escape MR Pleasure Compensation</i>	<p><b>Daydreaming</b> (Campbell 1987, Christensen 2002, McCracken 1988)  <b>Pure daydreaming /daydreaming fantasy</b> (Singer 1975, Fournier and Guiry 1993, Fenichel 1945)  <b>Hopeless fantasy &amp; enchanted illusions</b> (Belk 2001)  <b>Consumption dreams</b> (d'Astous and Deschênes 2005)  <b>Based on desire</b> (Belk et al 1996; 1997; 2003)  <b>Wishful thinking &amp; impossible imaginings</b> Stevens and Maclaran (2005)</p>
	<b>Aspirational</b>	<i>High</i>	<i>Distant future</i>	<i>Very high</i>	<i>Positive</i>	<p><b>Manifest absent:</b> details of consumption</p> <p><b>Otherved:</b> current material reality &amp; details of material reality as it would be experienced upon actualisation. Consumer culture unable to be otherved.</p>	<i>Dissatisfaction / boredom</i>	<i>Escape MR Pleasure Compensation Explore Motivation to act</i>	
	<b>Anticipatory*</b>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Mid/near future</i>	<i>Very high</i>	<i>Positive</i>		<i>Current concerns / dissatisfaction</i>	<i>Escape from MR Compensation Explore Motivation to act</i>	<p>As above but also linked to plans and priorities:  <b>planful daydreams</b> (Singer 1975, Fournier and Guiry 1993),  <b>creative fantasy</b> (Fenichel 1945)</p>

Figure 5: Taxonomy of imagination (continued on pages 207 – 208)

Mode of imagination	Form	Degree of abstraction	Temporal location	Level of elaboration	Emotion	Assemblage (role for consumption)	Cause	Purpose	Similarities and links to literature
Materially Real	Negative anticipatory – Worry	Medium	Near/mid Future	High – very high	Negative	<p><b>Present in foreground:</b> ways of being, emotions, relationships, inc. details of material reality upon actualisation. Details of consumption force presence.</p> <p><b>Present in background:</b> Consumer goods</p> <p><b>Othered:</b> (potentially) positive aspects of imagined reality Consumer culture unable to be othered</p>	Current concerns, other peoples' experiences & reactions	Prepare for MR Explore Prepare (for worst) Motivation to act	<p><b>Worried daydreams</b> (Klinger 1990)  <b>Negative daydreams</b> (Singer 1975)  <b>Consumer fantasies</b> (Leonard 2005)</p>
	Nostalgic	Medium	Past	High	Positive or negative	<p><b>Present in foreground:</b> ways of being, emotions, relationships. In consumption daydreams consumer goods and experiences made present</p> <p><b>Present in background:</b> Consumer goods</p> <p><b>Manifest absent:</b> Details of consumption</p> <p><b>Othered:</b> Details of material reality as it was actually experienced &amp; details of material reality as they would be upon recreation/actualisation. Consumer culture unable to be othered.</p>	Current concerns, Fond memories, bad memories	Escape MR - Pleasure  Prepare for MR – Explore Learn Motivation to act (inc. avoid)	<p><b>Past orientated daydreams</b> (Singer 1975, Klinger 1990)  <b>Nostalgia</b> (Holbrook 1993, Holbrook and Schindler 1991; 2003)  <b>Nostalgia for/desire to return to a golden past</b> (McCracken 1988, Belk et al 2003)</p>

Mode of imagination	Form	Degree of abstraction	Temporal location	Level of elaboration	Emotion	Assemblage (role for consumption)	Cause	Purpose	Similarities and links to literature
Materially real (cont.)	Guided	Low	Present/ Near future	Low	Low level positive or negative (more rational)	<p><b>Present in foreground:</b> Consumer goods/exps. Details of consumption force presence.</p> <p><b>Present in background:</b> Details of current material reality.</p> <p><b>Othered:</b> Consumer culture unable to be othered</p>	Current concerns	Preparation for MR Planning Organising Decision making	<p><b>Planful daydream</b> (Singer 1975, Fournier and Guiry 1993).</p> <p><b>Creative fantasy</b> (Fenichel 1945)</p> <p><b>Imaginative anticipation</b> (Campbell 1987)</p> <p><b>Anticipating reality</b> (Christensen 2002)</p>
	Prospective	Very low	Future or past	Very low	Low level positive or negative (more rational)	<p><b>Present:</b> Consumer goods/exps. Details of possible material reality.</p> <p><b>Othered:</b> Consumer culture unable to be othered</p>	Current concerns	Preparation for MR Planning Set expectations	<p><b>Imaginative anticipation</b> (Campbell 1987)</p> <p><b>Anticipating reality</b> (Christensen 2002)</p> <p><b>Expectations</b> (Oettingen and Mayer 2002)</p>

\*Anticipatory imagining is listed here under the ideal mode as it shares more qualities with fanciful and aspirational forms, though it may still be considered a materially real form because it is based on the actual events (past and forthcoming) of material reality.



case the more abstract a scenario the more detailed and elaborate it is. For instance we can consider that aspirational daydreams can be more elaborate than fanciful because they are based on more solid foundations – such as our memories of our own childhood informing hopes for future family life – when we have more to ‘go on’, we may be able to create more vivid daydreams. I then consider the emotion, and note that in some materially real forms there is only a low level of emotion and more rational quality, which occurs in line with the more practical and plan based imagining becomes. The next column considers the assemblage of an imagined reality or scenario, which concerns the roles of consumption in the everyday imagination. It notes the different aspects of an assemblage – presence (foreground and background), manifest absence, and othering – and proposes which aspects of consumption may take these roles, as well as other aspects of a scenario that are involved. This column of the taxonomy will be discussed in depth shortly when I unpack the roles for consumption in the imagination. Next I note the main causes for each form of imagining and then their purposes. Finally I note existing theory and research that is linked to each form. These are not necessarily parallel forms of imagining but ones that share similarities with the forms I have identified.

I do not claim that this is a complete taxonomy; there are likely to be gaps. Potential additions may include; fantastic imagining that is more aligned to fantasy, ‘idealised negative futures’, such as ‘dark’ daydreams, the negative emotional equivalent of fanciful and aspirational imagining. This could include things such as imagining a break-up or divorce, a terminal illness, a loved one’s death or funeral – things that are possible but not part of material reality. There is also the potential for negative idealised past orientated imagining, perhaps imagining a relationship as worse than it was because of a recent break-up and because it is too painful to look back on it positively. It is likely though that these are the kinds of occasions when we stop or prevent ourselves from imagining, as Klinger (1990) states, we do not daydream about negative events for very long simply because we do not like to think about bad experiences.

It is also the case that a certain form of imagining may be experienced in different ways – for instance guided imagining could be highly elaborated as the details of material

reality that are included may help us to envisage a more detailed (vivid) scene. For example, when planning a wedding, once all the decisions have been made, we may be better equipped to imagine how everything will look, we can hear the music as we imagine walking down the aisle, what we'll look like in the dress, how the day will go and so on. Hence broader categories might be an appropriate way to categorise, and indeed the highly situated and shifting nature of the imagination may be why such categorisations have not been offered previously but rather a preference for looser terms and definitions has been favoured in order to cover a multitude of possibilities that may fall under a 'planful' or 'pure' daydream for example (e.g. Fourier and Guiry 1993).

Nevertheless, these more detailed categorisations do help us to better appreciate a wider variety of possibilities for imaginative experiences. Particularly, they may be positive or negative in terms of emotion, past or future orientated (though future imagining is more prominent) and range in the degree to which they are elaborated and abstracted. So while 'fantasy and imagination are typically contrasted to a rational, mature mode of thinking' (Leonard 2005, p15), as we see in the current depiction in consumer behaviour – a contrast between pleasurable, fantastic, elaborate fantasies and daydreams and rational forms of thought such as remorse, dissonance, regret and satisfaction – from the findings we can see different degrees of rationality and emotion in different forms of imagination. The apparent rationalised quality is based on the conditions of material reality and its potential outcomes, which is particularly prominent in terms of where my findings extend our existing understanding, and therefore the main issue I want to draw attention to is that many imaginative experiences are *about* life; they are based on the events and concerns of material reality, not just in terms of topic and focus – things that are actually 'going on' or forthcoming – but various circumstances and conditions as well.

Where ideal imaginings are similar in nature to existing conceptualisations of daydreaming and consumption dreaming, in that they are future orientated, feature idealised versions of life and omit 'life's little inconveniences' (Campbell 1987, p84), materially real forms of imagining highlight that imagining is not always about pleasurable ideals that deviate from what is realistic, but illustrate that material reality

can be an integral component of an imagined scenario. While Campbell (1987; 1994) states that pleasurable daydreams may *begin* by imagining a forthcoming or a 'hoped-for event', these then come to represent something much more fanciful and distanced from reality. Yet many of the participants' stories tended to stay *within* the context of their everyday lives not only in terms of being centred around an actual or forthcoming event but the specific circumstances of their own situation (e.g. budgets, needs) as well as the wider conditions of material reality (e.g. a specific job industry). These we saw may involve past or future locations and positive or negative emotions.

So we saw stories where individuals focused on forthcoming events that may be a source of pleasure and pain, such as the excitement associated with moving home or to another country together with the angst and worry that imagining and pursuing these experiences also cause; events from the past that were reflected on with happiness; those experiences where individual circumstances and the wider environment were taken into account and guided imaginative activity, making imagining more realistic and often less pleasurable and less emotional. In all of these, and more, we see that the imagination takes on a character that is much closer to material reality and helps us to negotiate and manage our daily lives by including the things we may actually have to consider and deal with. While those such as Campbell (1987), Fournier and Guiry (1993), and d'Astous and Deschênes (2005) may argue that we cope with a dissatisfactory reality by escaping to the imagination where we can experience pleasure and receive (consumption focused) compensation, it is apparent that we also cope with material reality by imagining in-line with it, helping us to plan, prepare and rehearse (Klinger 1990). It is this that marks a more rational side to the imagination, where it has often been thought of as a highly emotional sphere (e.g. Campbell 1987, Belk et al 2003), in fact, we see that it can be both. It is also in these forms where we see consumption is made present. I now want to discuss the roles of consumption in the imagination before moving on to consider in detail the relationship between material reality and imagination and the complex imaginative practices that result from this relationship.

## **Unpacking the roles of consumption, commodities and consumer culture in the everyday imagination**

A central concern of this study is to develop a better appreciation and a contextualised understanding of the ways that consumption features in the imagination. By studying a broader range of imaginative experiences in the context of everyday life, rather than in the context of consumption directly, we are able to see how consumption is manifest in a number of different ways.

In the stories of everyday imagining it was clear that a variety of things may form the focus of attention in the imagination; consumption was sometimes central, but more often concerns about everyday life, relationships, ways of being and emotional experiences often dominate. Of course it is possible to see these kinds of daydreams as similar in nature to the kinds of consumption daydreams that Campbell (1987), McCracken (1988), Belk et al (2003) and d'Astous and Deschênes (2005) describe, in that imaginings revolve around the kinds of experiences that goods lend themselves to – that people imagine in relation to owning a particular consumer good or experience, which holds the promise of transformation to this altered state. Yet in these depictions the sought after goods remains all important (Belk et al 2003) precisely because of the promises it holds as a bridge to an ideal (McCracken 1988). My approach, however, lay in asking about the specific life projects and everyday lives of individuals and such descriptions emerged without a direct focus on consumption. It was often the case that individuals may, for example, imagine a happy family life in the future, and understand or contextualise this within consumer culture; certain material goods and consumption practices that help us envision happy family life, though these aspects were not laboured. So rather than desiring an object for the possibilities it holds in terms of alternative ways of being, I note that ways of being are desired more directly and these are assumed to involve consumer goods. Where my analysis of consumption in the imagination extends existing work is in looking at consumption in a variety of roles as it occurs in relation to broader imaginings. So beyond acting as a bridge to displaced meaning (McCracken 1988) and as conduits to loving relationships (Belk et al 2003), my analysis considers how else consumption features, and inversely may not feature (Illouz 1997), in imagined scenarios.

To develop a more sufficient understanding of consumption in the imagination I consider how different aspects of consumption feature – that is, consumption practices, consumer goods and experiences, and consumer culture – and the various roles these take. We know from phenomenology that aspects of an experience may be figural (in the foreground) or may recede into the background (Thompson et al 1989), but the focus remains on how a given experience or phenomenon is experienced and understood by the individual in the context of their life world. Miller (2010) and Illouz (1997), however, stress that we should pay particular attention to consumption when it appears to be ‘hidden’ – when individuals may ignore their practices – for it is then that we are able to see how material goods and our consumer culture ‘act’ on us. When we look at these stories from this perspective we may consider them in terms of what is made present and focal, and what is hidden or absent (Law 2004). Moreover, we may consider the autonomous processes involved in assembling imaginative scenarios through making things present and absent (Law 2004).

### ***The presence, absence and othering of consumption in the imagination***

Law (2004) provides a set of terms that bring together and extend approaches that consider how a certain situation is structured and experienced by analysing how a given scenario or reality is assembled. These concepts are useful when looking at how imaginative scenarios – or imagined realities – are assembled. If we consider that the imagination is assembled, then we consider what is made in that assembling – what reality is experienced? – and what is it made from? – what aspects are present and therefore, what aspects are absent?

For Law (2004), the focus of a scenario is that which is made present and directly experienced, and this may tell us a lot about individuals’ priorities and concerns, but ‘presence is incomplete and depends on absence’ (Law 2004, p84), and so it is important to consider what is *not* the focus of an imagined scenario. Law (2004) proposes differing degrees of absence; ‘manifest absence’ refers to those things that are absent but manifest in their absence, necessary parts of a scenario – things that are evident, or noticeable – that have disappeared or are omitted. With regard to how I use these terms in relation to the imagination, I consider two levels of presence; present in

the foreground as a central focus, and present in the background, as props or part of the setting – things that are acknowledged but mentioned only fleetingly. I take manifest absence to be aspects that are required for the scene to take place, but where there is no mention of what is required for them to be there. This is similar to how Illouz (1997) regards a walk on the beach as a romantic moment; it may be experienced as simply a romantic stroll but to be so it requires aspects of consumption in terms of a car, car parking fee and so on. These things are required to make an experience, or reality, what it is, to enable a daydream to take place as it does, but are largely ignored. ‘Othering’ is another form of absence, it refers to aspects of a reality that ‘disappear’, a likely result of something being routine or uninteresting. In terms of imagined realities this may relate to the mundane, routine conditions of material reality. Othering also regards other possible realities that could have been assembled (Law 2004); for one reality to be imagined, there are likely others that are not considered. In relation to consumption in the imagination this refers to consumer culture providing the narrative and our inability to assemble other possible realities (outside consumer culture).

When we look at the things that individuals make present we see idealised relationships, ways of being, emotional experiences and the meaning of social practices are most often focal. The ‘good life’ is assembled not from consumer goods directly, but from cultural scripts of happy families and simple living. When this is the case, consumer goods recede into the background and consumption practices fade into manifest absence as we saw with Monica’s descriptions of imagining her home. In both stories (anticipatory imagining about the flat they are currently renovating and aspirational imagining about the farmhouse lifestyle she and her partner dream of in the future), we see goods recede into the background while she makes present the ‘feeling’ of home and imagines different ways of being in both of these places. In such stories, there is an assumed level of material comfort, consumer goods are often mentioned but these act as props, as part of the setting and context within which we imagine emotional and relational aspects. The consumer practices necessary for such a scenario to take place – the researching, choosing and purchasing of particular goods, the mundane aspects of everyday life in a consumer society – are manifest absent as she focuses on idealised notions of home and family. To briefly return to her story, we recall that she described a picture of family life where the children and dog play outside, unannounced visits from friends are welcomed

and she feels secure and content, these aspects were made present. In this picture she mentioned a bed with a white duvet and an oak kitchen table, so consumer goods are also present but mentioned rather fleetingly as part of the setting that helps her to envisage family life – these are present but in the background. The details of consumption (desiring, researching, choosing and acquiring), however, are manifest absent. They had to occur in order for the duvet, the table and so on to be in the dream, but they are not acknowledged. Even the purchase of the house itself is not addressed. All the things that are required to make this picture what it is are taken for granted or as Illouz (1997) regards, they are ignored. By looking at the assemblage in this way, it is apparent that a ‘consuming’ life is ‘there’ but is not necessarily noticed or elaborated. Consistent with Miller (2010), here we can see how goods become a frame to our behaviour, they may not be focused upon, at times they may not even be noticed, but their being there demonstrates that we imagine life and ways of being within our consumer culture. The good life is understood through a happy family and successful relationships that are largely built on a satisfactory consumer culture – other possible realities for constructing the good life (outside consumer culture) are not considered. And in constructing this imagined reality, Monica ‘others’ her current material reality (it is put aside and not part of the daydream) as well as the details of material reality as they would occur if the scenario were to be actualised (the annoyance of uninvited guests, children fighting rather than playing happily and so on). So to imagine in an ideal form, many mundane aspect of daily life – including consumption practices – are not focused upon.

The notion of imagining within the remit of consumer culture was particularly prevalent in Holly’s description of her perfect family life in the future. She says that she does not want to buy her children meaningless things but give them opportunities to learn through hobbies and sport. Here she rejects aspects of consumer culture – the buying of meaningless objects – and considers consumption as dispersed practice (Warde 2005) where it is used to operationalise her ideal role as a loving parent. The wellbeing and development of her children is made paramount, yet the possibility of envisioning these ideals outside of their consumerist markers is othered; at the same time as dismissing ‘meaningless’ consumer goods, Holly mis-reads or ignores the consumer scripts acting on her ideals. And so in line with Illouz’s (1997, p148) observations on the

commodification of romance, it seems that while individuals may see themselves and their actions as ‘divorced from acts of consumption’, and instead focus on the emotional or relational experience, they are in fact reproducing the consumerist order. Since the market co-opts and commodifies emotional experiences, such as romance, can we expect consumption in some form *not* to be involved in imagining?

The prevalence of a consumer ideology is also clearly visible when we consider how individuals pursue and actualise their dreams. If we briefly return to the consequences of imagining for behaviour, it is apparent that saving and making money is a common requirement for people to pursue their dreams and make them a reality, this necessarily indicates the consumption aspects of our hopes and desires, even when they are expressed in terms of ideal relationships and emotional experiences, which are made present in the imagination. In a similar way, Leonard (2005) notes this of honeymoons, where individuals focus on the ‘spiritual bond’ yet adhere to social and market conventions regarding luxurious accommodation, tropical locations and so the consumer aspects of this spiritual vacation is of great importance even when individuals may not focus on it or in fact say the opposite. Even though individuals may discuss relationships as most important and simple pleasures as more satisfying, we recognise that these are ‘done’ or achievable in a certain way – those ways given to us by the market (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Patrick and Matteo are not settling for a small barn conversion in Italy, but a big farmhouse with 30 acres of land. Simone has not taken on a second job to be able to afford a small wedding but because the budget has doubled from £9000 to £18000 and she wants to exceed everyone’s expectations. Yet the focus of ideal imagining is predominantly not on these consumption related aspects.

If we continue down the forms of imagining in the taxonomy, we see that when we imagine negatively, particularly when we worry there is still a focus on ways of being, but undesirable or feared experiences and here the (potential) details of material reality are also present in the foreground as we anticipate all sorts of possibilities. When we worry about the future, such as Simone’s worries and stresses about things that could go wrong on the wedding day, the details of consumption may also be made present in terms of the ways that consumption can help solve our problems and quash our negative



imaginings. When we focus on negative aspects, we may ‘other’ potentially positive aspects of a given reality. We may find it difficult to acknowledge other possibilities because the presence of our worry is so strong – this, as Law (2004) states, is sometimes a requirement of an assemblage; certain aspects may need to be othered so that others can be made present.

In relation to nostalgic imagining, again ways of being are made present and the goods that make up the setting are present in the background. The details of consumption are manifest absent – we do not address the consumption practices involved in making a scenario actual. Likewise, in this form of positive reflection the details of material reality – as they were and as they may be upon possible recreation are othered. For example, family feuds that may have taken place on Jim’s skiing holiday are removed as he focuses on the pleasurable feeling of family togetherness.

Guided imagining and prospective imagining are far more rational and less elaborate. In both we see that consumption is present as are the conditions or details of material reality. In guided imagining particularly, consumer goods and the details of consumption are present in the foreground and we may consider that they force their presence as a result of our material reality. For instance, Simone and Sandra who were both planning weddings were preoccupied with wedding paraphernalia and explained how the wedding dominated their thoughts as well as their material reality. Simone’s wedding budget guided how she imagined certain elements of the day, such as the cake and flowers, while Monica and Patrick’s renovation projects required consumption practices in keeping with their budgets that guide what and how they imagine. And when expecting a baby, as in the cases of Catherine and Samantha, consumption becomes a focus in order to prepare ourselves and our home for the baby’s arrival. Consumption may become more prominent in the imagination as it does in material reality at these times of transition because, as Davies et al (2010) remark, it is important in helping us enact and come to terms with new roles. Like Miller (2005; 2010) then, material goods help to concretise abstract concepts that may be difficult for us to imagine in any other way. But these things also require consumption – consumption related to a forthcoming event becomes a ‘current concern’ (Klinger (1990) – and when

this is the case the imagination may also focus on it. Different kinds of imagining then (ideal Vs materially real), incite different roles for various aspects of consumption.

To summarise then, in ideal imagining consumer goods tend to be present in the background, the details of consumption manifest absent, while consumer culture provides the narrative within which we imagine ways of being, emotions and relationships that are made present in the foreground, while the details of current material reality and material reality as it may transpire upon actualisation are othered. In materially real forms of imagining there are more instances of consumer goods and the details of consumption being present in the foreground and where they may force their presence based on the requirements of material reality, though emotions, relationships and ways of being are still focused upon and consumer culture still provides the overall narrative. In all of the forms we see that consumer culture cannot be othered. What is significant then, is that consumption in some form is always 'there', whether it is made present or manifest absent and our apparent inability to other it means we cannot imagine outside consumer culture.

That said, there were times when consumption was made present in a negative manner where participants commented upon aspects of consumption and consumer culture that they consider unsatisfactory, that may be seen as the reason for unhappiness and discontent in material reality, or are simply viewed as unnecessary. Patrick spoke of alienating aspects of consumer culture as a cause of his discontent with daily life, holding consumption to account and a key factor prompting his move to Italy for a slower pace of life where they intend to be as self-sufficient as possible. Here Patrick constructs the good life as simple and rural and dismisses an urban, consumption based good life. Consumer culture here – or a particular part of it – *is* othered, as he imagines a different kind of good life and reflects on consumer culture as an unsatisfactory reality. Sandra also acknowledged consumption related concerns in relation to the overly consumer aspects of weddings that detract from the true meaning of marriage. Samantha commented on the fact that although other people, especially sales people, lead you to believe you should buy everything, and the best of everything, for your baby, in fact they need very little. Barbara raised more general concerns as she reflected

about other people in the world having very little but being happy, while we (in the West) have so much but are never satisfied. These stories all raise concerns with consumer culture, and while it may be tempting to read these as a sign of consumer resistance to our everyday frustrations with consumer society, we are reminded that Sandra did not reject a material wedding, and some critics would argue that Patrick's 'escape to the country' is yet another consumer script (for example see Twitchell 1999, who condemns voluntary simplicity as just another form of consumption and a different kind of consumer lifestyle) and a growing cultural trend amongst certain social groups in the UK (Thomas 2008). So it is only *some* aspects of consumer culture that are rejected or othered, in some cases new, better realities are assembled out of different narratives and aspects of consumer culture.

By making certain things present and others absent we are able to experience events in an ideal form, free of the constraints, practicalities and routine that we face in daily life. As such we can see that the imagination is clearly a place where individuals have a degree of control over the aspects of life that they want to focus on and those they want to make absent. The focus on relationships and emotional experiences as the object of desire demonstrates that autonomy seems to be used to relegate consumer goods and services and associated market practices. If the everyday is made up of consumer matter this reality may be 'escaped' in the imagination where other roles can be grasped as present. Participants seemed to favour enduring cultural values of living with others, scripts that participants know from the media, or remembered from childhood. Although there isn't an emphasis on desiring, choosing and purchasing goods in these imagined scenarios, successful relationships are subject to cultural norms that include owning a home that is 'nicely' furnished, for example. Even though the routine practices of consumption are manifest absent, the possibility of assembling a good life without being involved with consumer culture is othered in most of the stories. Assuming these are reasonable reflections of daydreaming practices much of my data seems consistent with Illouz's (1997) view that our only real choice in constructing social relationships is through consumer culture. Indeed, Miller (2005) considers that all cultures are material cultures, seeking to make the immaterial material – from this perspective, in a consumer culture we simply make use of the options that are available

to us in the marketplace (Leonard 2005), as Arnould and Thompson (2005, p869) acknowledge;

much like a game where individuals improvise within the constraints of the rules...consumer culture – and the marketplace ideology it conveys – frames consumers' horizons of conceivable action, feeling and thought, making certain patterns of behaviour and sense making interpretations more likely than others.

However, our ability to make present ideals and relegate mundane aspects of daily life, including consumption, into manifest absence suggests that in the imagination we can find salvation from the routine of daily life and all its consumption, if only temporarily.

So it is apparent that consumption is always 'there' in the imagination, it is assumed and provides the context and setting for imagined realities just as it does for many practices in material reality (for example see Illouz 1997, Miller 2005; 2010, Warde 2005). Relationships and emotional experiences are prioritised and understood in terms of consumer culture. Whereas existing work draws these kinds of scenarios out as underlying desire for a particular object that is seen as a bridge, it appears these transformations are also desired in and of themselves, goods may be a necessary part of how it becomes actualised but the good does not need to be the focus for an imagined scenario or reality to be conjured. This is a subtle inversion of Belk et al's (2003) concluding priorities regarding the social basis of consumer desire. While Belk et al (2003) acknowledge that a desire for altered social relations underwrites the longing for consumer goods in the imagination, the relational transformations they promise must then be accessed through actual shopping, purchasing and using. In contrast, I find it is successful relationships that are made present, without being tied to a particular consumer desire, while desire for goods and associated market activity are manifest absent. Perhaps this alludes to the prevalence and inseparability of goods from meaning, the symbolic meaning of goods may be so entangled in our understanding of the world that we do not need to think about the objects themselves, they may simply be assumed. However, that goods are more important when it comes to actualisation would seem to indicate that they are still bridges that enable ways of being to be actualised, but they are not necessarily desired in this way in the everyday imagination.

### *Uncovering the tension between consumption in the imagination and material reality*

I have already noted some of the differences between the role of consumption in the imagination and in material reality – where we may omit or make absent the details and mundane aspects that we have to deal with in daily life – but there is more to this relationship. In the imagination consumption is ‘there’ in a number of ways, often not noticed or elaborated. In material reality, however, its presence – as something in the foreground – is much more apparent. More than a bridge to displaced meaning (McCracken 1988), the way to (attempt to) actualise our desires (Campbell 1987), consumption serves a number of purposes. It may help us actualise our daydreams, in part when we take part in self seductive activities (Belk et al 2003) or more wholly. It may also act as a safeguard to prevent potentially negative outcomes in material reality, as a new start offering a way to transform oneself or one’s life and it enables us to escape from the lived experience of dream pursuit when the material reality of the dream actualisation process becomes too much (an irony here being that while imagining may serve as an escape from our daily consuming lives, consumption itself may act as an escape from our dreams). Broadly this translates to consumption in material reality being seen as the answer to our fears, worries, hopes and dreams. While it may not be the focus in the imagination, it becomes the focus in material reality.

The prominence of consumption in material reality may be usefully explained in terms of Warde’s (2005) dispersed and integrative practices – what is and isn’t seen as consumption by individuals. While individuals may not see themselves as consumers or consuming when taking part in dispersed practices, and may not imagine themselves in this way either, when it comes to actualising or practicing these imagined activities, consumption is necessarily involved. Many of the people I talked to were involved in DIY, creating their own world travel itineraries, making wedding invitations and centre pieces, and preparing nurseries for the arrival of a new baby – things that require consumption – but saw themselves much more as homemakers, travellers/adventurers, brides-to-be, and parents-in-waiting. In doing (practicing) these things, consumption is necessarily involved but in our conversations the participants focused on the processes involved in creating, ‘doing’ and being, as well as the ‘end result’ in terms of an ideal life or experience. Practices become focal in both the imagination and material reality

and necessarily involve consumption, but the consumption aspects involved are not laboured in the imagination and in material reality they become a tool or a means to achieve other things.

So in the imagination the consumption aspects can be escaped as individuals make present the desired ways of being, but in material reality the reality of consumption, of the market with all its routines and details and requirements, cannot be escaped. In material reality then, consumption is made present, or, perhaps it is more accurate to say, it makes itself present. We may imagine life with a new baby in a scene where the goods are in the background and the details of consumption are manifest absent but in material reality we have to go out and buy those goods and take part in the associated marketplace practices. Equally, we may not consider something consumption related in the imagination – such as sport and music lessons for our children, but in material reality we have deal with the researching, choosing and paying of those classes along with the clothing, equipment and transportation requirements that may go with it.

What we also need to consider is that this is likely a product of our consumer culture – we simply don't know anything else and cannot imagine outside of it. It may be that consumption is an easy answer, it requires little of us and provides multiple solutions and possibilities for assembling our material reality – again in line with Arnould and Thompson (2005) we see the marketplace as purveyor, offering us the resources to create the good life. This is indeed the way the market and its 'seducers' call to us; as the solution to problems, as a preventative measure for our worries; a way to find happiness. The consumer ideology I mentioned earlier is also relevant here. Saving money necessarily indicates the consumption aspects in relation to actualising dreams and so although it is not always a focus of imagined scenarios, it is implicit when we consider what is entailed in actualisation. The tension may be a result of our consumer culture being so embedded in everyday life – the way we understand things – that we do not notice it or make it focal in the imagination, it is just assumed as a taken for granted aspect of everyday life.

Having considered the different forms of imagining and how consumption features within it, I now want to focus on the complexities of imaginative practices that tell us more about the nature of everyday imagining, specifically the relationship between imagination and material reality.

### **Unravelling the relationship between material reality and imagination**

That we imagine *about* or in-line with material reality is significant because it highlights that the everyday imagination is not disembodied from everyday life and this suggests that the two domains (fantasy and reality) should not be regarded as separate entities where one is concerned with the ‘real’ and the other with the ‘unreal’ (see for example Rader and Lanier 2010). What unravels here is the idea that the everyday imagination is structured through material reality and consequently the imagination becomes a way for us to negotiate and manage our material reality.

It is apparent that our ‘current concerns’ (Klinger 1990) dominate the imagination – we imagine and think about those things that are going on in our life – but more than this our materially real circumstances (e.g. budget, life stage) may set parameters within which we imagine, thereby restricting the extent to which we idealise things and helping us to rehearse for, plan, and cope with daily life. Yet even when people described their future ideals, they were very much situated within the context of their everyday lives and what they have good reason to expect (even if the details of material reality are omitted). Aspirational daydreams remained ‘everyday’ (Pettigrew 2005) in the sense that they were not overly ambitious or abstract but centred on ordinary events and desires, such as having a happy family or enjoying the pleasures of a more simple life. Even those that were more fanciful, such as Jez who dreams of being a racing driver or Christopher who aspires to be a musician, were not entirely divorced from the individual’s everyday life. For instance Jez competes in national carting championships, the same place where many Formula One drivers are discovered, and Christopher plays in a local band and has performed at a festival to an audience of 3000 people. This is not the stuff of high fantasy such as that referred to by Campbell (1987) when he uses the characters of Walter Mitty and Billy Liar to demonstrate the concept. This may of

course be a consequence of the research approach focusing on contextualising the imagination within everyday life and it may be the case that there are more fantastic or indeed darker and perhaps embarrassing daydreams and fantasies that people did not disclose that are harder to reveal in research. But if we take the stories as typical illustrations of what makes up everyday imagining, we see a number of practices which demonstrate that material reality – our knowledge and understanding of, and place in, the world – imposes itself on the imagination and suggests that we give consideration to what is likely to transpire in the future. In other words, we think about imagining. This leads me now to explore the concept of a meta-imagination where I consider not only how we think about, imagine and plan for imagining, but also how we exert control over our own imagination as a result of material reality.

### **Thinking about and managing the imagination: a meta-imagination**

As a result of material reality imposing itself on the imagination a number of complex imaginative practices arise as significant. I heard stories which suggest that people think about and reflect on imagining, and its role in their lives, it is evident therefore that we have an awareness of, and sensitivity towards, the imagination. This sensitivity causes us to exert control over our own imagination so as to negotiate and manage our emotions and everyday life. I refer to this as a meta-imagination.

It emerged that we use and control our imagination as a form of self-protection, protection from potentially negative emotional experiences in material reality. The participants stories highlighted a number of imaginative strategies that help us prepare ourselves for an uncertain future and these are based on our knowledge and understanding of the world as well as our own personal lifeworld circumstances. Not only do we imagine in order to avoid negative experiences in material reality but it is also the case that we plan for future imagining.

In some cases we may create and carry with us different ‘versions’ of an imagined future. If we recall university student and carting enthusiast, Jez’s career hopes we



remember that his ideal for the future is to be a formula one driver but his knowledge and understanding of the motorsport industry has driven him to create a number of alternative futures that hold greater degrees of possibility for actualisation. These reality imposed modifications act as contingencies, which in turn can be seen as a way of ensuring that we achieve a dream and therefore reduce the likelihood of experiencing disappointment in material reality – even if it is not the most desirable version that is actualised. These different degrees of imagining can be seen as a gradual lowering of expectations, but in some cases it is apparent that individuals set low expectations from the outset. Again we can see this as a form of management or negotiation with material reality and this is somewhat different from the frustration that is produced by a lack of hope as in Belk et al's (2003) work, or disappointment from the testing of displaced meanings (McCracken 1988) but is focused on preparing, anticipating and managing expectations and emotions, suggesting a more rational and calculated approach to imagining.

In order to avoid disappointment in material reality individuals may set low, or attempt not to have any kind of expectations of an anticipated event or experience. We saw this in the stories of postgraduate student Tim's guided daydream about his career worries and in Samantha's concerns about writing her birthing plan. In both, we see a reluctance to conjure pleasurable, anticipatory daydreams based on the knowledge that events in material reality may not play out as we hope and we can see that this is linked to a lack of control in material reality – nature taking over the birthing plan and the hurdles involved in getting a job – which has resulted in Tim and Samantha exerting control over their imagination. Rather than trying to overcome barriers that stand in the way of desire as Belk et al (2003) acknowledge, we accommodate them and modify our dreams accordingly. By restricting the pleasure of the imagination (i.e. not conjuring pleasurable idealised daydreams) we may increase the potential for pleasure – and therefore the avoidance of disappointment – in material reality when outcomes either live up to or even exceed expectations. This notion is also reflected in stories where people described undesirable but potentially possible imaginative scenarios that serve to help prepare them for the worst, such as Barbara, who I first met prior to her retirement. Barbara feared not having the same level of independence due to a reduced level of income and this prompted her to imagine negative scenarios, such as having to stack

shelves in Tesco to make ends meet. Regarding consumption here, we might note that her fear of not having the same level of income reflects a certain level of material comfort that she is accustomed to and afraid of losing. By pre-empting various possibilities she was able to prepare herself, perhaps in the hope that material reality would be, by comparison, a pleasant surprise – which it was when I met up with her on several times after she had retired.

Similarly, people were aware that they may build things up in their mind and would sometimes try to avoid doing this so as not to be disappointed if an actual outcome did not live up to an imagined scenario. For soon to be married Sandra daydreaming about her wedding is exciting but she is aware that she might build it up too much and the actual wedding could then be a disappointment, which gives her cause to worry. It seems we are able to reflect on our imagining and are aware that we can get carried away with the unrestrained possibilities on offer in the imagination and consequently experience the imagination as something that needs to be managed. This may be why, in some cases, we may prevent ourselves from imagining altogether.

It emerges that there are times or conditions in which we allow and do not allow ourselves to imagine certain things or in a certain way, in line with our material reality, as in the case of Holly who tries not to think about her possible future living with her boyfriend in Brighton and training to be a teacher, because she doesn't want to be disappointed if it doesn't work out. Not allowing ourselves to imagine something positively, not wanting to 'tempt fate', in case it doesn't materialise is a familiar feeling; we can't allow ourselves to imagine in detail or get carried away because we may be setting ourselves up for a fall. This also came across in stories where people discussed imagining in 'blocks', that certain conditions (in material reality) have to be met before we allow ourselves to imagine the next phase. So we don't imagine our wedding in any real detail until we are either engaged or close to being engaged, and we do not allow ourselves to imagine what living in a our own house will be like and how we might decorate until the contract is signed. It is as if the more pleasure we take from imagining the more disappointment we are opening ourselves up to experience in material reality, and thus risk enacting Campbell's (1987) perpetual cycle of disappointment. And so,

from our own experiences of this in the past, where a perfect proposal scenario did not transpire or a house sale fell through, we see that we have a sensitivity to the role of imagining in our own lives – we do not want to be disappointed, and when it is something extremely important like a new job, a new house or a new stage in our lives, and when the outcome is not in our own hands, we may be compelled to imaginatively ‘switch off’. In comparison to this, we can note times when we allow ourselves to be open to, even taken over by, imaginative experiences. Participants talked about being preoccupied with dream pursuit, being in a “wedding bubble”, thinking about it all the time, wanting to talk about it and letting our imagination be switched on by any kind of trigger and I note how these occasions are when dream pursuit is in full swing and under our own control – when we are planning a wedding or when contracts have been exchanged – when we no longer need to be imaginatively tentative. What is significant here thought is we are not voluntarily managing our imagination but doing so as a result of the conditions of (dictated by) material reality, which directs us to exert control.

So our knowledge and understanding of the world, our own circumstances and previous experiences of imagining and actualisation, and our desire to avoid negative emotional experiences, specifically disappointment, drive us to exert control over our imagination. It seems we grow savvy to the nature of imagination and its role in our lives and try to manage it as a result. But what is the significance of this? Why might we create different versions of the future if we know many of them are not likely to be actualised? Why hold low expectations and anticipate negative outcomes? And why try to stop ourselves imagining altogether? Such behaviours indicate that we think about dream actualisation and demonstrate that practicalities come into the imagination – the everyday imagination is not only or even predominantly about pleasure and pleasurable escapes, or fantasy embellished scenarios that, although retain an element of possibility, are highly unlikely to materialise as Campbell (1987) theorises, but about what is achievable. Possibility, then, is key, for anything other than fantasy.

Possibility equates to hope; the ‘felt possibility or likelihood of achieving a desire’ (Belk et al 2003, p343) and a required element of desire. We see an over-riding need for our daydreams to contain a strong sense of hope. When we create different versions, or

set ourselves low expectations, we take into account what is possible – what we can have hope in. We consider what is and is not likely to transpire and what factors could play a role in determining whether something gets actualised; our knowledge of material reality imposes itself and we imaginatively adjust in order to accommodate it. This may help us extend the framework that Belk et al (2003) present, in particular when we look at what animates desire – such as desire for desire and hope for hope. This extends beyond that however, by qualifying hope to include a self-mechanism for the management of hope (possibility) and in making the dream more attainable – increasing hope – suggests that the very configuration of dreams is continuously revisited. This notion aligns with Leonard's (2005) acknowledgement that 'consumer fantasies change over time... [they] may involve compromise in order that they fit within situational contexts'. More than this, however, in creating different versions of the future we actually pre-empt the various possibilities or situational contexts rather than modifying the dream on the basis of a particular incident or experience that cause us to make them 'fit' with a given situation, it seems we consider this in advance. By modifying a dream and holding a number of variations it is made more achievable and the likelihood of fulfilling a dream is high.

That possibility is key highlights that not only do we need to have some belief that imagined events could transpire but we need a strong belief that they *will* transpire, moreover, we seem to have a need to achieve our dreams or more notably, perhaps it is a need *not* to fail – in which case, not only are we likely to be disappointed with material reality but also with ourselves. By making imagined futures less abstract and more probable, fulfilment becomes more likely. It seems then, that we are more developed and savvy to the relationship between imagination and material reality than might be suggested by Campbell (1987), who sees us in a cycle of perpetual disillusionment. While Campbell (1987) recognises that daydreams require a sense of possibility for actualisation, the stories of daydreams that have been modified to be *more likely* (or indeed worse than what is likely to transpire) suggest that we need a stronger sense of possibility and belief in actualisation, and it seems that we engage in psychic work to maintain or generate hope. Rather than dwell in a state of hopelessness if something is beyond hope, as Belk et al (2003) remark, we modify our dreams to be more hopeful. Here then hope or possibility becomes more likened to anticipation,

which is dealt with in a more rational way ‘in terms of outcomes that are certain’ (p343), while outcomes may not necessarily be certain, there is *more* certainty and imaginatively modifying dreams works to prevent reality from being disappointing. And so we are left to consider that the strategies of imagination that we use to avoid disappointment in material reality are employed as a means of protection, protecting ourselves from what Campbell (1987) regards as an ever-disillusioning reality – protecting ourselves from potentially negative emotional experiences in the future. Much like Leonard (2005) concludes; it seems that we modify our daydreams to make ourselves feel we have fulfilled or even exceeded them. Yet, Leonard’s research finds that individuals *retroactively* modify their fantasies so they can look back on them as fulfilled, while my research suggests that we modify our hopes and dreams *prior* to their pursuit. In modifying dreams we can see a clear rehearsal quality in action – considering possible outcomes and alternatives prepares us for what might be.

Beyond trying to reduce or eliminate the possibility of disappointment participants also described instances where they intentionally behaved in a way that would promote a certain imaginative experience in the future. Thus it seems we may also plan for positive imagining and emotion in the future. For instance, Monica described how it was important to create memories that she and Owen will reminisce about in the future in order to make their flat a home and Jim talked about his desire to re-create a past experience that he has “*fond memories*” of and capture the feeling in a photo that he could “*clutch for the rest of my days*”. Similarly, Sandra wanted to take part in unique activities on honeymoon to reflect on in the future and make it stand out as more special than a typical holiday. We could see these as the intentional creation of future nostalgia – a desire to create pleasant memories for future indulgence. We also saw how individuals wanted to avoid the possibility of negative emotional and imaginative experiences in the future. If you recall, Holly expressed how she was fearful of having regrets and this caused her to make sure she doesn’t miss out on anything or sacrifice too much for the sake of saving money for a deposit for a house that is still a very long way off – we can see this as the prevention or avoidance, even fear, of future regret. Within these stories there is a strong sense of being and doing, when we think about this in everyday terms it seems quite obvious – we go on holiday not only for a break from routine but for adventure, change, stories to tell and memories to look back on (see for

example Urry 2001). Indeed the experience economy is based on this very premise – a focus on doing and being to enjoy and engage the imagination – more than this though, it is also about acting now to ensure a certain emotional experience later.

So we can see that imagining becomes a way to manage our emotions. It is not only about the emotions associated with imagining – the emotions that an imaginative scenario can prompt, which provide pleasure, as Campbell (1987; 1994) puts forward, or even the frustration we may feel as a consequence of not being able to actualise a consumption dream as d’Astous and Deschênes (2005) and Christensen (2002) note – but the emotions that the imagination can help us to avoid or create in the future. It seems that by reducing the emotional content of an imagined scenario – i.e. not conjuring a pleasurable, fanciful daydream, or indeed creating imaginative contingencies alongside it – we can increase the chance of experiencing pleasure in material reality. This is somewhat different from the well accepted cycle of desire, where desire is seen as something we give into, that is more in control of us than we are of it (e.g. Belk et al 2003, Campbell 1987). This extends the notion of control that Campbell (1987) suggests regarding our control over the images we experience to create pleasure. It seems the more control we exercise, the less desire and pleasure we experience in the imagination, but in return for feeling more in material reality later.

This sensitivity to imagination demonstrates a level of autonomy that is not necessarily recognised in existing theory and research but that is important because it provides us with a sense of agency that may otherwise (in material reality) be denied us. Thinking about, planning and controlling what we imagine helps us to feel in control or at least able to manage material reality. What is significant here is that by anticipating various possibilities, contingencies, planning for potential disappointment or at least being aware of it, we are acknowledging that many things act on us in daily life, that in fact we have little control and autonomy in material reality. But if we consider a variety of potential outcomes we can at least grasp a sense of autonomy – a kind of limited autonomy, or autonomy within given boundaries – a bit like having choice but from a selection of predetermined options. This extends but also contrasts with Campbell’s (1987; 2003) ideas of consumer autonomy. Campbell (1987) states that the imaginative

hedonist is autonomous in hooking and unhooking daydreams to particular objects of desire that afford new possibilities for experiencing imaginative and emotional pleasures. An extension to this is that we also have autonomy in controlling our emotional responses in the present and those projected onto the future. In contrast, however, when it comes to materially real imagining, the constraints we are under limit the autonomy we have, it is only in ideal imagining that we experience autonomy in the way that Campbell (1987) acknowledges because material reality does not constrain us. What seems apparent is that one technique for managing this risk of disappointment may be to place the future in the hands of fate and tell ourselves that it wasn't meant to be. Rather than grasping control, this is a way to relinquish all control, particularly when things do not or may not work out as imagined or idealised. Not only are we protecting ourselves but we are freeing ourselves of blame.

The various strategies we employ highlight the complex nature of imagination and bring to attention the fact that it is something we are aware of and give consideration to. That we do this also gives prominence to the significance of imagining and imagination in everyday life, and what we should also consider here is the context of these imaginings, the situations in which they are created.

A common theme is worry or fear, anticipating negative outcomes, and situations in which individuals have invested a lot of time and energy, something they deeply desire that may bring about something life changing. Thus, within the kind of materially real imaginative practices that I have discussed here we may see a widening of the concept of desire. We do not only imagine the things that we desire and hope to actualise but also the things that we desire to avoid, as asserted by Klinger (1990). The consumer imagination is not only about escaping from material reality to experience pleasure via fanciful and elaborate consumption based daydreams (as supported by Campbell 1987, McCracken 1988) but about managing our emotions and everyday life, working out if and how we can fulfil our dreams and to do this we need to negotiate positive and negative potentialities, and so that we do not succumb to a disillusioning material reality, over which we have little control, we need to find routes to reduce disappointment and increase or ensure achievement (Leonard 2005). And so we come to

see that the issue of pleasure is problematic; a tension exists between what is pleasurable to imagine (but may result in disappointment in material reality) and what we can allow ourselves to imagine (so that we do not experience disappointment in material reality). This is reminiscent of the uncomfortable state of desire articulated by Campbell (1987) and extended by Belk et al (2003). Belk et al (2003) acknowledge that consumers experience an internal conflict between desire and morality. Desire is often associated with the forbidden and this results in a moral tension based on societal norms and wanting to be perceived as ethical. Here though, we see more mundane and practical constraints of everyday life controlling the imagination, and we see this in relation to more emotions than desire. Such material constraints are perhaps more urgent or prominent than moral dilemmas faced by Belk et al's participants.

Campbell (1987) states that with modern hedonism true pleasure is to be found in the imagination, indeed research such as that by Fournier and Guiry (1993) and d'Astous and Deschênes (2005) states that daydreaming offers pleasure in the form of compensation and vicarious consumption when material reality cannot deliver. Yet when it comes to materially real imagining and significant life events or experiences, experiencing pleasure (or at least avoiding pain) in material reality seems to be more important, to the point where people stop themselves from imagining.

While previous theory and research has been somewhat implicit with regard to integration of material reality and imagination, the findings here have enabled me to provide detail of the complexity and level of integration. We can see more clearly the movement and detail in which lived experience (and predictions of it) may be entangled or at the centre of our imaginings. More support for the relationship is evident when we look at it from the other direction – the impact and consequences of imagination on material reality. I now consider this dynamic and continue to build a case for the significance of the imagination in everyday life.



### *The imagination influencing everyday life*

The people I talked to about their experiences of imagining and the process of actualising a dream over a period of time adds nuance to our understanding of the way that the imagination is integrated into our daily lives. It is not only material reality that impacts how and what we imagine, but the things that we imagine can also have a significant impact on our material reality. Here I discuss the significance of the consequences of imagining on our behaviour in terms of specific complementary and actualisation behaviours, but also the kind of undercurrent effect that the process of dream actualisation can have on our daily lives. This extends the focus on ‘small’ cycles of desire that are often conceptual (e.g. Campbell 1987, McCracken 1988) to address elongated processes of pursuit and actualisation, which is recognised as missing from existing work (see Belk et al’s 2003 call for longitudinal studies), in terms of accompanying imaginative activity, the changing conditions of material reality and the role of consumption throughout this process.

In support of existing research it emerges that individuals take part in a number of activities that may be classed as ‘self-seduction’ (Belk et al 2003, Belk 2001); those activities we take part in willingly as a result of daydreaming, such as making scrap books, reading and buying magazines, searching online, watching related television programmes. These perform two functions; they intensify our desires, providing fuel for our daydreams – indicating that we like to indulge in and develop our imaginings – and help us to tangibilise or ‘make real’ some of the things we imagine so that we can experience them, and feel we are, to an extent, actualising them and incorporating them in our daily lives. What this also tells us is that we want to work on our imagination but more than this it shows us some of the ways we bring the imagination into material reality – how it penetrates daily life.

There are, however, other ways in which the imagination influences and becomes part of material reality. These came to light as a result of the context of this study, which meant that I was able to follow people across the actualisation process, following (changes in) their imaginative activity, consequential behaviours along with their

thoughts and feelings towards the dream and its actualisation. The significance of the imagination in everyday life is heightened here as a number of actualisation behaviours demonstrate how dreams become prioritised in material reality and how we may neglect and forego other things in order to help us fulfil our dream and we come to see that the process of pursuit and actualisation can become something life encompassing and may result in substantial lifestyle changes – for the sake of the dream. It seems that, at times, the dream becomes more important than everyday life – our living arrangements, social life or little luxuries that we may enjoy at other times for instance – and its pursuit becomes the priority, which strikes a chord with Cohen and Taylor's (1992, p43) work, particularly the notion of 'that persistent sense that we are more than the arrangements which we live, that we stand apart from reality within than within it'. The strength with which we believe that the real self lies elsewhere, that better is waiting for us elsewhere may be what causes us to pursue dreams and sacrifice something now for reward later. Pursuing the real self or a better life and set of circumstances becomes the priority.

In adding detail to Belk et al's (2003) and d'Astous and Deschênes' (2005) recognition that we engage in behaviours to make the desired object more accessible, my findings develop how these behaviours are engaged in and how they relate to and impact on the dream and everyday life. For instance, beyond trying to save money we may stop spending money on ourselves altogether, take on a second job, sell our cherished home, move back in with our parents, thereby altering the quality of one's daily life, often quite dramatically. In some cases it may be out of necessity, in order to live out the dream in the way we imagine, and we see the difference between consequential behaviours related to ideal and materially real imaginings here. So, for Monica, the use of gift vouchers, which may normally be a treat to spend on something you may not buy yourself, perhaps something frivolous, becomes an additional means to make important or necessary purchases associated with the (materially real) dream. While, for Holly, saving money for a future home 'someday' may be important, when that is further in the future and the other conditions that go with it are yet to be satisfied (e.g. job, marriage) the present (material reality) is more important and so we may not save as much as we could, less take on a second job. So the difference here is between an ideal daydream and one that crystallises into a specific goal, which results in a series of changes to everyday practices.

It may also be the case that in deciding to pursue one dream we may be faced with an inevitable disappointment that other, potentially pleasurable dreams may be forfeited. For instance, Patrick explained that by pursuing the Italian Dream he was turning his back on potential career opportunities in the UK and so we can see that we may have to choose between dreams. Though he later added that the move to Italy does not have to be forever and that if other opportunities arose, such as working in another part of the world they would pursue these knowing they had Italy to come back to, he was keen to state that this dream of a simple life did not mean they were retiring yet. Perhaps this is a sign of unease or uncertainty, which Patrick talked about with regard to his future in Italy, keeping options open also means keeping open the opportunity for pleasurable imagining – as Leonard (2005) states, it may be that we do not want to forego the opportunity for indulging in ideal imagining. Even when we are pursuing a long held dream, that for many people will only ever remain fanciful or aspirational, we need other ideals to grasp onto.

The process of dream pursuit and actualisation brings a heightened level of detail to our understanding of actualisation. In life-projects like those of many of the participants I spoke to, it is clear that the process of pursuit and actualisation can be a long journey in which there are many properties at work, following this journey enables us to capture this nuance. We see people reflecting on their dreams and the way actualisation is taking shape, and this involves a variety of emotions. We also see how strongly dream pursuit can encroach on all aspects of our daily lives. It is also in actualisation that we see a number of strong roles for consumption in terms of providing solutions for worries and concerns, marking new starts and even escaping the actualisation process of a long-term dream. So consumption serves a number of purposes in this journey which go beyond providing objects of desire to build daydreams around. When we follow the process over time, it becomes more complex, the constraints of material reality play a key role in how dreams are actualised and our dreams may be revisited and modified to adapt to the restraints we face.

### *Summarising the relationship between material reality and imagination*

In summarising the relationship between the imagination and material reality what we come to learn is that the everyday imagination is structured through material reality. Our everyday life may be the focus of imagining, including the everydayness of idealised narratives surrounding notions of family, happiness and love. More than this though, material reality imposes itself on the imagination. It causes us to modify and monitor our daydreams and we react to this in a number of ways; imagining in differing degrees regarding the level of abstraction and likelihood of actualisation; setting low expectations, preventing an imaginative ‘build up’, and disallowing imagining altogether. What is apparent is that we have an awareness of our imagination and its relationship to daily life; we are savvy to the disappointment that can result from some forms of imagining. And so we come to see the imagination as less about escaping material reality – although at times it may also be – to find pleasure and compensation in the imagination, and more about preparing for it, exploring it and coping with it.

Looking at the other side of the relationship, we see that imagining has very real effects on material reality. It drives us to behave in certain ways and demonstrates that we want to incorporate our imagination into everyday life by making aspects of the things we desire tangible in some form or another. There are implications for consumption in this in terms of the uneven pattern with which it enters the imagination. At times desire for commodities is absent, yet when closer to actualisation consumer matter is much more prominent. In some ways then, we may see the desire based imagination as relatively straightforward, in that it is based on the cyclic process of one core emotion that we seek to fulfil through consumption and involves a steady and regular pattern of consumption in the imagination (e.g. Campbell 1987, Belk et al 2003). In sacrificing things for the sake of our dreams, needing to escape from our dreams and the idea that our entire lives can become organised around the pursuit of a particular dream, the importance of what exists only in the fabric of the imagination is brought to attention. Such findings broaden our understanding of the relationship between the two domains, which tends to consider imagining as pleasurable and reality as disillusioning in comparison (e.g. McCracken 1988, Campbell 1987, Belk et al 2003), by contextualising

the imagination in everyday life and considering various aspects that feed into one another.

### **Uncovering the social nature of imagination**

Campbell's (1987; 1994) thesis of modern hedonism, indeed modern consumerism, considers it as inner-orientated, individualised, private, and not guided by or orientated towards others. And it is easy to see how imagining may be considered in this way because it is the one place where we have complete privacy, to do with as we please. However, the stories I heard suggest that far from individualised, the imagination is highly social in nature.

We may be stimulated by others in terms of what we come to desire in the first instance (Belk et al 2003), but other people also guide what and how we imagine – their previous experiences can feed into our imagination – and they feature in our imagination. In an extension of Belk et al's (2003) conclusions that a desire for improved social relations underwrites consumer desire, it is apparent that this social nature extends beyond the emotion and experience of desire (for goods), to the imagination more generally where it is apparent that we do not merely desire successful relationships and social approval but a product of that desire is worry, angst and stress over what others might think, say, and do in relation to our decisions and actions and this feeds into what we imagine as we anticipate their thoughts and reactions and prepare ourselves for what might be, but it is also the case that we may behave in such a way as to minimise their negative responses and increase their positive ones so that we are held in esteem. In addition, the fact that personal relationships are commonly the focus of imagined scenarios is also an important element that heightens this social dimension, and on a broader level we see that the imagination is inspired and influenced by the media and marketplace. Imagining is very much about everyday life and we have seen that the reciprocal relationship between the two domains is rather complex, in addition, this relationship shows that far from inner-orientated, the imagination is about what is 'out there'.

That relationships are prioritised in the imagination is central to its social nature. I heard a variety of different kinds of stories that showed concern for other people and a prioritisation of loved ones over and above the self and consumption aspects of a scenario. Even in situations where we might expect consumption to prevail, such as planning a wedding or moving home, relationship issues emerged as central. Participants expressed how they wanted a significant other to be happy, even if this meant not having things the way they would have wanted themselves. Here we begin to see the emergence of shared dreams and compromise. When someone else is part of the dream it may change, compromises may need to be made in order to accommodate both peoples' tastes and desires. This contrasts with existing work where the focus has been on individual imagining. Belk et al (2003) for instance, acknowledge that individuals seek to be and feel like others and experience moral tensions based on societal norms but this about being socially approved of rather than making other people happy. The notion of shared dreams was picked up by Leonard (2005) in her study of honeymoons and became apparent through interviewing couples separately where they discussed their own ideals compared to their partners and the compromises that had to be made – here love and relationships were prioritised over and above consumer experiences and desires and the self. In other stories participants emphasised a desire to just 'be' with a particular loved one or with the family. And in line with existing research (Belk et al 2003, McCracken 1988, Leonard 2005) when consumption was a focus there was still a clear emphasis on social relations and emotional experiences that such consumption may entail. When talking about lottery wins, for instance, the participants were focused on ensuring that they could take care of their loved ones financially (Pettigrew 2005) and demonstrated broader social concerns with a desire to help those less fortunate. Even when people were at a stage in life where they were single or focused on themselves, particularly their education or career, there was consideration of existing and imagined future relationships and family.

This emphasis on relationships links to broader literature regarding the nature of consumer society, specifically critiques of modern consumption such as Fromm (1956; 1976) and Bauman (2003) who regard consumer society as damaging on the basis that it prevents us from being able to sustain meaningful relationships but rather causes individualisation. They argue that this is a consequence of our apparent consumer

attitude, which assumes a moral concern; ‘that people are becoming more and more orientated to things, such as commodities...and less concerned with other people and their social relationships’ (Miller 2008, p1). But far from Bauman’s (2003) notion of an individualised society, and Fromm’s (1956; 1976) consumer attitude, my findings are far more supportive of Miller’s work (2009), which endorses that what matters most to people is their ability to form relationships and the nature of those relationships. The fact that consumption is not always, or even mostly, the focus of everyday imagining disputes this idea but additionally, the variety of ways in which we imagine other people in the imagination, the amount we care about what they think, adds fuel to the argument against such critiques.

In many of the stories other people were considered, they formed part of and were sometimes the focus of an imagined scenario. Rather than focus on a particular relationship or significant other, here we see a more general desire for improved social relations and social approval (Belk et al 2003), and on reflection we can see that this can sometimes be related to approval of consumption choices, such as choices and decisions made about the wedding venue or home decoration, taste and style. We think about what other people might think, we imagine what other people might say, we anticipate how they may react and in such stories there is a clear leaning towards meeting people’s expectations and judgements – something Leonard (2005) refers to as ‘social anxiety’ regarding the social norms and values we feel we need to adhere to. Further to this however, in some circumstances, a desire to exceed the expectations of others was apparent and here we can note a competitive aspect to our behaviour and consumption. This notion of competition leads me now to consider other people and their consumption as an imaginative resource.

It is not only *in* the imagination that the social influence is apparent. Other people and broader social resources, particularly the media and the marketplace also have an influence *on* our desires and the things we imagine, so we could see the imagination as a product of sociality (as indicated by Belk et al 2003).

While existing research comments upon mimesis (Girard 1977, Belk et al 2003) as a competitive form of emulation, where other people set the tone that we want to emulate in order to convey our social standing (Veblen 1899 [1994]) my findings suggest that other people may be more a source of inspiration and their consumption or achievements and experiences are admired rather than something we feel we need to live up to or exceed. In this way we can see emulation as flattery. Other people also influence the things we imagine based on their own experiences. Much like 'travellers tales' provide information for us to rely on (Urry 2001), the experiences of people we know and trust may give good cause for us to imagine certain things.

The focus on and desire for traditional life scripts and roles is illustrative of Cohen and Taylor's (1976/1992) assertion that cultural scripts invade and shape our desires and daydreams, that there is a 'common stock of symbolic material out of which all our fantasies are fashioned' (p84), and we can see that the media, and indeed the marketplace, may provide these by presenting social conventions and norms that we follow, out of both obligation and choice. In some respects the media is shown to provide hope that our dreams can be achieved. When we see other 'real' people on reality shows particularly actualising a dream we share, we are prompted to feel that it is within our grasp. At the same time, such shows are setting the standards that we feel we should adhere to. This notion runs through to the marketplace where we see that it may invade our dreams, prescribing styles and goods that we 'should' desire. Through self-seductive activities, such as buying magazines, window shopping and browsing, it seems we welcome such inspiration and may not notice, or care, that the structural resources for our imagination are provided by the market.



## **Chapter Nine: Conclusion**

### **Changing conceptions of the consumer imagination**

In consumer behaviour the existing dominant perspective on the imagination considers it to be centred around the creation of pleasurable, future orientated, desire based consumption daydreams. The imagination is acknowledged as a domain that offers opportunities for experiencing greater pleasure than material reality, thus it functions as an escape from everyday life – which is generally regarded as unsatisfactory in comparison – and in its escape function, consumption daydreaming is regarded as a form of compensation, enabling individuals to imagine the things that they desire but cannot actualise. It is argued that consumer desire and daydreaming motivates actual consumption as consumers attempt to experience their imagined pleasures in real life through the purchase of a coveted object that a given desire is ‘hooked’ onto. Yet the same degree of pleasure cannot be actualised, thus desire is constantly renewed and attached to new objects, hence the imagination is regarded as ‘the motivating force behind much of contemporary consumption’ (Belk et al 2003, p 326); and something the market relies on (Belk et al 2003). Although a desire for improved social relations is regarded as an underlying basis of our consumer desires, such relational wishes must then be actualised through purchase (Belk et al 2003, McCracken 1988). While some distinctions have been made between daydreams based on wishes or desires and those based on expectations or plans (for example Fournier and Guiry 1993), I have argued that this perspective does not capture the complexities of the imagination when it comes to the variety of imaginative experiences and practices that individuals engage in, or the various ways that consumption, consumer goods and consumer culture feature within the imagination, and so I argue for a new conceptualisation; one that recognises the possibility for a range of emotional and temporal imaginative experiences, as well as different degrees of abstraction and elaboration, and where consumption is not always situated at the centre. I do not argue that consumption daydreams are not experienced, nor that consumer goods and experiences are not an important component of imagined scenarios, but that the present conceptualisation in consumer behaviour does not paint a full enough picture in terms of the variety of ways that consumption may be present, absent and reflected on in the everyday imagination and indeed, what takes priority when it is not the focus.

Synthesising theory and research from a number of fields has opened up the study of the consumer imagination. Taking a contextualised view of consumption in the imagination in order to explore the different kinds of imaginative experiences that we engage in, and how consumption fits into these has brought to attention the significance of the imagination in material reality and valuable insight regarding how consumption sits in relation to other concerns and scripts of life. Rather than foregrounding consumption and subjecting all behaviour to a consumption narrative, thereby potentially giving it undue prominence by asking directly about it, I have endeavoured to address it in terms of how it is a part of our lives, a part of our imagined scenarios, and like Warde (2005) I have given consideration to how it is described, experienced and understood by individuals and how it is experienced in relation to other things. But, as Illouz (1997, p148) warns, the danger of focusing only on how individuals experience something, particularly emotional and relational experiences, may mean missing their ‘consumerist character’, which is often imperceptibly ‘the frame to our behaviour’ (Miller 2010, p115) or manifest absent (Law 2004). To this end, the contextualised view considers consumption in a variety of guises and roles in order that we obtain a more holistic understanding. This means looking at; *consumption* – as a process or set of practices related to purchase, *consumer goods and services*, and our broader *consumer culture* – the dominant culture that forms the context in which we live and indeed imagine – as well as acknowledging these whatever their level of presence or absence.

The outcome of this approach has highlighted that consumption in the imagination is not just, or even mostly, about endless cycles of desire, it is more complex than that. It has become apparent that in the everyday imagination we are able to escape the prominence of consumption and consumer goods in daily life, as we experience a transient autonomy that enables us to make present more warmly human ideals and concerns, but that is conditional on imagining remaining ideal. The pervasiveness of the broader consumer culture, however, continues to provide a compelling narrative to our imagined scenarios. By studying the imagination in the context of everyday life more complex issues related to imaginative practices, a variety of precursors and consequences of imagining and indeed the journey of pursuit and actualisation that I was able to follow with some of the participants, reveal more about the role of the imagination in everyday life. Based on my findings, it is therefore desirable to reframe

the imagination in consumer research. This reframing marks four key contributions; 1) that individuals engage in a variety of imaginative forms that can be mapped out according to a number of characteristics to help us better define different kinds of imagining and; 2) recognises a varied role for consumption in the imagination. In addition, this reframing acknowledges the negotiations and changes in imaginative activity that take place over time and in relation to material reality, such that an important element of this reframing is; 3) the managed nature of imagination. Finally, and linked to this management feature, is 4) the social dimension of imagination, which refers to the social norms and values that structure the scripts that individuals imagine. Overall, this reframing recognises the imagination as a significant part of material reality.

### **Reframing the imagination in consumer research**

The imagination is a complex and contradictory space where we negotiate and manage a wide range of emotions and outcomes for life. It is not restricted to pleasurable, future orientated, desire based daydreams centred on consumer goods and services. It is constantly evolving in line with our material reality, that is to say that the imagination is highly influenced and driven by the conditions of material reality. This may be in terms of imagining in-line with those conditions and the things that are prominent in daily life (including consumption) as we prepare and organise, or imagining something more abstract, pleasing and ideal as we attempt to escape. The taxonomy presented in chapter eight characterises different forms of imagining, acknowledging a variety of emotions, temporal locations and ‘levels’ in terms of elaboration and abstraction, as well as differing roles for consumption, such that we come to see how the desire based view does not sufficiently speak to the variety of experiences that the participants described in this study. Beyond mapping these different forms it is important to note its complexity in terms of movement between different forms of imagining – its ebbs and flows – in response to the changing conditions of material reality, and this includes the way that aspects of consumption may feature. While the taxonomy is useful in characterising and distinguishing between different forms or levels of imagining, such a systematic representation can only go so far, we must also take into account that it does not sufficiently capture the nuance of imagination; the relationships and movement between different forms or its relationship to material reality – the things that come

together to illustrate the significance of the imagination in material reality – it does, however, capture the sense of autonomy, albeit a transient and conditional autonomy, that individuals experience in the imagination where I detail the assemblage of a given imaginative experience (presence/ absence/ othering), which speaks most centrally to consumption in the everyday imagination.

In assembling imaginative experiences individuals are autonomous in bringing certain things to the fore, relegating others to the background, while some aspects are manifest absent and others disappear altogether. Often we see ideals at the fore, while mundane aspects of material reality (things that daily life forces upon us) are manifest absent or present but placed in the background, acknowledged but not really considered. In doing this we build opportunities for experiencing pleasure, focusing on the things we want to focus on, in an ideal form that allows for positive emotions. When it comes to materially real imagining, the conditions of material reality are more prominent and we see that this sense of control is somewhat compromised as the conditions of daily life force their presence upon us and our imagination, which often becomes more practical and indeed where we may experience negative imaginative experiences, such as worry. It is in these different assemblages that we are able to recognise a variety of roles for consumption.

In the everyday imagination consumer goods are not always or even often central. In the stories I heard individuals focused more on idealised ways of being, relationships and emotional experiences – these were made present. This may align with existing conceptualisations (e.g. Campbell 1987, McCracken 1988) but these were not elicited through asking about consumption – these were not consumer desires but desires that involve consumption. In these imaginings goods may be present but in the background as an assumed part of life. We also see that the details of consumption are manifest absent in these scenarios, not mentioned but necessary for the action and scene to take place. Our autonomy then, lies in being able to ignore or relegate aspects of consumption in favour of more emotional and relational desires. But in line with material reality consumer goods and the details of consumption may at times be more prominent and even force their presence upon us, particularly when planning and

preparing for a particular event. Such details may help us imagine more vividly (e.g. the high level of elaboration in aspirational imagining) but this means less possibility for abstraction because we have greater detail and certainty regarding how something will transpire.

It is also the case that we may make aspects of consumption present. This occurred in two ways, in what are closer to more typical consumption dreams where individuals discussed either a desire for or worry over a particular consumer good or service, and when individuals recognised that consumption is not always desirable, or may be damaging and detract from the meaning of an event or experience, it may even be held to account as responsible for discontent in daily life.

Even when consumer goods and consumption are not focused upon (made present in the foreground) the broader consumer culture continues to provide the narrative to our imagination. For instance, we may understand and describe the abstract notion of a happy family life in terms of owning a house with a garden in a quiet suburb that is nicely furnished and various extra-curricular classes for the children to attend. As Illouz (1997) acknowledges, we simply can't escape the market if the dominant structural resources incorporated into the scenarios are contained within that market, even when they may be invisible and not subject to reflection. Yet my findings illustrate that individuals often do reflect on the market and consumer culture, it is not always unnoticed or 'divorced' from emotional experiences. Individuals may moralise their consumption, which recognises that they reflect on the market, making judgements and choices about different forms or aspects of consumption, sometimes holding consumer culture to account for detracting from the 'good life' – though this does not stop them from turning to the market to actualise their dreams. And so we are left to consider that pure fantasy (that is incompatible with material reality) may be our only way to other consumer culture and escape to a different reality, yet even these may be a product of the market, as Molesworth and Denegri-Knott (2006) assert.

There is also a notable tension between the roles of consumer goods and the details of consumption in the imagination and material reality where it may be more prominent –

a way to actualise or avoid our dreams, the answer to our worries and fears, the solution to our problems, an escape from the prolonged lived experience of dream pursuit – and so we may consider that we can escape this by retreating to the imagination where we can make other things – our ideals – present without being tainted by the reality of the market, even if it still, provides the narrative, albeit imperceptibly. Subsequently, like Cohen and Taylor (1976; 1992) we may note a conservative role for imagining, as a temporary escape, a coping mechanism to help the routine of material reality continue unchanged.

### *The managed imagination*

A number of practices indicate that the imagination is experienced as something that needs to be managed, based on its relationship to material reality. The notion of a meta-imagination demonstrates that we have a sensitivity to the imagination and its role in daily life, and through this we can grasp some sense of control over material reality. By exerting control over what, how and even whether, we imagine we are able to anticipate and therefore prepare ourselves for potential outcomes, though we also see that this may be the result of material reality acting on us, prompting us to imagine in certain ways. Within this, possibility (hope) emerges as important and I observe a dialectic between what is pleasurable to imagine and what we can allow ourselves to imagine so as not to be disappointed in material reality. In direct competition with Campbell (1987) it seems that pleasure in material reality is more important than pleasure in the imagination as individuals imagine the worst, set low expectations or stop themselves from imagining something until certain conditions in material reality are met. The need for hope and possibility and the subsequent desire to achieve and prevent failure of our dreams is taken further as I observe that dreams may be modified or effectively written-off if we do not actualise them as we had initially imagined, and, in our willingness to put our future and outcomes in the hands of fate to relinquish responsibility. Again these practices are an outcome of the conditions of material reality leading events and causing us to imaginatively respond. By controlling the imagination we forfeit pleasure in one realm for an improved level of pleasure and thereby reduced level of disappointment or pain in material reality. Perhaps then we have become conservative ‘dream artists’.

Taking these aspects into account we may see how the imagination acts as a coping device, a way to cope with or attempt to manage material reality, yet often this is in response to material reality managing the imagination. To label the imagination as a coping device or management strategy may therefore be too reductionist, while there is certainly a management function this alone doesn't say enough about the variety of practices we engage in, the prompts, consequences and functions of imagining. It doesn't quite do it justice. Its broader significance is made apparent when we consider more aspects of the imagination and its relationship to everyday life.

The significance of the imagination in material reality is further exemplified by the fact that we want to bring our dreams into material reality – our hopes, dreams, goals and fears are not confined to the private and infinite space of the imagination but become part of our lives. This supports but also develops the notion of 'self-seduction' that Belk (2001) and Belk et al (2003) acknowledge, as we see that individuals engage in activities to fuel their imaginings but also as a way to part-actualise them – 'doing something' helps to make our dreams more tangible and this is something we want. In contrast to MacInnis and Price (1987) and Fournier and Guiry (1993) for instance, it seems imagining is not always compensation-enough. A surrogate experience needs to be more concrete – we want to (and do) make our dreams part of material reality, for instance by making scrapbooks or looking through specialist magazines. When it comes to some life projects, the journey of pursuit and actualisation may be a long and emotional ride that requires us to make significant changes to our behaviour and lifestyle. Here we see how 'making a dream come true' can significantly change the way we live each day, whether it be considering the hoped for end goal in the decisions we make, taking on a second job, or sacrificing things (time, social life, luxuries) in the interests of a better future. With Patrick's hospitalisation we even saw how pursuing a dream can have severe consequences for wellbeing. So some dreams come to shape our material reality, in both small ways and significant ways. While existing research acknowledges certain consequences for consumption dreams, often these are based on dreams that are not necessarily being pursued (d'Astous and Deschênes 2005) and so the full extent of possible consequences is not sufficiently explored. The prevalence of the imagination in material reality was made visible by following people over the journey of actualisation and it is this that really shows us how important dreams can be

in terms of the lengths we go to, to make them 'actual'. When we consider the ways that imagination is made visible it starts to look like a much bigger and more important part of everyday life and we might wonder how much of our lives are taken up with pursuing something from our imagination. We might ask if 'real' life is actually led in the imagination and material reality an outlet or place to attempt to pursue it and live it out. Are we constantly trying to reach for the 'real self' that lies elsewhere – apart from reality? (Cohen and Taylor 1992) and if so, shouldn't researchers pay more attention to the imagination and the ways we try to make it part of material reality?

### ***The social imagination***

The imagination causes our material reality to change, for an ideal that exists only in our mind, but that is socially structured. The scripts that occupy the imagination are informed by social norms and values, they are about social relationships, and they are reinforced by a variety of social resources. The imagination then, stems from and is concerned with (or managed by) the social world.

The media may provide various acceptable scripts for us to follow and reinforce to us that our dreams are possible, though it can also mar the imagination. We could also see this with marketplace resources. While catalogues and in-store displays for example may provide inspiration, we could also say that they stifle our imagination, preventing us from conjuring our own ideas by 'telling' us what we can have, what we should want. Personal experiences and significant others are particularly noteworthy as we attempt to recreate or make good memories of our own childhood experiences, and use other experiences as points of reference for our own imaginings and the way we want to actualise certain dreams. Significant others are important sources of inspiration for us and far from Girard's (1977) notion of mimesis in a competitive manner, I find it to be more about admiration and inspiration. We could potentially see the impact of these social factors as widening or going against the notion that the marketplace is responsible for instilling desires – consumer desire as a product of advertising and the media (Belk et al 2003, Belk 2001, Arnould and Thompson 2005, Bocoock 1993) – and shows that many desires are based more on the broader lifeworld. The social nature also contends



that the imagination is primarily concerned with consumption or the self like Campbell (1994) states, as we see that other people are also a strong feature *in* the imagination.

The contextual approach of this study reveals that (in the imagination) we may prioritise our relationships with others and often imagine other people's thoughts, feelings, reactions and approval in relation to our behaviour and decisions. This, I have argued goes against wider debates regarding the individualised society that Bauman (2003) talks about and the damaging effects of consumption on human relationships, made prevalent by Fromm (1956; 1976). In the space where we could be selfish and introverted it seems we are not, we show a concern for others and relationships with them, we even sacrifice things ourselves to keep others happy. It also adds nuance to Belk et al's (2003) notion of social relations underlying consumer desire as we see that it may be a more primary concern that extends into all aspects of life. Of course there may be times when people do imagine in a less social and caring way, where they are more selfish and self-indulgent, but these may not be easy to share in an interview situation. Overall, the way ideals and imaginings may be socially inspired, cultivated, and orientated shows us that many desires start and grow from our own material reality.

### ***Concluding remarks: the significance of imagination in material reality***

We could see the relationship between material reality and imagination as circular or as concentric circles, growing from and around one another. Material reality informs and fuels the imagination at a number of levels – societal, environmental, personal, past and immediate – and we bring the imagination into material reality as we pursue and actualise (whether in part or wholly) the dreams that were sparked in material reality. Like a circle, there is no clear beginning and end; precursors and consequences merge with one another, imagining fuels and guides behaviour and behaviour fuels and guides imagining. What is most noteworthy is that we cannot take the imagination out of the lifeworld and study it independent of material reality, as Klinger (1990, p5) confirms, we must consider the person's 'life, state and history'. And we should also consider this for the study of consumption more generally.

When we look at the imagination from a broader perspective, its significance in daily life is made paramount. I observe that the imagination is not just about small, individual cycles of desire for consumer goods and services that are renewed or recycled, as put forward by Campbell (1987) and Belk et al (2003) for example, but that it becomes something much more life encompassing and something much more fundamental to our everyday lives. This significance is made visible not only on the basis of imagining as an activity (or set of activities) but its relationship to everyday life, particularly the prolonged journey of dream pursuit and actualisation, as we negotiate and manage our emotions.

Studying the broader, everyday imagination has revealed that there is a range of possibilities for imagining and a more varied narrative of consumption in the imagination. One that accounts for a variety of positive and negative imaginative experiences, but also a scale of abstraction that shows us how imagining is not always idealised, but very much about and guided by the stuff of daily life – material reality confronts our ideals. The various levels of elaboration also tell us that the consumer imagination is not always about elaborate and intense daydreams where commodities are the focus. When consumption is not taken as the starting point for research we are able to see different aspects of consumption in different roles in relation to other events, issues and concerns, it reveals the importance of focusing on consumption not just when it is made present and is central – whether in the imagination or in material reality – but wherever and however it occurs, in the context of other things and in relation to how individuals view it and experience it, that means considering it in all its roles and guises – consumption, consumer goods and consumer culture, present in the foreground and background, manifest absent and othered along with the other aspects that make up a scenario. What is absent in consumer accounts is just as important as what is made present (Illouz 1997) and this tells us something about the nature of consumption in daily life and the lives of individuals. This varied narrative also ascribes a level of autonomy to the individual in assembling imaginative scenarios but acknowledges that the relationship between imagination and material reality should not be underestimated and is considered key to better understanding the complex nature of the imagination. Imagining is very much about ‘real life’, it helps us to manage our emotions and material reality, it is also incredibly susceptible to the conditions of material reality.

## **Reflections and Limitations**

This study has opened up the study of imagination in consumer research and asks that we pay more attention to it in all its complexities.

By removing the consumer lens, this study lends support for the notion that we do not need to study consumption directly in order to learn about it, more than this though, it supports the fact that we should appreciate material goods, aspects of consumption and consumer culture, whatever their role in a given experience or situation – whether hidden, peripheral or central (Miller 2010, Illouz 1997) – and recognise the way that individuals experience and feel about them (Warde 2005, Shankar et al 2009?). This also requires that we recognise what else is ‘going on’, not just focusing on aspects of consumption but how it relates to other concerns in whatever role it takes. We can see how consumer researchers may, understandably, be tempted to give undue prominence to consumer goods in the imagination by asking directly about them thereby making them the focus of attention and obscuring other roles that they may take.

Initially I was surprised that participants didn’t talk more directly about consumer goods as previous research might suggest. Instead I heard descriptions that presented ‘more important’ ideals of life; love between newlyweds, slower and healthier lifestyles abroad, and a concern for family-orientated living and of community that emerged as desired in and of themselves, not necessarily through consumer desires that promise such ways of being. Does this signal a shift in the ‘changing priority of consumption’ from having to being? (Shankar and Fitchett 2002, p501). Could this be the ‘green shoots’ of more substantial resistance to the normalcy of consumer desire and a work and spend culture? Maybe, we must also acknowledge the substantial role for consumption as a consequence of imagining, especially as a means to quash worries and fears, and the role of the market in providing fuel for our imagination and constructing our daydreams. While we may imagine relationships, our dreams must confront consumer practices when we try to actualise them.

The complex, contradictory and highly situated nature of the imagination means it is not easy to categorise such personal and individual experiences. It is not always easy to differentiate between different forms because differences are not always clear cut, this may explain why the topic of imagination is not fully dealt with in consumer behaviour and why there are no agreed upon set of definitions. The taxonomy may be useful in this respect, helping to characterise and distinguish different kinds of imaginative experience, it may therefore be useful as a definitional tool, something currently lacking in the area in consumer research. But this is not an exhaustive 'list', and the complexities of the imagination may not be best approached or captured in a table or diagram. So while the taxonomy helps us to better characterise and understand how different kinds of imagining may take shape, there are greater complexities to consider.

This was a study of the everyday imagination, of larger life projects and where consumer goods, consumption and consumer culture 'fits in'. Consequently, the kinds of imaginings presented here, in terms of content and experience, may be quite different from those that could be identified when consumption is made present in the research approach. While I wanted to establish a contextualised view, we can imagine that if we asked specifically about consumption orientated imaginative experiences, such as a regretted purchase or non-purchase, an experience of worry over a consumer good or the fear of consuming, we may uncover quite different imaginative experiences. Again, the problem here may be in focusing on consumer goods too much, but in order to understand a particular emotion attached to the imaginative experience it may be a viable route and if the assemblage of the imagined scenario, as well as the lifeworld of the individual was also considered then this would go some way to offer a more holistic view.

## **Future directions for research**

There is no shortage of future research in the area of imagination. The exploratory nature of this study means every issue and theme raised, each column in the taxonomy, and each form or level of imagining, along with the identification of new ones, can and

should be explored in greater depth. Here I consider a small selection of possible courses for future research.

The people I talked to were essentially all middle-class, even if they felt their roots weren't. They all upheld a certain standard of living, nothing out of the ordinary for the Western World, in the South of England, but this does limit the findings somewhat. It would be interesting to conduct a similar study with a broader sample, including people who may be socially and/or financially deprived. Cohen and Taylor's (1976) work with prisoners highlighted how such a mundane routine resulted in the conjuring of fantastic imaginative escape attempts, perhaps because they were free from the possibility of actualising them, free from being confronted by material reality. It may be the same for those who work in mundane jobs, or do not have strong aspirations for the future, they may conjure more fantastic daydreams as imaginative escape. Daniel Miller's (2005; 2008) work also suggests that poor people are often the most materialistic, and so perhaps consumption would feature differently in the daydreams of those who cannot easily access goods. Perhaps it is the case that when we 'have' (more than) enough, when goods are so readily available and acquired, they become less important, less noticed, even less satisfying and so we turn our attention to other things, not as a rejection of consumption necessarily but perhaps because, for many in the west, consumer goods are so taken for granted that they long for something else, and so we see relationships and simple pleasures taking precedence in the imagination. So there are certainly other groups of people that would shed more light on different ways of imagining, the roles of consumption in the imagination and the relationship between imagination and material reality.

The trajectory of imagination is something that deserves considerably more attention. While I have attempted to capture this – the ebb and flow of imaginative activity over time – with a number of individual participants and have been able to make observations related to this based on studying a variety of people at different stages of life and at different stages of an experience, related to how these may invite different forms of imagining and indeed may involve consumption in different ways (occasions when it may be more focal for instance), there is scope to conduct longitudinal research

to follow the trajectory of imagination much more closely. Following individuals' lives and imagining over an extended period of time to better demonstrate how particular consumer goods, life projects or events move from one form of imagining to another – ideal to materially real, positive to negative, future to past – the full nuance of how consumption, consumer goods and consumer culture shift in their level of presence and absence across time and different forms of imagining, and how such movement is prompted will significantly develop our understanding of imaginative practices and their link to material reality. As well as further phenomenological research, diary studies may be effective for this prolonged piece of research, but such an extensive project may also be well suited to introspection, and this kind of close, self-analysis when attention to imagining is heightened may offer significant and intricate insights into the phenomenon that may go unnoticed or be difficult to recall and disclose in other situations.

In addition to this, while I was able to trace people's lives and imagining over the course of pursuit and actualisation, a follow up study would be beneficial to explore what happens after actualisation. Do we 'live the dream'? Do we feel a strong sense of achievement, especially in those projects that were a long time in the making, such as Patrick's five years actualising the Italian Dream? What happens upon actualisation, when there is no more decorating to be done, no more changes to make? And what happens if and when the dream doesn't work out? A great deal of research could be conducted in relation to life after the dream and people's reflections on the journey of pursuit and actualisation. More longitudinal studies in consumer research may help us to better see how life goals, hopes and desires pan out over time and the changing roles for consumption over their course.

I have discussed relationships as central in the imagination. One particular aspect related to this that emerged from some of the stories I heard was the notion of shared dreams. Leonard (2005) raises this in terms of changing ideas of an ideal honeymoon and compromising our dreams for the sake of the other person. Several of the people I talked to discussed 'our dream' or 'our future', the things that 'we'd like', and so as well as thinking about other people in the imagination and being influenced by others in

terms of the things we come to desire, it seems that some dreams may be shared dreams. Consequently, they are likely to be subject to change not only based on a significant other but also based on the changing nature of relationships – as we grow with one another and as we end relationships and start new ones. When it comes to compromising our dreams for another person, what are we willing to compromise on? What are we prepared to sacrifice for the sake of a dream and why? Under what conditions are we willing to give up a dream of our own to make way for a new shared, one? There are many aspects related to compromising, sacrificing and changing our dreams, but how do such changes evolve? Are we aware that compromise is taking place? Is it that *we* change as well as our dreams? What happens if and when we may be forced to give up our dream? These issues may relate more broadly to the circumstances of the personal lifeworld as it is not only significant others that may cause us to compromise our dreams but the conditions of material reality. So there are also more factors related to material reality that may come to bear on our imagination that offer scope for research.

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## Appendix A: Example interview transcript

### Samantha and John # 1.

16/07/09. Their flat.

I arrive at Samantha's just after 7pm. We sat in the lounge for the interview. John has been delayed at work so won't be home in time to take part. We talk a little before recording starts and Samantha told me about her not having found out she was pregnant until she was 9 and half weeks.

John returned home about 8.45 and joined in at the end.

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[Loud cat purr as the recording starts.... brief chit chat about the cat]

How are you feeling at the moment then?

Yeah ok. I'm enjoying this bit now because I'm not feeling unwell and I'm not huge and there's lot of stuff I can do and get on with, we've been out and about recently, we went to Glastonbury a few weekends ago and did all that, and the other end of the musical spectrum we did Take That a few weeks afterwards [laughs] so that was really good, we've doing all sorts of things like that and i'm feeling really fit and well. I'm 25 weeks now and up until I was about 16 weeks I was feeling really ill and tired and everything. Much better now.

Yeah, and you said you didn't realise you were pregnant until you were about 9 weeks did you?

Yeah, 9 and a half weeks, now I think about it it's probably quite a good thing because my first scan at 12 weeks, mine was at about 13 weeks I think my first scan, but it felt like an absolute age waiting from when I found out to having the scan to sort of actually confirm it all and see it and make it real and I think if I had found out when I was four weeks or something it just would have been a nightmare, whereas then after my 12 week scan it's all gone really quite quickly cos then I only had a few weeks where I wasn't feeling well still, but that then passed and since then I've been feeling really well and [cat jumps up and distracts] yeah I've been feeling really well and the time's just gone really quickly, so since then I've had my 20 week scan and we found out we're having a little boy so,

oh really? Oh wow! So how did that change how you were feeling about it all?

Well the funny thing was when I when we first got pregnant and started getting into the NHS system and things I don't know why but I thought that you couldn't find out the sex at Poole Hospital but for the last couple of years you have been able to so I and it

almost wasn't a decision to be made, it was like 'oh we can't find out, oh well never mind', not even crossed our minds sort of thing, but then when we found out we could find out we both were like 'oh well, we don't know whether we want to or not' cos we sort of thought we couldn't [baby kicks and Samantha explains what it feels like] so we thought we'd think about it, I suppose it was a good few weeks before my 20 week scan that we realised that we could so we thought about it, and I'd always presumed that I'd feel really strongly about it one way or the other, that I'd really want to find out or I really wouldn't and be really quite, I guess quite traditional about the way I felt about it but actually when I realised I could find out I was a bit not bothered one way or the other and I guess there's a few practical reasons why you might find out in terms of, oh like colours of nurseries, wellt he nursery's going to be beige [laughs] even though we know and clothes, and, so the reason we ended up deciding to find out was that we thought it would be easier for choosing names because we thought well it's just, more straightforward, and we could get rid of half the names at least on the list and concentrate on a few, so we decided to find out but the strangest, I mean ok those things have happened but the biggest impact of the whole thing is that we, it sort of feels a bit more real and it's given the baby an identity almost and it's a little boy that we're going to have rather than a baby so yeah we're both really pleased that we chose to because I wondered whether I'd think 'oh I wish it was still a surprise' but I haven't felt like that at all it's just been really exciting.

Yeah, It must really change things, from just not knowing

Yeah because you sort of already know what your family's going to be before hand, you know you're going to have a son and you know that your eldest child will be a boy and all those sorts of things, ok you don't know after that but you are sort of getting a sneak preview into later life I guess.

And had you thought about what order you would like ideally to have children in before?

Yeah it's funny because I thought that I'd like a boy first but then as soon as you're, as soon as , I was a bit the same with the wedding and things, as soon as reality strikes you sort of, you don't care anymore, it's like well whatever happens, happens and so long as it's healthy and so long as everything goes to plan then it doesn't matter but before I was pregnant, and when I was younger I always wanted to have a boy first and that's just because I'm one of two and I've got a younger brother and when I was growing up as a teenager I always felt that as the eldest your parents are finding boundaries as much as you are, and knowing where to push it, and that's going to happen with your eldest whatever happens but when it's a girl as well I think your parents can be a bit more protective over you so I thought, well if you have a boy first then it's not going to be quite as bad, so that was my theory about it... (I talk a little about being the youngest child)... yeah I don't know whether being a girl has anything to do with it but I do think that my brother was allowed to do things sooner than I was but whether that was to do with them having been through it once already or to do with him being a boy I don't know.

And do you know how many children you would like to have?

Yeah we both want two so, although John was convinced we were having twins because there's twins in my family. That's the only disagreement I suppose we ever had which is passed now which is that if we were to have twins first I would have always wanted to have a second pregnancy and another one or however many, [laughing slightly] hopefully just another one. But John has always said that if we had twins first that that would be two and that was what we said we wanted but I just was always interested in the age gap thing and seeing them interact over different ages, so yeah I guess we could have one and then two but we wouldn't have any more than that, a friend at work's just found out that she's having twins the second time around, it's a bit of a shocker, she said if she'd had twins first time around 'well that would be two and that would everything we were expecting, ok it would be a bit of a shock all in one go but and she's going 'oh my god the car won't fit three car seats and the house isn't big enough for three cots, cos her eldest is still very little and so she's in complete shock about it all at the moment, she's excited as well now but to start with she was like 'how am I going to cope?'

Yeah, yeah. I don't know what would be harder. At least the second time around you've already had a baby whereas without having any and then having twins you've got two straight away.

Yeah, to deal with

Do you like the idea of having twins?

Well I think, I wouldn't mind I think I'd have found it a bit of a struggle to have them first time round for that reason but I sort of prepared myself for it because there are so many in my family that we wouldn't have been surprised if that's what we were told and John really really would have liked to have them first time round and still now if you say to him, if you bring the subject up he says 'she still might be having twins you know' [laughs] despite the fact we've been to two scans and there's only one there...(I tell her twins running in my family)... both of my cousins', maybe this part's a bit of an old wife's tale but they're supposed to skip a generation but and they were in my grandparents generation on both sides and then my cousins' on my dad's side, so my dad's sister's son and daughter have both had twins, so there's four little boys around, they're about 7 and almost exactly the same as one another, but it's great for them cos the two sets of twins are only three months apart which is nice really.

And so you said you've been doing some decoration and

Yeah, since we moved in here we've always had things we wanted to do and sort out and decorate and things but when we first moved in there wasn't any need to do anything really. Well the colour of the walls in here is what everywhere was when we moved in, she'd just done it when we moved in and that was five years ago so there wasn't really any need to do anything in particular but as time's gone by, we rented it for the first year we were here and then we bought it and at that stage I guess we might



have done more but you know we didn't necessarily, well it wasn't that we couldn't afford it it's just that wasn't what we wanted to spend out money on at the time and there were things that we needed like the sofa and it was more furniture we bought and invested in and now, I guess we've got most of the furniture that we needed and we did the kitchen, but we never decorated any of the rooms so about about 6 weeks ago we did the study which will be the study stroke nursery so that's done, although it's cluttered up now with loads of other stuff and we did the bedroom last weekend. I think we'll do most of the, yeah we'll do the whole flat before the baby arrives just so it's all done and nice it's not necessarily all for the baby it's more for us [laughs] but at least it's all done and we don't have to worry about doing it when the baby arrives because we might well, well we will at some point between the baby being born and it probably being about a year old we'll probably move so if we've got all the decorating done before the baby arrives then we're not trying to do it afterwards and we might well, well at some point between the baby being born and it being about a year old we'll probably move so if we've got all the decorating done before the baby arrives then we're not trying to do it afterwards when we're ready to sell.

So what sort of place would you want to move to?

Well we probably wouldn't want to move very far, but we, there's lots of things now to consider like School catchment areas and I don't really know how everything works, I don't really know how to find out either. I'm just presuming that one day I'll get told [laughs] but I've been asking a couple of people at work and even down to like nurseries for when I want to go back to work and things but we need to work out whether we can stay here or whether we need to move across the other side of the village, what we need to do in terms of getting into whatever schools or, I don't even know which schools are the best schools so

Is it strange to be thinking about that kind of thing before you've even had the baby?

It is and I, that's, I almost don't want to think about that stuff yet because it's like well I just want to enjoy the first bit but this chap at work, he said that when they went, when their little girl was 6 months old they went round to the nurseries trying to find her a place and they need childcare for her 3 days a week and they could only manage to get one day a week so then they had to get a child minder in for the other two days. Which he says is fine and it's cheaper and all the rest of it but she doesn't get the social interaction she would at nursery and when they went around he said there was about 6 unborn children on the list for the nurseries, I was like 'oh my goodness! I don't even know when I'm going to want to go back to work, how many days I'm going to want to go back, I don't know any of that stuff yet, so to start planning which nursery and things, it's a bit tricky to work out you know which, you could go and say I'll put them down for five days a week but then if you don't want that then they'll get miffed with you I'm sure or start charging you for things you haven't had or whatever

Are you still at [your workplace] ?

Yeah

How are they with, are they quite flexible?

Yeh I mean my boss I guess, she's a mum, she's got a son who, must be, he's just about to turn twelve so although it was a long time ago I think she appreciates that, getting back into the work environment and things so that's helpful and she's managed a few people more recently who have been off and had children and come back into the workplace so that's helpful as well but she's really flexible about everything almost more than I've asked for, not that, I haven't had to ask for anything but she was saying to me 'oh well if', I've sort of marked a date in the calendar for when I intend to finish before I have the baby and she said you know if you want to leave later, or leave sooner or whatever then that's fine as long as we're all prepped and ready a month or so ahead then that's fine, we'll just work to how you're feeling and all the rest of it and she was saying that when I come back, we were talking about who was going to do my cover and how that was going to work and she said oh well if we get that person to do it then potentially they could stay in that sort of a role which would mean you could come back, because essentially I'm a supervisor at work and if we put someone in place who was a team leader then they could stay as a team leader as I came back and keep a lot of the responsibilities which would mean that I wouldn't have to come back full time, and I always presumed that if you're a supervisor you'd have to come back full time because you can't supervise a team if you're not there but I guess if you've got a team leader who can do some of that for you in your absence then I guess you can and she sort of thought all about that before I had. And in all honesty I probably do only want to come back part time but I *don't know* and if I'd been forced into going back full time because that's what the job required I guess that's what I would have done but she's really flexible about it all, so I feel quite comfortable about that side of things. I don't have to worry about it too much

Is it important to you to still have a working life?

Well yes and no. I don't know to be honest with you. In some ways I think it is, because I do enjoy my work but then having said that I guess there's always days when you put in all your effort at work and you don't seem to get anything back for it and I just wonder whether I'll find being a mum more rewarding because you know perhaps you get more and it's more in your control and you do what you want and whatever choices you make are your own sort of thing. But I don't know I think I probably will want some of that time but then I know there's lots of other things I could do if financially I didn't have to go back to work then there's lots of things that I could throw myself into in the village and things to keep me interested and keep me socially active and sort of involved in doing other things so I'm not so, I'm not really that sure whether it's actually the work that's important to me or whether it's something else. I think financially I need to go back to work certainly at the moment but whether I just go back between children, if we have two if I finish, go back for a bit then have a second one because by the time you've got two of them in childcare it's getting expensive and ok it's not quite my whole wage but it's almost there and if I go part time then maybe it is my whole wage, so yeah there's a lot of unknowns really at the moment. But my idea is to go back as if I'm going back full-time forever because I think that's the only way to

get on at work is to just sort of commit yourself completely to it and if there's potential for me to get a promotion while I'm there then maybe that'll make me think 'oh I do want to stay' because it's something new and different for me, but if everything remains the same then I might feel there's more new and different things outside of here for me so. It's tricky to know

Yeah there's a lot of things that it throws up for you to think about. So if you didn't have to work for financial reasons, like you said there's lots of things you could do, would you leave your job?

Well I don't know, I mean if I didn't have to, if we didn't need the money I think probably between the two I'd still go back but probably very little, I think I'd go back as little as they'd let me probably a couple days a week or something whatever would be the minimum, just to make sure that I didn't want to go back almost to start with and then maybe I'd stop before I had the next one but obviously if you're in full time employment then you get your next lot of maternity leave benefits as well and the other thing is for so long as I'm on maternity leave or going back in between babies then I'm employed by the company which means that my all my pension contributions from the company continue so that sort of helps because I'm on a final salary scheme and every year I manage to clock up on that will make a difference, though maybe perhaps not the income that's a major consideration but the pension is something to think about as well, but that's a long way off so [laughs]

Yeah, it's one of those things that perhaps you don't think about seriously until something like this happens and suddenly you have more than yourself to think about

Yeah that's it, have to put everything into perspective and work out what's best the other thing is, although we'll have less money coming in whilst I'm off, I'm interested to see how much we waste because we're so busy and I think, I know that we have takeaways however many times we have them a month, I don't know probably between 4 and 6 times every month, well if I was at home everyday then we wouldn't because we'd never get home and go 'goodness, let's', ok you might decide once in a while 'we're going to have one' but at the moment for us it's certainly we get in a go 'what's in the cupboard? Oh nothing, do you want to go up the shop? No I don't want to go up the shop? Oh well let's just call in and order something'. It's laziness more than anything else, but if that's 20 quid, 30 quid, whatever that happens to be over the course of a month we'll save that and I think we'll be less wasteful with the other food we have in and I think there's lots of things we could save money on if I'm at home so it may be that we find that the savings we make from that mean that we are able to be ok without my wage, but I think I'd feel a bit strange not going back to work, just because it's been a bit part of my work for quite a long time now. So, you never know.

Sorry, when's the baby actually due?

31<sup>st</sup> of October

Have you, so you were just talking about how things might change like not getting takeaways or being a bit more careful is there any, have you changed any of your habits since you've been pregnant?

Not, apart from I guess we eat more healthily now just because I'm trying to be good for the baby, but I think probably the biggest change is that we haven't done quite as much travelling I mean I know I said we'd been up to London for Take That and Glastonbury and things, we haven't done quite as much of that, more so my parents have been down here to help us out with the decorating, so I guess it's things like that, but I guess in terms of things like what we eat and generally what we do not particularly, early on I was just so tired that we weren't doing anything [laughs] I expect John was quite bored, but yeah no I, there was several weeks where I was just literally getting in, sometimes I couldn't make it to the end of the day at work so I'd be home early and on the sofa and just about manage to eat my dinner if I was feeling like I could eat my dinner and then I'd go to bed about 8 o'clock and sleep through to the next day, so that sort of changed things quite a bit.

Was any of that before you realised you were pregnant?

No from, from about two weeks before I found out through til when I was about, so from 7 weeks to 14 or 15 weeks, so quite a long time but since then I almost feel better than, well I don't know maybe I felt so rough for a while it feels like I feel better now than I did before but I almost feel better now than I did before I was pregnant, I feel really quite full of life and everything now, so that's good.

Yeah. OK, so what do you think life will be like with the baby?

I don't know. I think a lot of my, this last weekend loads of people had babies. 5 weeks before my cousin had her second and then this last weekend someone from work, two school friends and my other cousin's wife, all had their babies so I sort of think about them and another school friend no university friend had hers the week before and so i see what they write on facebook and things and my cousin's wife, she wrote today 'Harry's done a really big poo and then a little wee fountain to celebrate' [laughs] and i thought I didn't know what to make of it cos I thought, I really didn't know what to make of it cos I thought 'am i really going to be discussing those sorts of things on my facebook'? but quite possibly [laughs] because that might be the most momentous thing to happen to you and my other friend, she really struggled through her pregnancy and so she's, her little boy was born premature, about 6 weeks premature but he was born very healthy and they were home quite quickly and everything was good but because she'd had quite a rocky pregnancy I guess she's got quite obsessed with him very quickly, you know very, very locked into him and everyday she posts a little clip on youtube of what he's been doing that day [small laugh], so I've been watching him so I don't know, things like doing their first bath and all that sort of thing it all seems a bit surreal. My mum's going to come down and help for the first couple of weeks which will be a big help because she said when I was born her mum came and stayed with them for a couple of weeks and did nothing to do with the baby but all the other stuff in the house so like cooking and cleaning and everything which then allowed her to focus on me as a

new baby, so I think that will be really helpful and I think because of that I haven't really thought about much beyond the first couple of weeks really. I'm quite excited because my parents both retire this, my mum retires at the end of next week and my dad retires the Friday after that so that is great because obviously they're looking forward to their retirement and things but it's nice because I think if they were both retiring and I was going to be working for the next year I'd be [laughs] you know 'well this isn't fair' but now because I'm going to be off, ok I'm going to be busy and it's all going to be different and everything but it's lovely that we're all off and if we want to see each other then we can whenever, it'll be really nice I think so

Are they very far away?

They're not too far, Oxford way, sort of an hour and a half, I think we'll see quite a lot of them

Is this their first grandchild?

yes, they're very very excited about that, so yeah they'll be down here a lot and I'll be able to go down there in the week if I want and stay with them a couple of nights, or meet them somewhere for a day or something, as I say my cousin's wife who's had her baby this last weekend they live not far from Guildford so we'll be able to meet up once in a while. So that's all i've thought about really, i've picture this very easy lifestyle where i have this baby and i just meet up with people and socialise and do lunch [laughing]

Like a yummy mummy [smiling/joking]

That's it yeah that's it, that's my general plan [laughs] I think because I've pictured that my mum's going to come here for a couple of weeks to start with and I'll just look after the baby I think I've decided that all that other stuff will always be looked after, but it's only two weeks, so. But obviously there's a lot of things that i need to be doing around here. Part of the deal is that i need to prove to John that i will be a good housewife in case i don't want to go back to work, so keeping the place clean and tidy and put dinners on the table and all the rest of it, because we are a bit chaotic most of the time when we're both at work like this evening John is working late again and I didn't get back here until about 6.30 so it is, we do put the hours in and I think if things are like that you do tend to rush around and as I say, waste things, we've been much better this year, well since we've been married we've been much better about making sure that we spend some time together in the evenings because he also does work outside, a bit of moonlighting for a couple of other people, which is great because it brings in a bit of extra money but it does, it can mean that he gets home from work late and then he goes straight in there and works and ok there's only a wall between us [laughs] but we're not in the same room, so this year we've been a bit more although he's been doing a bit more work we've been conscious that we'll have at least one or two nights a week where we'll sit down in here and watch a film together or something just so we're spending time together, yeah I think, hopefully that will be something that if I'm at home more then I'll be able to do various bits and pieces that mean it makes his life a

bit easier and he doesn't, he shouldn't ever have to come home and [lowers voice slightly] he will though because I know what I'm like! But he shouldn't ever have to come home and put the dinner on because I should, if I've got all day I should be able to manage to clean and look after the baby and get dinner on so, although everyone says you're knackered to start with so I'm guessing there may be days to start with where I don't manage it all but if my mum's here for a couple weeks and then John is going to take his paternity leave after that so mum will be here the first two weeks then John will be here for the next two and presumably if the baby does what first babies tend to do and that is be about a week late then that will take us through to about the 8<sup>th</sup> of December or something like that and there's only a few weeks until Christmas and we go up and spend Christmas with my mum and dad again so we'll be up for a couple of weeks

Yeah, so you get the full Christmas and New Year period off

Yeah, John will come up for a couple of weeks, he's booked all that, and the cats will come, so we've got two cat baskets and a baby seat in the car for Christmas [laughs] we'll go up and install ourselves there for a bit and then by the time we get back after Christmas the baby will be a couple months old and I'm sure by then routines will be established at that point and as John gets back into work in the new year I think I'll get into my routines and things, work out what I'm doing.

Are you looking forward to maternity leave?

I am yeah because I just, I've done a lot at work over the last 5 years, and I've been quite lucky in a lot of ways in that my job's progressed about every, well from 6-18 months I've moved onto a different job and that's been really good but I've been in my current role now for almost two years and I know it's not very long but compared to the other ones it's been quite a long time now and I'm ready for the next thing and it's part of the decision that we made was that I couldn't see what was coming up next for me at work and so I thought well that's out of my control but what's in my control is something else I want to do in my life and that's to have a family so let's do that now while everything at work's perhaps a bit more static, so from that point of view yeah I am, because I think I need a break from work almost to come back at it with a fresh pair of eyes and feel different, I think otherwise if I was to stay I'd start, if nothing did change, which is not to say it wouldn't but if it didn't and I stayed in the same role I might start to resent it and that's not really fair because two years in a role is not forever and I shouldn't but it's just what I've been used to, it's nice to go away and take 9 months a year, doing something different and then come back to it and things will have changed in that time and there'll be new things for me to learn, even if I'm going back to the same job so otherwise you forget when you're doing a job how much changes and how much you learn in the course of a year so if I'm not there I'll have like a year's catch up to do which will be quite a challenge but be good. I was talking to someone else and they said 'it's a bit like having a sabbatical for a year you sort of go away, do something different, then come back and look at everything with a fresh pair of eyes, you refocus cos quite often you do come back part time so you've got to be a bit more strict about

what you're going to focus your attentions on , you haven't got all the time you used to have, you've got other commitments at home so you can't be putting the hours in that you were and so I think we sort of, it'll make a difference to me in terms of how I approach things.

And do you think, you said John is doing extra work, do you think once you've got the baby, spending time together will

It's funny because over the last few weeks when we've been getting things, starting to do some decorating, starting to get things ready John works for two people outside of work. One of them is a very straight forward arrangement, John does a job for him and he gets paid. The other one is much less straightforward. He's been doing work for this guy on the promise that if it all takes off he'll get some shares in the company , so he's not getting any direct reward from it, which is I think part of it, but he doesn't always enjoy working with this chap, whereas the other guy is someone he went to school with, they get on like a house on fire, I hear him on the phone laughing away but when it comes to this other chap it's all 'oh you'll never guess what Dave wants now rah rah rah, he doesn't understand that I've done this and now I've got to change it and we've got plans this weekend' I think from that side of things he doesn't see any direct reward for it either, potentially he will you know, it's no exaggeration there's potential for it to be a 40million pound business, they've got it all patented, he's got all the right backing, which is fine but it's just how long is John willing to put in without anything from it, so I, over the last couple of weeks John has got a bit more annoyed with the process of working with this chap and has got a bit more, he's been enjoying more getting ready for the baby and doing the decorating and I think he's just started to realise that if he wants that time doing stuff here with me and with my parents, or with the baby or whatever it happens to be then he hasn't got the time to be doing both these other jobs he's doing and he's talked a couple of times about stopping it and I would prefer him to stop because I think it's knackered him out and he gets quite cross about it at times and that's not fun for him, or me to be honest with you so I'd quite like him to stop but I only want him to stop if he wants to stop because if I persuade him to then the company takes off and it is a 40million pound business and he doesn't get his section of the shares then he'll kick himself and kick me probably so I've just sort of left it at that and we'll see what happens , I think if nothing changes and nothing comes to fruition in the next couple of months, well before the baby arrives then I think he will probably say 'look I'm sorry, the situation's changed, or is changing for us, I can't commit the time that I was and I'd rather back out at this point' there is somebody else who was working, doing the marketing for this chap, cos John is doing the programming and he's got another guy on board doing sales and they had this girl, a mutual friend doing the marketing and she got a bit fed up with his working style and she pulled out and he did pay her off a nice lump sum as well so and John has done a lot lot more than she did, so that's the other thing that's crossed John's mind as well that if I do step out now we might get a little bit of a payment, there's no agreement and he's under no obligation to but I think he would give him a bit of a payout, so that might be worth having just as the baby arrives [laughs]

So what sort of things have you been doing to get ready for when the baby arrives?

Yeah it's just been doing the decorating really, John has not ever been a DIY person, and when I was at school and during my A-Levels and doing my degree I used to work summers at Focus DIY, so out of the two of us I've always known more about DIY and things and because of that, although John's dad was an electrician so he, by rights he should have some sort of DIY bones in his body [laughs a little] but he doesn't seem to, out of the two of us it seems to be me more so, but John's parents were a lot older than mine. My parents are mid-50s and John's dad would have been er, 80 this year and his mum would have been, my goodness, about [thinking] 74. But his dad passed away four years ago and his mum dies seven years ago so because of that, John never, I think almost because of age gap John never had that time where his dad might have taught him how to do things/odd jobs it just didn't happen, it wasn't part of their life and when my Dad has ended up coming down and helping us, and my mum, Mum does teas and lunches and cleaning up after us all, but John seems to have been really enjoying learning from my dad, bits and pieces like wiring a light in or painting techniques or whatever it happens to be and my dad has enjoyed teaching him as well because my dad learnt all his stuff from his dad and he's enjoying passing it on to John. So, I think he's, my dad's been quite clever about how he does it, he just gives John a hint or a tip and then just lets him do it, he doesn't stand there watching him. This last weekend Dad did some work in the kitchen and John decorated the bedroom but if he needed, didn't quite know how he was going to do something then he's got my Dad to go and ask, but now John feels like that bedroom and what he's done in it is what he's achieved and I think that sense of achievement is something different and he does sit at his computer all day and invariably comes home and sits in front of his computer here and so just to be doing something at home but a bit more physical or you know, just different I think he's really enjoyed that and the fact that he's doing it in preparation for the baby he likes as well, so [pause] he doesn't, me and my mum have gone out and done most of the shopping for baby stuff, [laughs] the moment I told him, he was here when I told him I was pregnant because he was off sick and I was off sick because I thought well the Dr up until that point thought I'd got gastroenteritis and that's why I had been so unwell, so I was off sick with that and John thought he picked up a stomach bug from me, but he must have just picked up a stomach bug because it turned out I was pregnant, so he was off sick and I was but I'd been at the Dr's and I came back and I told him, so it was a Monday but we were both here and I don't know I went in the other room for something and by the time I got back in here he'd got the laptop out and he was looking at pushchairs [laughs] and that's the one thing that he's really wanted a say in is what pushchair we had but and he's very specific, it had to have three wheels but not just any old three wheels it had to have big chunky off-road-y tyres so he's chosen the one we're going to have, but everything else really, all the little clothes and changing mat and the all I guess, 'baby-baby' stuff he's not been so interested in, well he doesn't mind, I'll bring it home and he'll go 'ooh that's nice' you know, but he hasn't been fussed about coming and picking it whereas on the other hand my mum has been absolutely ecstatic about coming along. We've got everything that we need, we have done for quite a long time, all the baby grows and that sort of thing but when they arrived at the weekend



she'd got another 3 sets of baby grows with bibs and hats and these little sets that you can get and, bless here [laughs] she said 'oh I had to get them for you' this little set of rubber ducks for the bath, this one big one and three little ones that sit on its back, so she gets really you know, 'I couldn't leave them in the shop I had to have them', whereas John would probably just walk past them and to be honest I might do with rubber ducks I don't know [laughs] but there are certain things he really wants to get involved in like the pushchair, I'm trying to think of something else, I'm sure there are a couple of things that he's been 'oh it has to be like this' or whatever but most of the little bits and pieces he's not really too worried about I guess.

So how far along are you with things you need for the baby?

Well I think we're there really in terms of what we *have* to get, last weekend when we'd been doing all the decorating my dad and I headed across to Southampton to, because they had their big estate car and we picked up the bedroom furniture from Ikea and there's a Mama's and Papa's shop there so we went in and got the pushchair that John selected and the car seat and the car seat base thing that you fit into the car and the car seat then just slots in and out of and the car seat goes onto that, then clips out and goes onto the pushchair, and my mum and dad bought the pushchair so we went and bought that, so we've got that and that will be delivered a couple of weeks before the baby arrives so that's quite good they keep hold of that and keep it out the way. There's apparently some sort of superstition about having the pushchair or the pram in the house before the baby arrives but I don't know, it'll come a couple of weeks before the baby's born so that it's here and we've got it, cos they won't let you out of the hospital without a car seat, which is fair enough [laughs]... but that was the biggest thing that we hadn't got, so clothes, nappies, blankets, sheets, yeah mum's bought loads of sheets

Did you get much stuff before you knew the sex of the baby?

Yeah in fact we got most of it I think, that was quite purposeful because even though we knew we were going to find out, I wanted stuff that I can use again and I thought well if I buy it now without knowing I'll just buy stuff that I like, most of the little tiniest baby grows and sleep suits and things are all just white, plain white and we've got a really multi coloured blanket and a pale cream one, the changing mat's just multi coloured polka dots, I didn't really want baby blue stuff or baby pink stuff, I don't really like it anyway so it's quite nice to have bright colours then it can be for either of them, if we have a girl next it will be, we can transfer it over, if it's a boy we have the boy stuff, the only things I've bought since finding out it was a boy is a few little boys clothes but most of it we had beforehand.

How do you feel when you're buying the stuff?

I don't know, I feel a bit, with clothes I thought I'd be really excited about it but I feel like we've got so much already, and I'd love to go out and buy more in a way but it seems so expensive and I look at things and go 'oh that's nice' and there have been a couple of things where I've thought 'oh I've got to have that for it' yeah I don't know I thought I'd be more excited about buying it than I have, I think I've always been more

excited about buying it for other people's children but now that it's sort of I guess all real and it's ours yeah I think the main thing is you go 'we don't need all of that, what are we going to do with it?' and you know it just, it, I mean we've bought enough of what we need and as I say my mum keeps buying stuff Bianca, do you know Bianca? she's already bought stuff for it and given it and she wants to arrange a baby shower as well, which as much as I'd be very happy if we didn't have anything given to us I'm sure people coming to that are going to buy things. My cousin who I said she has a 5 week old little girl, she said to me 'Samantha, if I don't put her in something different everyday for the next 3 months she's not going to wear stuff', so literally through what she'd bought for her and what everybody else had bought she had an outfit for everyday of her life!

oh if only you could do that as an adult!

Yeah! [laughs] she said it seems so wasteful but 'I want to put her in all the things that I bought for her and things that other people have, ok it'll be nearly new but I still want to put her in it all and take pictures' yeah without a word of a lie something different everyday, I can see it happening, we've already got loads and loads of stuff

So you're really quite well prepared.

I think so yeah.

What was the first thing you bought?

Oh [thinks for a while, mumbles a little] oh the first thing i bought was at Easter, i was buying John's easter egg and saw this little tiny, really soft bunny and I was buying John's Easter present and I can't have known for very long, I must only have known for a couple of weeks and I thought 'I'm going to get that for the baby' and John laughed and said 'you can't buy something for the baby it's not here yet', it was sort of completely impractical but I thought 'well'. I think that was it for a little while and then mum and I went out shopping for a day, we got lots of things, probably too much, I was shattered by the end of it but yeah we did all, because we're going to attempt to do reusable nappies we've got all of that kit, all the muslins all the baby grows the changing mat and everything like that

How did you decide to go for reusable nappies?

Well, we always said that we would. I know when we ever spoke about it [laughs] I don't know how these things come up in conversations, we always said we would try it, and then when we first started seriously looking at it when we knew I was pregnant I'd looked on a few websites and it seemed really expensive to do it that way actually because all the reusable nappies now, the modern style reusable nappies they're all sort of pre cut and folded, well pre-cut really and they've got Velcro all on them and things so you buy these kits and I was looking at the whole, to get from newborn to potty trained was, everything you needed was about 4 hundred quid and I thought 'oh well if it's going to cost that much' it's probably not worth doing. Although the main reason we said we'd do it is for environmental reasons, but then they reckon now that the

amount of washing you have to do for reusable nappies actually outweighs the environmental benefits of the disposables but I don't really know which way to take it, although the main concern is the landfills, it's not necessarily the recycling aspect but filling up landfill space, that's always been my main concern but with the, if you go really traditional, cos I didn't know you could get all the traditional stuff, and you can and if you do that, we bought a traditional set that had everything we needed for 35 quid, all we did was bought for when it's newborn instead of using terry towelling we, you use muslins and just fold them thick because otherwise baby drowns in a terry towel when it's very little and if you do that then the only things you have to buy different as they get bigger is the plastic outers that go over them so we'll give it a go and see how we get on, if we can't cope and it's too much or whatever then we'll go back to disposables but we've got friends who did do it and they got on fine with it so if we need any tips or anything we know where to go and as I say my mum will be here for the first couple of weeks and that's what she did for us so she knows what she's doing. The only thing is when you're going to hospital, or in hospital to start with they don't let you do reusable nappies there because they haven't got anywhere to launder them or anything so you have to take disposables into hospital and that's what, my cousin was saying when they had their first one, they intended to do reusables but they hadn't bought anything and when they went to hospital they had to use disposables and because disposables were so easy and they never went out and bought the others they just went out and kept buying the disposables but I guess if we've bought all the reusable's we try, I want to give it a go.

are you generally quite environmentally conscious people anyway?

Yeah we are, i think we could always do more but on the whole we tend to be, we do all our recycling here and yeah we do try, we do what we can and as I say we want to be, try not to be wasteful when the baby arrives, as much to save money as anything else, hopefully, you know touch wood, if I can breast feed successfully and we can use reusable nappies there shouldn't be any extra costs for the first six months or so until we start moving onto solids and things so, so hopefully that'll ease us into the financial side of it a bit more. We haven't spent a vast fortune now before it arrives, the most expensive things were the car seat and the buggy, a friend's giving us their Moses basket, there are a couple other things which I thought would be nice to have, which I thought well we'll get those after the baby arrives, like one of these pouches you put on the front of you to carry the baby around and a baby bouncer and all that sort of thing and we saw one of my cousin the other weekend and she said 'oh I've got one of those you can have!' and so most of the other, not big big stuff but the medium sized stuff is coming to us in terms of somebody lending it to us or giving it to us, it's only really clothes that we've had, and I guess we didn't have to buy any of that new but you sort of want to in a way, I think most of it's done really. We haven't got a cot but because we think we'll probably move before the baby needs to go into the cot we won't do that until the baby's a bit bigger 'cos it'll be in its moses basket for the first six months so if we find that we're still here we'll to rearrange the study a bit more to find somewhere to squeeze it in

And you said the nursery's going to be beige, have you decided how you're going to decorate it?

Yeah well we've done it, we wanted something because it's going to stay as the study as well as the baby's room once the baby moves into it, I don't know when that will be, we wanted to keep it as, so it felt useable as a study as well I suppose, so we've done the walls a sort of a mushroomy colour and then we bought curtains which are beige on the background but they've got big circles of different colours on it, which they look nice for the study but also they're blackout curtains as well, but will give the baby something to look at and I bought a rocking chair from Ikea which is sort of two tone and it's black and white so that's something that he can pick up on from quite a young age

cos they can only see black and white for a while can't they? I remember my sister-in-law drawing with black marker pens on paper plates for my nephew, just patterns and things

to identify yeah. So I got that. I thought that would be a good idea

Is that a feeding chair then?

yeah that's the idea, although it's not a proper one a proper um, [trying to think of proper name) the proper ones cost a bomb the ones the slidy, gliding ones, this is just a low rocking chair from Ikea which hopefully will do the job. So yeah those are the sort of main differences and we er the one thing that we haven't done in that room or the other room is floors, because we've got paint all over the floors in both of them, but when we've done the whole flat we'll do all the floors everywhere.

So has the baby really kind of spurred you on to get the flat finished?

Yeah I think so because, although having said that we probably would have done it all now anyway if, if I hadn't got pregnant when I did at the beginning of the year then we probably would have done all this now anyway and moved *before* I got pregnant, but now that I am we just thought we'd get it done anyway, as I said earlier then when the baby arrives when we decide we want to put the house on the market it's all ready to go rather than us having to rush around when the little one's here

Yeah, my brother and sister-in-law have been renovating their house and she was about 8 months pregnant knocking down walls and stuff. They were doing all sorts and going to work, with a toddler and baby. I don't know how they've done it

Yeah, well my parents, they haven't retired yet but they've been very generous with coming down here and we say we'll do this this weekend and we do, we get on and do it whereas if it was just the two of us 'oh let's do it next weekend', so they've been great. I think they're going to come down the last week of July and stay a whole week and do more for us. The first week of my dad's retirement he's coming down to do DIY for us [laughs]. But that week we plan to get the bathroom suite in and things, yeah the kitchen we did but the bathrooms still got an avocado suite so we decided that it just needs a white suite in it, the tiles are fine they're mostly white but every so often there;s a

coloured one, it's alright. As my Dad fitted some new taps for us the other week and took the bath panel off to do it and found a whole stack of white tiles underneath, so we'll be able to just replace the coloured ones, have them all white. It is my preference but it'll also be easier to sell if everything looks nice and plain so then people can think about what they'd like to do to it. Doing the bathroom is the next big job, apart from decorating in here. The only other big job really is laying the floors, we've seen what we like but we thought we'd leave it 'til the end. In the hall and in the, through to the bathroom we're going to get wood floor, there's this wood floor which is water resistant, we thought that'll be good for the bathroom but we might as well have it go all the way through to the hall cos it'll be great in the hall as well and it'll stop, as I bring the buggy in it won't mark or whatever it won't damage it in any way, we will have carpet in here and the bedroom and the study and we'll just have, probably just beige, the same one in all three rooms, wood in the hall and bathroom then we've got black tiles in the kitchen. A flat this size you've to be a bit careful about having too many different types of things, so we'll keep it kind of the same throughout, hopefully it will be ok.

Is it how you had wanted to do the flat when you,

It is really how we wanted it, we sat down the other day and said 'when it's all done we're not going to want to move out' because we'll finally get it the way we wanted it and it's given us a bit more impetus to focus on it and get it done, and I think more so for me because I've always been the one who's had the ideas of what it would look like or how we would do it and now just having the bedroom done how I thought we would do it now, it's like 'oh yeah I really like this I wish we'd done this sooner' but it's all about investing that time to do it, but it's nice now it's done so at least we'll have a period of time when we'll enjoy living in it the way it is so, I'd love to say that I'll resolve the next place we live in we'll get it all done to start with so we can enjoy it but I know that's not the case I've got a friend at work and they're always, she's lived in three different places since I've known her and every time they've moved in, I suppose they have the luxury, her parents live close by and they've gone and lived with her parents for a couple of months while they're doing up the place they're going to move into, so they got it how they want it and moved in and then sold it later on, but I think, it depends how awful it was, if the decor was bright orange walls or something you couldn't stick I guess you would do something about it fairly quickly. You can see it needs doing here now cos the paints cracking, I think she did it quite quickly when she wanted to rent it out but it was neutral and we could move our stuff in and it didn't make any odds really

And, going back to the baby. Did you know very much about babies before you pregnant, what it would involve and

I don't know I guess a bit, but it's difficult to say what I knew and didn't know now. I think I knew what, I definitely, one of the things that I've found is that you can read on different websites or you can go into chatrooms and read what different people say, and people will write the *longest* list in the world about what you need, like physically what you need to buy when you, to have a baby and seriously you don't need to buy a *quarter*

of what they put on the list. Obviously some people like to have everything that you could need, i've seen lists for babies toiletries, johnson's shampoo, johnson's lavender after bath cream, johnson's this, johnson's that, sort of all the brand stuff and actually the midwife recommends just warm water when they're very little they actually don't recommend you put anything on their skin at all, so you I think you can go into shops and think you need one of everything that's on the shelf and actually you don't at all. And one of the things that I thought I would want to do is have like a proper nursery all kitted out with things like the cot and set of drawers and little baby wardrobe and things but a, we haven't got the space for it and b, to get a set like that that, nice that i like, you're spending £500, yeah babies can be expensive but they don't have to be. The only furniture that we're gonna have for the baby is a moses basket that we've borrowed off a friend [laughs] so that saves us £500 really, you know depending on which route you choose to go down. I think I've been surprised at how little of what I guess I'd imagined you might need you actually do need, i've been quite minimal

Yeh so like you were saying, other than the baby grows and changing mat the first six months is just you and the reusable nappies and that's all the baby needs

Yeah that's right I guess that's how, how we're designed, and somewhere to sleep. The pushchair's the biggest thing, expense that we've had, again you can go crazy with them. We've got what I think is a really nice pushchair, very safe car seat all the rest of it but altogether on all of that we've spent just over £400 on all of that but you know some of them the buggies and things they start for, just the buggy's £400 and you think 'oh my goodness' i guess if you've got the money to spend and you want to, then fine but, i do see, or *i know* people who haven't got the income that we've got and do go out and spend an awful lot of their money on things like that because it's the thing to have, it's that brand or whatever, I think you do have to distance yourself from that a little bit because, when you're buying for yourself if it's clothes or whatever then you're buying for yourself and you have your own justifications for why you have to go and get that, or you need a new dress, whatever it happens to be, when you're buying for the baby it's very easy to say 'oh well the baby needs it', it's very easy to put it on somebody else and say 'oh well I have to have that because the baby needs it and actually because they use certain things for such short periods of time, it's worse value than if you were buying it for yourself. I guess a lot of the money that we've spent since we found out that I was pregnant is on us or on the flat or whatever else that I guess is a bit more of an investment or long term buys, we spent all this money on the furniture for our bedroom last weekend, but we needed to spend that money on that whereas we didn't need to spend it on a super duper buggy of any sort, you know it does what it needs to and it's got the requirements that John needed it to have [laughs] so that's done the trick.

Did he do a lot of research?

Yes [laughs] he did, as I say it was the first thing he did. He went online and was looking at what it needed to be, he suddenly within literally in the course of 15 minutes he was an expert on buggies, I guess he must have seen a few peoples' buggies but he

knew exactly what he wanted, what sort of tyres it had to have and what the front wheel needed to do and not do. As far as he's concerned 4 wheels is a wheel too many so it had to have three and the wheel at the front needed to be, you need to be able to fix it in position so if you're going over rough terrain then it holds place But then you need to be able to un-do it so that you can move it round more easily as well.

1.18.00 Do you go over rough terrain a lot [laughs]?

I'm not particularly intending to [laughs] but we shall have to see. At the moment we don't go on rough terrain but clearly John is intends to take the baby on rough terrain so we shall see when we were at Glastonbury there were people with very young babies there and they've got all these whizzy pushchairs and things and I know they would have cost four or five hundred pounds and they were covered in mud completely trashed. I would have bought a cheap one for that.

Ok, and last thing cos we've been talking for over an hour and I don't want to hold you up.

Oh that's alright. What time is it?

It's 9 o'clock.

Oh is it?

You mentioned about going on websites and chat rooms, what kind of things have you done?

Yeah well I got quite obsessed with because I wanted a source of information that I could dip in and out of and I ordered a pregnancy book quite early on but that took a few days to come and like the day I found out I wanted an immediate source of something and did a couple google searches and found this website called Babycentre.com and that's got lots of advice on every facet of pregnancy that you could imagine but it has chat rooms and forums as well so, I thought when I started going in there and reading things, I always do this when I go into chat rooms though, whatever it happens to be I always think 'ooh I'll just after a little bit I'll start writing' but I never do I just read and never end up writing anything, I guess some people in there are a bit obsessive and things so you take them with a pinch of salt but, they have different forums for whatever month your baby's due so you can go in and read about people who are at the same stage of pregnancy or more or less, as you, so that's good to see how other people are getting on but at the start I was in there *every day*, like on an evening I'd be in there every 15 minutes or something seeing what people have written, but I guess I'm a bit bored of it now. The other thing is, at the beginning I guess I was looking for reassurance about different things that I was feeling and when I was feeling sick and I'd have nosebleeds and all these different symptoms that I didn't know if they were right or you know do a quick search and see 'oh yeah fair enough that's to be expected', but, what was I going to say about it?, oh yeah, it's a bit like I guess going onto google to find out whether you've got swine flu or not, it's enough to, you can worry yourself sick over things and what I really struggled with was there was a period,

I don't know from probably from when I found out to when I had my scan and a little bit after that when I didn't really know whether I was, well you knew, you're told you're pregnant, and you've seen the little stick and you know that is real but you're not really sure and you're not sure whether it's going to be a successful pregnancy or not because up until 12 weeks that's when the miscarriage risk is high and what I found on these forums is that, because you're going in with them to a chat room where everyone's at the same stage of pregnancy as you, when you're at the time in the pregnancy when the risk of miscarriage is high of course, in the chat room you're seeing a lot of people saying 'i'm going to have to leave because i've lost my baby' sort of thing and I found that quite difficult because, if I thought about it logically I'd realise that everybody who was, most people like me who were happy and didn't have problems weren't writing anything in there and it's the people having problems or who had had miscarriages who were writing in there so it's quite a distorted view and I think that's what I had to keep telling myself but obviously your hormones are everywhere and you worry about it all. And at the time there was somebody at work who was two weeks behind me in her pregnancy and she lost her baby and so all that just made me worry, overly so and the time around then just dragged and dragged because I was waiting for it to feel real and obviously you've not got a bump and you're told that you've got something this [demonstrates size of foetus with her fingers] sort of size inside you and it just doesn't feel real but at one point I realised I *did* have this bump and all of a sudden it was *this* big and I couldn't quite believe that it had gone from, obviously it had gone in very small stages but it felt like it had gone from one minute it was this big and I couldn't see it and didn't really believe it was there and next thing I'd got a bump and it was getting to be something that was sizeable you know, it wasn't just like a little nugget of something it was a small baby at that stage.

So is it quite a difficult time in those first twelve weeks because you have got that worry like you said, but you've also got that initial excitement?

1.24.30 yeah, yeah it's real sort of a juxtaposition of different feelings you are very excited but you don't want to let yourself get excited and I think it was good that I didn't actually know I was pregnant until I was 9 and a half weeks but thinking back I almost think I did that, it was almost something quite purposeful because we were trying [phone rings, she's answers it - John] what was I saying? [I remind her] yeah so we were trying and we went skiing when I was about 4 weeks pregnant as it turns out and just before we went I thought 'right I'm gonna go to the dr's' cos I'd had a pain right low own sort of, which I associated with my ovaries and I thought oh well I'll just go and check co I knew we'd been trying but I thought 'oh it's early days, the first month we'd been trying, probably not but worth going to get it checked out cos if I'm going skiing I'm better off knowing ' so I went to the Dr's, explained what would be my dates and things and she 'oh right, well we'll be able to find out now if you are' so she did a test there in the surgery and it was negative and she said 'but because it was early days I will send it off to the hospital as well but obviously won't get that back until you're back from holiday' but because it was negative in the surgery I, I guess part of me knew that it might not be accurate but I just presumed it was because I didn't



want to dwell on the fact that I might be pregnant because I think that for so long as I was thinking 'am I aren't i?' I think you can get yourself quite wound up and anxious about keeping a baby at that very early stage and they say that most people, most of the upsets of miscarriage nowadays are because people find out so early from a home pregnancy test whereas they might not have known and they might just have had what they thought was a heavy period and that was that, so I sort of put it to the back of my mind and almost didn't want to dwell on it, we went on holiday and skied my heart out and drank too much probably did all the things, because in my mind I wasn't pregnant there was no chance really because it had only been the first month we'd been trying and that would have been ridiculous if I'd managed to get pregnant that quickly and anyhow the doctor had said I wasn't and came back from holiday and went to the dr's for something else, I'm not sure what that was, but asked them about the results from the hospital and they said 'oh yeah, everything came back', cos they tested for pregnant but also urinary infections and things like that, 'everything's come back negative', left it and that would have been when I was about 5 weeks and as I say from 7-9 weeks I was off work sick and they thought it was [mumbling, trying to remember] oh I have IBS, so thought it was my IBS playing up but then because I was constantly being sick, which I'd never had with it before they then said it must be a stomach bug of some sort or it must be gastroenteritis, so she started treating me, they can't give me anything because it was viral but she'd given me anti-sickness tablets to stop me being sick because I just couldn't keep anything down and at the end of the two weeks when she'd signed me off I said 'I'm still being sick and nothing's changed, I feel just as awful as I did except for that I feel really tired and everything' and that's when she said 'oh well let's just do one more test now just to make sure' and that one came back positive [laughs] so I think in some ways it was a good thing, whether it was a subconscious thing that I did to just blocked it out and pretended that it wasn't an issue and I couldn't possibly be just so that I wasn't worrying about it but I have seen other people who have struggled, are still really struggling to get pregnant but I just think that when people obsess about it that that worry in itself can't be good for the situation so I guess I just didn't want to worry about it so I didn't think about it too much and just left it where it was and thought 'if it happens it happens but if it doesn't it doesn't' and that was partly also because we'd planned, we would have liked to have got pregnant this autumn, when the baby's now due, but earlier in the year because I said to you I felt things were fairly flat at work and nothing much was going on and because we knew a lot of people who'd struggled to get pregnant we thought 'well let's, nothing's stopping us now, financially we're in as good a position as I guess we probably ever will be so we might as well try and if it happens it happens but if it doesn't it doesn't' and I think because we took that attitude I wasn't counting days I wasn't, because people say to me now 'but you were 9 and half weeks pregnant when you found out, that's two periods, that's this that's that ' you know literally I'd come off a pill in December and I wasn't counting and the Dr kept saying to me 'oh your body's just adapting to coming off the pill' and I, that's what I thought and I just wasn't going, I wasn't thinking about it any further, I didn't want to count the days since my last period or anything like that and just start thinking 'oh well maybe I am' and start doing a test every week to see when it, as I say I think I didn't want to know because I didn't want to be worrying about it. When she said gastroenteritis I

thought 'that'd be about right' because I felt so rubbish cos I didn't know to expect this tiredness it made sense that it was a virus, what were like flu like symptoms as far as I was concerned. I think it's probably a good thing that we quite relaxed about it all and not anxious and things at the same time we're very lucky that it happened for us that first month and it was straight forward for us.

Have you thought much about the birth?

A little bit more recently, I've been trying to block it out [laughs] I think maybe it's quite natural to block it out, when I saw my cousin's wife the weekend before last we saw her on her due date and she said that completely got her head round being very pregnant and being at the end of her pregnancy, she'd completely got her head round the fact she was going to have a baby but she hadn't got her head around the fact that she was going to give birth [smiling] and she said, 'I don't think that that's day's going to come, I think it's just going to happen', she didn't think she'd ever get used to the idea and I think potentially that's maybe nature's way of, cos by that time she would have been to the ante-natal classes and you get to see a lot more and talk through it and I think there are things that they do to try and make it more real for you, but I don't think you ever, I think there is a natural thing that stops you dwelling on it too much because and again I wouldn't want to because I think the more you dwell on it the more anxious you become and the more tense you are about the whole thing is I think going to make it worse not better. They want you to write this birth plan so that you, so you say you know do you want to have it in the birthing pool or you want to have pain relief or you don't, all these sorts of things they want to know about, and when the baby's born do you want the dad to cut the cord or do you want the doctors to do it, do you want the baby to be handed straight to you, all these things and I think that, my theory with all that is that that's there for you to feel like you've got some control over the situation but everyone I speak to says that, literally, apparently it's the dad's job to take the birthing plan into the hospital, your bag, you and the birthing plan. They hand the birthing plan over to the midwife and they chuck it out the window [laughs] because everything changes and you can't predict what's going to happen and you know, you've planned a natural birth, gas and air only and you need to have a c-section so I think as much as I will, I'm guess I'll think about it and my ideas of what I'd ideally want and what I wouldn't, I don't want to plan it too much because again if it doesn't go the way you want it I think that could be more stress on the day itself but also, I don't know I'm no expert but I wouldn't be surprised if could be something that could trigger like post natal depression as well because your hormones are all over the place and you've planned your perfect birth, however that might look to you, and then you have to have a c-section or something else happens, or your husband's away and he can't get there and that might just be, especially if it's your first I think you might think, 'I'm never going to have my first child again. It was a one-off and it didn't go the way that I'd planned and I think perhaps even in a normal hormonal state that could make you think 'oh that's not fair' or whatever, even at a very subconscious level but when you've got all your hormones flying around as well I don't think it can be any good for you at all to be too obsessed with a certain way of it happening

so it's a way of giving you control and almost reduce your fears but that in itself could be source of worry for you

I think it could be, I'm sure I'll go through the process in fact I think you have to but I'll try to be flexible in my approach to that when I write it and as flexible in my attitude towards it, as I can be and not get too, maybe it's easier said than done I don't know but not get too obsessed with how I want things or whatever, but, through the whole of our wedding preparation as well as this pregnancy what I've found is that when you're actually in a situation that you anticipated for a long time in your life, whether that's being engaged or planning the wedding day itself or being pregnant or having a baby I think a lot of the, perhaps just personal things, but a lot of the things that I was absolutely *sure* I wanted or very dead set on *before* I was in the reality of that situation, when I was there then all of a sudden a lot of them didn't seem as important as I thought that it would do and it was more important not to get hung up on the little things so that actually you could enjoy the process, whether that was planning the wedding or being pregnant, I think

have you got a particular example?

Well the wedding's probably easier, things like [pause], how the invitations looked, at the end of the day the most important thing for me was making it easy to produce them and get them out so we didn't spend a lot of time doing them and also we didn't want to spend a lot of money so we did want to do them ourselves but I'd always imagined like putting loads and loads of time into it and having them absolutely perfect and doing them, actually when it came down to it actually it was more important that we had more time not sitting around and tying bits of ribbon or whatever we were doing, yes we had some nice invites, but we didn't spend forever doing them and I think it's that balance between having what you want and the reality of actually living your life alongside all of those things basically, and keeping that balance. And although I didn't know what I would want to do, I always thought I would feel very strongly whether I wanted to find out the sex of the baby or not and actually it turns out I didn't feel strongly one way or the other and it came down to more the practical side of things as to whether I wanted to find out or not and, yeah, the other [laughs] my mum, she thinks I'm awful for saying this but I also used to think that I would be *very very* particular about what I ate, sticking to a, almost like a diet plan of you know 'must have fish twice a week, must have this' and don't get me wrong, I eat healthily but if I've not had fish in a week then I'm not counting it at all, it's not something that I've got hung up on. I thought, I *really* thought I would, I thought I would be planning everything to the nth degree and making sure the baby's getting all the nutrients but I think you just sort of, rightly or wrongly the way I feel about it is, you know people have been doing this for years and years and actually maybe if I gave it fish once more a week it would be a cleverer baby but then maybe it wouldn't and maybe it's not worth worrying and maybe the worry of trying to do all of that is worse for the baby than actually giving it whatever and maybe it's better that you just have what you want and ok eat healthily but not worry about it too much.

Have you had any cravings?

Well, I say no but there are three things that I could say might be cravings but I'm not really sure if they are or not. Two of the things started before I knew I was pregnant, one of those is just water. I've been really really thirsty and just wanted water, and nothing else and John said 'oh you better be careful you might be diabetic' [laughs] so not a particular craving but something I guess your body's telling you it needs. And the other one from before that has continued is I want lots of salt and vinegar on chips [laughs] and I'm wanting chips a lot more, but I don't think it's the chips I want but the salt and vinegar on them cos it's not like MDonald's chips wouldn't be of any interest, it's got to be chip shop chips with stacks on them so, yeah so since being pregnant it probably has been getting lots of fish cos I've been having fish and chips a lot [laughs] not once a week but maybe once a fortnight, and what was the other thing, oh ice cream. But I think that's just because we've had a lot of hot weather and I've wanted something to cool me down in the evenings and ice cream's you're getting your calcium as well and I've got a sweet tooth, so I don't think it's been a craving just something convenient to have. I think because I was so sick to start with there's more stuff I've gone off. I'm not fussed by Indian take away or Chinese takeaway. We were making the wardrobe last night so we didn't cook, John said 'let's get chinese' and I was like 'I don't really want chinese', so I just had some mixed vegetables, rice but I can't eat all the saucy stuff, I can't stomach it. Foods I really really like I just can't stomach them at the moment. whether it's because I perceive them to be too full of stuff that's perhaps not good for me or the baby. I think like Chinese sauces are always with MSG aren't they and Indian sauces have lots of food colourings and, but like that hasn't stopped me eating Haribo [laughs] so it's just a bizarre connection I've had with types of food. So.

Are you enjoying being pregnant?

I am now, yeah. There was a bit, towards the end of when I was feeling ill, it didn't stop 'til I was about 15, 16 weeks pregnant I thought 'I really didn't want to be the one who moans about being pregnant, I wanted to enjoy it, but I am now I really am enjoying it and from about when I stopped feeling sick I started to feel the baby as well so it's nice now that I can feel it and the last couple of weeks John has been able to feel it on the outside as well but depending on where it's kicking, sometimes it's inwards or downwards so you can't so just being able to feel it and feeling well is ideal. I'm very much enjoying this stage. I suppose I'm a bit concerned about getting so big that it's all unmanageable and feeling uncomfortable [John arrives home] but yeah so, I'm enjoying this part

[pause while John comes in and then joins in]

What are you most looking forward to?

John: Toys [joking]

Samantha: [laughs] yeah toys

Me: oh yeah cos you know you've got a boy now to

John: Exactly

Samantha: John thinks I'm having a 7 year old, it needs a BMX apparently, what else does it need? A tree house, and all sorts of stuff that boys need. Um, most looking forward to, I don't know I think at the moment it's just meeting him, seeing what he's like and what he looks like, I get to see how he behaves and what sort of a person he's going to be really especially now i know it's a him.

John: yeah. I don't really know actually as well, it's a very odd thing, cos it's not something that's arrived cos, obviously you're pregnant and everyone knows about pregnancy but it's a completely different thing afterwards, so I don't really know what, it's very hard to say actually, obviously there's a lot of excitement about , you only really get excited from other peoples' experiences

Samantha [telling John]: I was saying that Lucy's written on her facebook status 'Harry has done a big poo and to celebrate a wee fountain and I said I can't imagine getting that excited about poo and wee, but clearly people do. I think it's going to be a bit strange to know what you'll find exciting. I mean I am looking forward to things like it's first bath and things like that

John: walking's quite a nice idea, I'm looking forward to that, to get out a lot more and there'll be more excuse to be able to get out, which you don't get without a baby

Samantha: hence the 3 wheel, off-road vehicle.

John: whether we go up mountains is another thing, it said we can do that in the brochure

Samantha: we don't go up mountains at the moment

John: and we're not generally mountain walking people, it may all change when we have the baby

Samantha: yeah, of course

John: [laughs]

Samantha: have baby must travel

Me: do you like being out and about then?

John: I think we do, I think at the moment there's not enough excuse for it, I think all that's because of work, like tonight. It'll be nice to get out as a family

Samantha: As a family unit, yeah I think that maybe we'll feel we owe it to the baby a bit more to get out and about. I don't know anyone with certainly small children, I don't know about babies, who don't go out at least and do something at least one day on the weekend, cos you can't have the kids in all the weekend whereas we could quite happily, at least if it was raining outside, we'd quite happily sit in here and watch DVDs back to back all weekend if we wanted to, whereas you wouldn't do that I don't think with a little one, cos you sort of want to get out

John: that's the thing I think I'm looking most forward to

Samantha: Yeah, but I am looking forward to what he'll be like and who he'll be

Me: Have you thought much about what he might be like?

Samantha: not really, I haven't, I can't really imagine. we know a lot of little ones so they're all so so different

I haven't really thought about that actually, that's really interesting, I hadn't thought about what he'll be

Samantha [finishing John's sentence for him]: like

John: I can't imagine a hybrid of us, I haven't even thought of that, which is really what he is. I hadn't even thought o that I just imagine him being small

Samantha: I don't know how long it will be from that stage to be able to say 'oh he's like this, he's like that'

John: yeah, It's interesting.

Me: Well you'll have to think about it more now and then tell me about it next time

John: Yeah yeah.

(end interview)

## Appendix B: Publications

Jenkins, R., Molesworth, M., and Eccles, S., 2010. Alternative hedonism, digital virtual consumption and structures of the imagination. *AMA Winter Educators Conference Proceedings*. New Orleans, February 2010.

Haywood, H., Jenkins, R., and Molesworth, M., 2010. 'A degree will make all your dreams come true: higher education as the management of consumer desires' in, Molesworth, M., Scullion, R., and Nixon, L., (eds) *The Marketisation of Higher Education and the Student as Consumer*. London: Routledge. Chapter 15: 183-195

### **Forthcoming work:**

Jenkins, R., Nixon, L., and Molesworth, M., 2011 (forthcoming July 2011) 'Just normal and homely': the presence, absence and othering of consumer culture in everyday imagining. *Journal of Consumer Culture*.

Jenkins, R., and Molesworth, M., 2011. Theorising the consumer imagination. Paper to be presented at the 6<sup>th</sup> *EIASM Interpretive Consumer Research Workshop*, Odense, Denmark. May 6-7 2011.

Molesworth, M., Jenkins, R., and Eccles, S., 2011. Love and Videogames: Negotiating relationships with cultural ideals and consumer practices. Paper to be presented at the 6<sup>th</sup> *Consumer Culture Theory Conference*, Northwestern University, Chicago, July 8-10 2011 and published in *Research in Consumer Behaviour*, Vol 13.