DECONSTRUCTING THE CHILDREN'S CULTURE INDUSTRY: A RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

by

JENNIFER ANN HILL

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ABSTRACT

The children's "culture industry," meaning the mass production of popular culture by corporations, has systematically targeted children to persuade them to desire commodities while promising an increase in happiness. Media in all forms has become the conduit through which corporations have access to children and the means by which they influence, mould and profoundly impact children's lives. Indeed, consumer culture plays a dominant role for individuals living in such cultures, arguably more than any other institution including government. In the 1990s, the most intense commercial campaign in the history of childhood had commenced. Despite the pervasiveness of consumerism, there has been a notable gap in the literature to ascertain from young people, in their own words, what are the experiences of and meanings attributed to consumerism throughout their childhoods. Using a paradigm of qualitative research, the present dissertation provides a detailed description of how young people, those aged 18 or 19, perceive the presence of consumer culture in their lives, both presently and with particular focus on the past, as children. Data presented here suggest that most of the young people interviewed feel considerable pressure to conform to the standards of consumerism, including the adoption of brand culture, fads and a 'buy-and-consume' modality. Furthermore, the very identities of young people are inextricably linked to the process of consumption including the desiring, acquiring and discarding of consumable objects. Nonetheless, the participants were adamant their individuality had not been altered by mass culture, and that they were free to make choices as citizens in democracies have come to expect. Overall, the participants' responses demonstrated a distinct lack of insight about the motives of corporations, the power of advertising/media and their far-reaching influence on thoughts and behaviours. However, hopeful signs of understanding and resistance arose among some of the participants, including two in particular, who strongly expressed their desire to not conform.

PREFACE

The research study upon which this dissertation was based was approved by the University of British Columbia Okanagan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on May 17, 2011. The UBC BREB number is H11-00447.

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DEDICATION

In 1998, my husband introduced me to *Adbusters: Journal of the Mental Environment* and from that point onward I was never the same. I began to look at the world differently, to see what it was that corporations were getting away with, especially as it related to children. Being a social worker I had always been wary that institutional power had the capacity to destroy the rights of ordinary citizens. It was not until I immersed myself in the articles from *Adbusters* that I realized the extent of the damage that had already taken place. It was clear that corporations and not governments were setting the agenda for cultural change, and in a direction that would enhance their profits at the expense of well-being.

This thesis is then dedicated to two extraordinary individuals—my husband, Marc Brillinger and Kalle Lasn, the founder of *Adbusters*. Without either one of them I would have remained in the dark confused and uncertain about the power that corporations have usurped. It is doubtful that I would have even questioned the ways in which consumer culture is engulfing children—once I got it there was no turning back. This thesis was largely motivated by a desire to expose the harm that children are incurring daily as the machine of consumption relentlessly pushes on. Marc and Kalle gave me the courage to look that machine in the eye.

INTRODUCTION

> [The] average kid only spends 30 minutes a day outside, an amount that shrinks yearly. In this brave new world of Facebook and YouTube, Twitter and Google, iPod and Wii, kids are tuned into technology, and kindergartners start school with 5,000 hours of TV under their belts. Typical tweens put in a 40-hour week – a virtual full-time job – watching screens: TV, laptop, cell phone, and so on. They can name dozens of corporate logos and celebrities on site...But they cannot name three animals that live in their neighborhood, or three plants. (Weilbacher 2010)

The Presenting Problem

Current consumer research on children[1] strongly suggests that they are being harmed by corporations who view them as a lucrative market for their commodities and thus target them in every imaginable way to enhance profits (Kasser 2002). The mechanism by which corporations access youth is through all forms of media including television, computers, phones, DVDs, movies, magazines, and advertising of all kinds. Particularly in the 1990s, children from babyhood on were sought after by the purveyors of consumer culture at an unprecedented intensity. There is mounting evidence that consumerism is generally harmful to the psychological and physical health of children (Bakan 2011; Dittmar 2007; Kramer 2006; Linn 2004; Schor 2004). As well, decades of research on the negative impact of television and other forms of media raises concerns for children's overall well-being (Huesmann et al. 2003; Singer et al. 1998). Yet, we know little about the overall effects of this massive campaign as heard directly, in their own words, from those young people who have experienced these campaigns and its effects as children. It is important to uncover whether the individuals who are targeted by massive corporate-sponsored campaigns have gained insight into their predicament and perhaps even developed strategies to offset the negative effects of consumer culture. This thesis endeavours to explore the intricacies of the psycho-cultural and social underpinnings associated with consumerism and youth as well as speculate about the greater societal impact on human well-being.

[1] 'Children' is used as an inclusive term for individuals between 0 - 17 with the following subgroups: Young children are 0 to 7; Tweens are 8 – 12; Youth are 12 – 18; Young people are individuals aged 18 - 19.

Background and Significance

> The data over the past 25 years have shown and continue to show, that enhancing consumerism in children, tweens and teens causes harm. (Kramer 2006:293)

Consumer culture dominates many aspects of modern life in the industrialized world and in the past few decades it has rapidly penetrated the lives of children in an unparalleled manner (Kasser and Kanner 2004). The process of consuming has become increasingly significant in understanding how the lives of youth are culturally, psychologically and socially constructed. Their everyday life is dominated by the ubiquitous and ephemeral nature of consumerism to the degree that children in the West have never known differently. Wherever children go—whether it be at home, at a friend's, at school, at church, at the mall or on the school bus—consumer culture is touted as having the answers to every challenging problem, and is a tempting escape from so-called mundane everyday existence. It promises an endless array of stimulating activities and tempting goods to please whatever it is that one may desire. Additionally, marketers manufacture or generate desires that are not necessarily conceived of by the individual until they encounter such 'stimuli.' The creation of manufactured wants systematically undermines childrens' sense of emotional security (Kasser 2002).

Between 1990 and 1998, advertising to children increased by twentyfold (Schor 2005). It is not surprising then that young people's lives are enmeshed with a buy-and-consume modality and that they appear to be losing the capacity for authentic forms of spontaneity or creativity (Shellenbarger 2010). So much of children's play is scripted whether it is through toys, books, videos; as a result, children's imaginations are restricted and perhaps even underutilized. By the time they reach adolescence, children have experienced years of corporate structuring about how to think, act and even fantasize. Children now seek to define themselves through the acquisition of actual goods, particularly those that are branded (Morris 2001). Increasingly, they are exposed to violent and sexually explicit media, sexist programming that marginalizes young girls, and advertisements for junk food, tobacco and alcohol (Kilbourne 1999). In 2004, the American Psychological Association's (APA) *Task Force on Advertising and Children* strongly recommended an advertising ban for children under the age of eight based on years of research (Wilcox et. al 2004). Children between the ages of eight to twelve are only starting to become aware of the impact of media and its significance (Buckingham 2003). Yet, despite the APA's

credibility, corporations continue to remain unencumbered in their advertising pursuits of children.

Millions of children now integrate consumer culture in their lives as a means of expressing individuality when in reality they strive to mimic those who have mastered the 'art' of consumerism including celebrities, pop music stars, their parents, and even some of their peers. Indeed, it appears that rather than pursuing their own ambitions, they are locked into repeating and replicating those of their idols, conforming to the very norms they often protest about and claim to be free of (Niedzviecki 2004). The current decline in children's creativity (Shellenbarger 2010) and the tendency toward conformity may ultimately have profound implications for the survival of forms of democratic processes (Marcuse 1964). And not least of all, youth seem to have developed a blind acceptance of the neoliberal ideology of 'free-market' capitalism and the efficacy of consumer culture.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the pervasiveness of consumer culture in the lives of children, there is a large gap in the empirical research literature regarding children's perspectives concerning their past and current experiences and how they were and are being impacted by consumer culture. It is not known whether young people are aware of the specific forces that were imposed upon them as children to adopt popular consumer norms as a mode of being. It is plausible that having grown up in a consumer-oriented society from birth, that by the time they are 18- or 19-years old, young people are incapable of detecting and analyzing the effects of consumerism on either themselves or their peers. It is also possible that young people are aware to some degree that their lives have been influenced by consumer culture in profound ways and can share insight as to the personal ways (psychologically, culturally and sociologically) in which they were and are affected. Understanding how young people experience consumer culture is fundamental to appreciating what it means to be growing up in modernity. A young person's perceived affinity with and strategic targeting by marketers make them a particularly fruitful lens through which to examine the nexus of consumption, conformity/resistance and individualization. The present study, by soliciting information from young people directly, was a step towards hearing about and understanding their perceptions, ideas, impressions and possible concerns regarding their childhood as it relates to consumer culture.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine how young people who are 18 or 19 years-old experienced consumer culture as children, and in their present lives. Such insight would contribute to a more complete picture as to how consumer culture impacts children developmentally and the degree to which children are aware of its influence. As noted above, children born in the 1990s were a highly targeted group with respect to consumerism and from the moment they were born they received an inundation of media messages encouraging full immersion in consumer culture. While many of the effects of this massive campaign are evident in data concerning physical and psychological health of children, there is a paucity of research in which young people are the subjects in speaking about their childhoods.

Rationale

A number of researchers have pointed to the fact that consumer culture is engulfing the lives of children with few if any positive benefits. Specifically, seminal work by Juliet Schor in 2004 identified several negative effects that consumer culture imposes on children between the ages of eight and twelve. She studied approximately 300 children and their families in the area of media use, consumer values, involvement in consumer culture, physical and psychological well-being and parental relationships. Her results indicated that there may be a causal relationship between high consumer involvement and depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and psychosomatic complaints. Put simply, the more a child is immersed in consumer culture the greater the possibility of specific and predictable forms of harm. In another study, Buijzen and Valkenburg (2003) used Schor's survey instrument with additional materialism items and found that children who frequently watch television advertisements held stronger materialistic values than peers who watched less often. Overall, they found a direct relationship between advertising exposure and materialism, an indirect relationship between advertising exposure and parent-child conflict, and an indirect relationship between advertising exposure and unhappiness. As well, Kasser and Ryan (1993; 1996; 2001) have conducted numerous studies that link consumer culture involvement with the harmful effects of over-valuing materialism.

The information garnered from my study has the potential to raise societal awareness and lead to the rethinking of the cocoon of consumerism that children currently function within and its long-term effects. The study may also provide some insight into the nature, importance

and urgency of understanding media-induced conformity. Ironically, the continuing high media involvement of children, an important aspect of consumer culture, has been largely ignored by many academic disciplines most notably, psychology (Kasser and Kanner 2004) and sociology (Cook 2008). Children are said to be merely keeping up with the times of modern life and under no real threat by consumer culture—a position David Buckingham (professor of education) asserts in *After the Death of Childhood* (2000). Children and adolescents, despite having access to sophisticated technology, are largely voiceless and possibly misunderstood when it comes to deconstructing the impact of consumer culture (Giroux 2011). This study, by engaging young people directly, offers an exploration of the effects of consumer culture at an intimate or psychologically deep level of understanding.

Significance of the Study

Though clearly important, conspicuously absent from the existing literature was a focus on understanding the intricacies of the psychological and social understanding of consumer culture on children that goes beyond an exploration of mere brand association as seen in the Elliot and Leonard (2004) and Frost (2005) studies. While Schor's 2004 study delved deeper by examining such psychological effects as anxiety and depression, the scope of the study did not extend beyond the identification of such mental states. Finally, the studies on materialism, while revealing important elements about the downside of accumulated wealth, cover only one facet of consumer culture—acquisition of material goods—and not such important aspects as conformity/resistance, for example. All of these studies help to establish the facts of the matter, but do not get below the surface, and dig deeply for the meaning and understanding of these facts for children. The significance of this study involves two aspects that, together, try to get beyond the facts and move towards a more complete understanding of the meaning of consumerism for children from the perspective of young people: first by documenting the experiences of children as consumers, and second, by analyzing that experience through the traditions of critical theory. The study also provides discussion on the ramifications of individual conformity and potential forms of resistance or lack thereof at the wider cultural level.

Research Aims

The immediate aim of the study was to determine how young people experience consumer culture in both a broad sociological sense and also in terms of the psychological processes involved. The data collection was descriptive in its orientation; that is, it provided a description of how youth understand consumer culture and its meaning for them, both from their childhood experiences and their experiences as young people. The data also provided a description of what young people think are the benefits, or negatives, of consumer culture, for children, and how it impacts their lives. Despite the prevalence of consumerism in North America, there have been to date, few qualitative studies that document directly the experiences of young people in relation to consumerism and how they understand what it has meant to them as children. Qualitative research findings potentially contain information about the subtleties and complexities of human response to culture that are essential to the understanding of phenomenon like consumerism. The long-term research goal was to advance knowledge about what the deeper experience of growing up in a culture where one is valued primarily as a commodity and commodity consumer rather than as a person first; for this work to be done, it will clearly take an interdisciplinary perspective, one that includes psychology, sociology, critical studies, to name a few. For example, to this end, the data provided insight into the psychological processes of young people including that of self-esteem, as well as cultural forces that impact their point of view such as the values associated with capitalism.

Overview of the Study

The thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter one covers the theoretical underpinnings of the study with particular focus on the theories of Theodor Adorno (1978; 1990; 2005) that dealt with culture and consumption. Among the first to speculate about the social effects that transpire when culture and its elements become nothing short of a commodity were the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School including Adorno, Horkheimer (1973) and Marcuse (1964). In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno (1973) coined the term 'culture industry' to capture how culture in the US was being mass-produced through the application of industrial techniques. Adorno (1990) in particular, was polemic about the repetitive and standardized characteristics of US culture in its attempts to gratify the illusion of individual cultural taste. The culture industry thesis that he developed offers a complex and sophisticated model with which

to critique how the commodification of culture influences our perceptions of and actions in the world.

Marcuse, like Adorno, observed and wrote about the analogy between American-style democracy and totalitarian states in *One-Dimensional Man* (1964). He believed that those who controlled the economic and communication infrastructures essentially gained control of most of society. Marcuse viewed consumer culture as repressive because its primary task was to create false needs.

The work of Stuart Ewen (1976) is also covered in chapter one, with focus on his book *Captains of Consciousness*. He provides a chronology of the development of consumer culture and deconstructs the harbinger of 'branding'—lifestyle as a commodity form. Indeed, Ewen believes that industry aspired to attain widespread social dependency on the commodity market to ensure corporations accrue profits.

Benjamin Barber's thesis on the effects of consumer culture is also covered in chapter one. According to Barber (2007), the commodity form is no longer associated with the specific content of a product or service—it is the brand itself which is being marketed. He goes on to note that brands are now mistaken for identities. Sheldon Wolin (2008) picks up where Barber leaves off, stating that US democracy has become an "inverted totalitarian" state. Wolin attributes the erosion of democracy to the power of the corporation and its elitist group of shareholders.

All six of the theorists reviewed in chapter one take issue with the fact that liberal democratic societies have relinquished power to corporations to such a degree that sovereignty of its citizenry has greatly diminished. They all assert that the modern-day corporation has undoubtedly become the most powerful of institutions and that consumer culture has facilitated this coup. And while adults presumably have the capacity to reject consumerism, children, especially young children, do not. With the theories presented in chapter one, we can begin to look at and understand the workings of consumer culture and why it may detract from individual enlightenment or autonomy.

Chapter two provides details as to the history of consumerism with respect to children and a number of the current issues at stake. Today's children are inundated with a hyper-consumer culture that seems to be taking over all aspects of childhood. Between 2000 and 2010, a number of prominent scholars began to voice their concerns about the mounting negative

effects of consumer culture on children and adolescents. In particular, 2004 was a watershed year for it was at that point in time that economist Juliet Schor published *Born to Buy* and psychologist Susan Linn released *Consuming Kids*. Both of these books detailed serious concerns about how children's development was being compromised by consumer culture involvement. Two psychologists, Tim Kasser and Allen Kanner, also published in 2004 one of the first anthologies that detailed the psychological effects of consumer culture on children. In addition, it was in this same year that Joel Bakan, law professor, released his book *The Corporation: the Pathological Pursuit of Power and Control*. Bakan's findings confirmed that corporations were running roughshod over consumers, including children, with very little interference from government or special interest groups. Between 2000 and 2006, Helga Dittmar, a social psychologist, conducted a number of studies on the cost of consumerism for children and the downside of the so-called material 'good' life. In 2003, two other important texts were published: *Einstein Never Used Flashcards* (Hirsh-Paesek, Michnick and Eyer 2003), written by three developmental psychologists, which highlighted the importance of creative play unfettered by mass-produced paraphernalia and *Branded* (Quart 2003), written by a journalist, which described how teenagers are targets for everything branded from clothing to plastic surgery. In 2008, *The Lolita Effect* by M. Gigi Durham (professor of Journalism and Mass Communication), exposed disturbing details about how young girls are being sexualized in US culture and how normalized this process has become. Chapter two summarizes the findings of numerous studies all pointing to the ways in which children are suffering under the auspices of 'free choice' that so characterizes the zeitgeist of consumer culture.

The main purpose of chapter three is to demonstrate the ways and means of enforcing conformity and to describe methods of persuasion that are commonly used by corporations through advertising. Several studies on conformity taken from psychology and sociology are reviewed to reveal how we can easily be led to think and behave in ways contrary to our own liking. Chapter three also reviews what it means to be creative, and what types of environments promote creative play to provide comparison and contrast to the face of conformity.

Chapter four outlines the research methodology. This research study utilized qualitative interviewing methods by focusing on the experiences of young people who have faced the ubiquitous presence of consumer culture since birth. The purpose of the study was to describe the experience of being a child and young person in a consumer culture and then interpret the

meaning of those findings within a critical framework of the wider social, political-economic and cultural context. The purpose of the study was *not* to explore the ways and means of how consumer culture is harming children—this has in large part already been established (Acuff and Reiher 2005; Kasser & Kanner, 2004; Linn 2004; Quart 2003; Schor 2004; Thomas 2007). Rather, the aim of the study was to determine how young people have *experienced* consumer culture throughout their lives and what it is they *perceived* to have been its effects. Thus, the primary research question: "How do young people understand and experience consumer culture over the course of their lifetime?"

Chapter five summarizes the results of the study, those impressions and beliefs that the participants identified to be associated with the process of consumption and all other related experiences linked to consumer culture. The results section of the dissertation is organized around three themes that emerged through analysis: Inside the Culture Industry, Identity and Media.

Chapter six, the discussion/conclusion section, presents an overview or interpretation of the study's results and how they relate back to the theory and literature review.

The dissertation concludes with the position that corporations are largely shaping today's young people to be efficient consumers yet, somewhat deplete in key areas that contribute to long-term happiness (Kasser, Kanner and Ryan 2007). The developing brain has become the new territory for corporate infiltration, meaning that media has now penetrated to the core of our thought processes, moulding how we think, behave and view the world. It will be an enormous challenge for children to optimally develop in such environments.

CHAPTER ONE: THEORIES ON MASS CULTURE

This chapter focuses largely on the writings of a group of left-wing intellectuals who would later become known as the Frankfurt School. Together, their work has been said to be the beginnings of what would later be called "critical theory" by incorporating the analysis of the ideological and/or economic role of media in capitalist society. Interestingly, nearly all forms of contemporary critical theory are theories of consumption; that is how a commodity takes on value beyond its function (Williams 2006b). The reason for choosing the critical theories of Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse, just a few of the Frankfurt School scholars, is because of their keen interest in what they called mass culture and their ability to hypothesize about and provide analysis on the effects of consumerism on citizens of capitalist cultures. The Frankfurt School scholars were especially concerned that the homogenization or "massification" of democratic society in the West was eliminating pluralistic difference altogether. The second half of the chapter reviews more current political theorists, Ewen, Barber and Wolin, who critique the effects of mass culture where the Frankfurt school left off (Ewen provides historical context from the 1920s on). They each examine the integrative role of mass consumer society, and the new values, political and societal structures that developed as a result of, or concomitantly with, the specific transformations that converged into consumer culture. All of the theorists discussed base their arguments on an analysis of social structure or the macro effects of culture on the individual and the related psychodynamic effects.

The crux of each of the theoretical perspectives examined in this chapter is that citizens of capitalism are participants in the formation, as well as victims, of modern consumer culture. They are victims in the sense that consumerism is about commodified culture in which cultural goods are no longer produced for their intrinsic cultural value, but are advertised merely to accrue profit for corporations whose interest in culture is largely absent. Whether reviewing the critical theory of Adorno and Horkheimer, Ewen, Barber or Wolin, each of these theorists link mass culture with a form of mind control, meaning individuals are psychologically and socially influenced. Culture, propagated by media, becomes a form of rationalized and systematic control of labour and leisure that leaves the consumer a pawn, subservient to a system that keeps him well in check. The consumer becomes less able to resist the economic and social systems spun by mass culture, all the while being told they operate in a 'free' society with limitless

choice. What appears to be a system capable of fulfilling wants and needs endlessly is in reality, servicing a small sector of society namely, the elite, who control the economic infrastructure, economic policy and media propaganda. Thus, the urging to consume, expounded by mass media, fulfills a corporatist agenda and, as such, the capitalist elite are directly tied to the creation of mass consciousness. Contemporary society is incapable of progressing (and is arguably regressing) beyond its present state as consumerism is reinforced relentlessly and re-established wherever it appears threatened. Capitalism perpetuates itself through the creation of desires for which it only offers spurious gratification.

Remarkably, Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse were all writing about the dangers of consumerism long before anyone took issue with the seemingly free cultures of democratic societies, those that appeared in sharp contrast with the totalitarianism of Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin. Even if some of the historical and sociological details of their analyses were specific to their time, their diagnoses of the predicament of mass culture hold true to the present. Indeed, the economic organization of modern capitalist societies reveals itself to be an instrument of control and self-destruction. They recognized that under capitalism all production was driven by the seeking of profit for the sake of acquiring further capital, and that this system was inherently flawed and dangerous to its citizens. By 2007, when Barber wrote *Consumed*, it was clear that capitalism had gone asunder, spiralling out of control, and reducing society to a puerile form of self-indulgent citizens who were losing their civic or democratic liberties. Finally, Wolin (2008), with his recent publication *Democracy Incorporated*, characterizes how democratic participation in capitalist cultures is marginalised and managed by a corporate ideology that justifies the overtaking of all forms of governance. This theoretical analysis offers an in-depth look at each of these perspectives and shows how the arguments build on a time-driven trajectory of increasing control from the "totalitarianism" that Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse describe, to Barber's depiction of "totalism," and finally to Wolin's warning about the spectre of "inverted totalitarianism." Additionally, Ewen's theory will be discussed for the purposes of gaining a historical perspective on how consumer culture came under the control of corporate America and the subsequent manipulation that occurred.

The Culture Industry

Adorno argues that popular culture or mass culture is not only lacking in aesthetic taste, but more importantly, it demands a rigid conformity of style for people. The central theme of Horkheimer's and Adorno's essay, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1973), includes the image of consumers easily manipulated by mass culture. The characterization of society is one increasingly authoritarian and short on opposition: "Even the aesthetic activities of political opposites are one in their enthusiastic obedience to the rhythm of the iron system" (129). Adorno (1990) repeatedly underscores a theme that would resonate deeply throughout his writings on mass culture, the role of the culture industry as an agent of social and intellectual control. By "culture industry," Adorno is referring to mass produced cultural artefacts (movies, popular music, literature, newspapers and most of the content of radio and television broadcasts) that are manufactured or contrived by those in power, politically and economically, for the purposes of accruing profit. The problem of the culture industry is twofold in that it perpetuates itself at an inferior intellectual quality, and secondly, bears no critical stance to society. There is no denying that the culture industry is a wholly synthetic concoction largely imposed upon from above; it is one of tight regimentation and control, sidestepping any breakdown or anarchy. Whether it is film, radio, popular novels or magazines, the same stock of character types, plot structures and narrowly conceived outcomes repeat themselves in a monotonous barrage that continuously reinforces the status quo. Even the most carefully constructed critique or argument is inevitably corrupted by virtue of its stereotypic form. This type of formation is potentially dangerous especially when dissenting views are shunned and considered deviant relative to a normatively acceptable view.

Mediums of Mass Culture: The Delivery of Control

Television

Adorno (1990) argues that television has a totalitarian impact even when specific programs have an overtly democratic or critical message because of how these messages are communicated. Like Marshall McLuhan's (1964:7) famed phrase "the medium is the message," Adorno sees debates about content as missing the point entirely and only diverting attention about the form of the medium to an irrelevant concern about content. He states: "The majority of television shows today aim at producing, or at least reproducing, the very smugness,

intellectual passivity and gullibility that seem to fit in with totalitarian creeds even if the explicit surface message of the shows may be anti-totalitarian" (142). It is the mechanism of delivery in the culture industry that fails to produce a mediated and consciously reflexive relationship between the viewer (subject) and that which is observed (object). The individual is eventually overpowered and unable to withstand the all-encompassing force of mass culture (of which television is one of its most powerful instruments). Adorno continues: "The repetitiveness, the selfsameness, and the ubiquity of modern mass culture tend to make for automatized reactions and to weaken the forces of individual resistance" (138). As the sway of conformity chips away at any rebuttal, individuals find themselves in consolidation with, and even defending, the status quo. Life is no longer fully lived, but is deceptively programmed for the citizens of the culture industry, all the while receiving the message that individuality is valued.

Television has proven to be an effective means of enforcing conformity through the tireless assail of overt and hidden messages justified as "information" by those in control. The pseudo-realism projected from television infuses life with a false meaning, one which viewers can scarcely see through. Thus, the television show presents a distorted image of life itself, such that a "widespread hostility toward effective self reflection" intensifies under the pretence that what is being viewed is an honest portrayal of conscious and unconscious patterns (Adorno 2005). "On the surface [television] employs psychodynamic notions; in truth it preaches a conventional black-and-white psychology" (66). It is not that the television consumer is entirely duped, it is that the attraction towards believing what appears on the screen is so powerful that it cannot be resisted.

Music

Of popular music, Adorno (1978) laments the loss of diversity and argues that one of the roles of popular music is the prohibition of free speech. He further believes that popular music is comprised of an agglomeration of musical phrases that are no longer consciously mediated in the form of a coherent whole. Put simply, popular music lacks integrity in form, serving only to meet immediate sensual gratification. And, because mass culture is designed to produce an immediate impact, the details lose their specificity. For example, popular music exhibits a limited range of musical techniques that are forever rearranged. Consequently, a narrow repertoire is established in which the most successful forms are imitated in a circle of seeming

never-ending repetition. Popular music successfully hides its repetitive form beneath the pseudo-free style and lyrics that promote rebellious actions. Adorno alleges that the process whereby an individual is seduced into regressive listening and conditioned to be its consumer compensates that individual by absolving him or her of the necessity of performing genuine labour, and in thinking critically about what he or she is hearing. Moreover, according to Adorno, the intended meaning of serious music becomes apparent only after a considerable degree of listening skill has been acquired; listening to serious music should, therefore, be an educational experience. Popular music fails to convey meaning and thus, no listening skill is necessary due to its standardised format. The purpose of popular music is partly to ensure that its social reception is predictable so, it must follow guidelines calculated to produce a specific and uniformed response among listeners.

The culture industry seeks to undermine critical thinking, a process eased by the power citizens inevitably acquiesce. The culture industry superficially, at least, performs the role of cultural reproduction yet, bears no critical stance. Ultimately, the individual relinquishes the capacity to think critically about his or her circumstance in relation to culture. In fact, the wishes and desires of individuals become so tightly controlled that their entire life-world becomes rationalised by the very system that controls them. For Adorno (1990), critical feelings are expressed or created by genuine art—engagement in art fosters reflexive capacities. He maintains as well, that the net result of musical fetishism and regressive listening is one of an alienation that is as radical as it is submissive. Furthermore, popular music has, ultimately, becomes a means of social control, a means of fragmentation, and stultification of the mass audience (26). Adorno is harsh in his criticism (though somewhat sympathetic) of the listener:

> It is contemporary listening which has regressed, arrested at an infantile stage... they [listening subjects] are not childlike... but they are childish; their primitivism is not that of the undeveloped but of the forcibly retarded... they are not merely turned away from more important music, but they are confirmed in their neurotic stupidity. (41)

Perhaps the most profound irony of this "condition" is that consumers are lured into believing there is social meaning where there is none and seek a sense of community where there is little.

As if the art form of music had not been defiled enough since Adorno's time, we have witnessed the emergence of the music video. Even at its worst, music incites some individual imagination. This is made to seem inconsequential with the inception of the music video in

which the listener receives a constant onslaught of visual cues accompanying each sound bite dictating in a precise matter what to think about or imagine. The music video is a disguised form of advertisement for musical commodities and their composers. Rarely do the music video images act in an authentic relationship to what is being heard: "[Music] in America today serves as an advertisement for commodities which one must acquire in order to be able to hear music"(Adorno 1990:33).

Movies

The monopolization of the culture industry in the hands of a few corporations creates standardization and unification within the cultural sphere (Horkheimer and Adorno 1973). Indeed, the culture industry, ultimately, creates monolithic culture whose style is a compilation of multiple elements treated as a unity. It is the feature film that serves as the quintessential example of this false unity. Thus, the process of unification itself, in fact, has become "the meaningful content of every film" (124). Horkheimer and Adorno maintain that the style of the culture industry is so thoroughly complete that it paradoxically represents the negation of style itself, since nothing remains outside style's purview: "[In]the culture industry every element of the subject matter has its origin in the same apparatus as the jargon whose stamp it bears" (129). Whatever art form is said to infuse the movie industry is sold under false pretences. Movies, for example, have nothing to do with art. The truth that they are merely motivated by money is made into an ideology in order to justify the content they produce.

Pseudo-Reality

Horkheimer and Adorno (1973) maintain that the masses of the culture industry are deluded into believing that the world mediated through technology (movies, television, radio) is the same as the 'real' world:

> [The] more intensely and flawlessly the movie producer's techniques duplicate empirical objects, the easier it is today for the illusion to prevail that the outside world is the straightforward continuation of that presented on the screen... Real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies. (126)

The illusion of total freedom is, in truth, but a mere image of total incarceration. Those who defend the products of the culture industry are quick to highlight its emancipation from the tyranny of 'style,' of a dated modality. Yet, these claims, from Adorno's perspective, prove to be hollow: "Having ceased to be anything but style, [the culture industry] reveals the latter's

secret: obedience to the social hierarchy" (Horkheimer and Adorno 1973:131). Further to this, the culture industry is central to the elimination of individuality because of its stereotyping of behaviour and expressions that renders genuine emotional display to mere empty gestures. The result is a kind of pseudo-individuality—thus what "is individual is no more than the generality's power to stamp the accidental details so firmly that it is accepted as such" (154). Individualism becomes a commodity in the culture industry, something that is determined by society, though represented as naturally occurring. The loss of individualism is easy to achieve under the forces of advertising which leaves nothing for consciousness but to capitulate to the advertised message (Adorno 1978).

Reification is best described as "thingification" meaning that which is generalized into some*thing* said to be a force in its own right, a force that is imbued with natural powers, to which the individual must adhere. Reification is a primary concern of critical theory since its central aim is to free the individual from repressive cultural institutions (e.g. media, the market). The ill of reification, it follows, is the annihilation of rational thought replaced with irrational subservience. Advertising claims to be reality and is therefore, according to Adorno, a central force in the reification of culture: "Advertising has absorbed surrealism and the champions of the movement have given their blessing to this commercialization of their own murderous attacks on culture in the name of hostility to the same" (Adorno 1990:59). In the same way that art is swallowed and reconfigured in the culture industry, so is "information" transformed and eventually lost. Advertising thus becomes disguised in the form of information, when in reality there is no longer anything to choose from except that of the most touted brand (Adorno 1990).

The lack of difference between mass culture and reality means that mass culture schematizes the world in terms of itself and can therefore, reflect nothing but itself: "In a perverse circularity: [mass] culture which is so true to the facts absorbs the truth content and expends itself in the material but all it has left as material is itself" (Adorno 1990:56). This double identity— identical with reality but also identical with itself—eliminates the possibility of anything different or new. Under these conditions, mass culture becomes the breeding ground for "synthetically produced modes of behavior" (78). Adorno believes that "people give their approval to mass culture because they know or suspect that this is where they are taught the mores they will surely need as their passport in a monopolized life" (80). Mass culture becomes self-sustaining as a model for ensuring conformity because of powerful (innate) needs that

characterize most of us such as the need to belong, the need to be liked, the need to be seen as successful, et cetera. Adorno believes that the totality of mass culture culminates in the demand that no one be different. Thus, the "monopoly shuts its doors on anyone who fails to learn from the cinema how to move and speak according to the schema which it has fabricated" (79). Conformity becomes the scaffold for the survival of the culture industry, constantly fuelled by newly invented schema that plague its citizens and their struggle to keep abreast of the latest fashion; failure to do so is akin to suicide.

> Today anyone who is incapable of talking in the prescribed to fashion, that is of effortlessly reproducing the formulas, conventions and judgments of mass culture as if they were his own, is threatened in his very existence suspected of being an idiot or an intellectual. (79)

Mass culture commands such power as to render the thorough reification of human beings, negating spontaneous and genuine bursts of life. Economic categories in capitalism are so predominant that they lead to the belief that society and human behaviour stem from the categories of production, when, in fact, it is the other way around. Within capitalism individuals become outcomes of economic processes and appear to enter into economic activity as if it were their nature rather than giving birth to economic processes in the first place. Reification can therefore be conceived of as the historical marking in the process of commodity capitalism when the characteristics of "thinghood" become the standard of objective reality (Morrison 1995:105). Adorno notes how reification destroys authentic human experience: "When people dance to jazz, for example, they do not dance for sensuous pleasure or to obtain release. Rather they merely depict the gestures of human beings" (82).

Commodification of Culture: Exchange-Value versus Use-Value

Horkheimer and Adorno lay much of the blame of the standardized, pseudo-individual (or customized) products of mass culture on the process of commodification. While the extension of capitalist systems meant that art could be produced for art's sake rather than for fulfilling a religious or political agenda, for example, this new-found "freedom" was short-lived. With the rise of the culture industry aesthetic freedom, initially provided by the commodity form, began to erode; cultural production is increasingly organized as a profit-making industry and is thus, subject to all the restrictions that conformity for production's sake demands. This

penetration of the commodity form into aesthetic culture is particularly damaging as true culture is believed to be born from the expression of free will and thought:

> Art of the masses has destroyed the dream...not only are hit songs, stars, and soap operas cyclically recurrent and rigidly invariable types, but the specific content of the entertainment itself is derived from them and only appears to change. The details are interchangeable. (Horkheimer and Adorno 1973:125)

Commodification, in late capitalism, imposes the most precise, extensive and insidious control over cultural activity that has yet existed. The entirety of the culture industry is premised on the rational organization of cultural production. And, there can be no mistaking that the creation of such an industry is driven by profit-making through the sale of culture. Gone is the time of the production of genuine art, replaced by that which is devoid of integrity and marketed for quick sale. Since culture is made specifically for the purpose of being sold, the production of true art is, thereby, eradicated. Thus, it is the process of capital exchange through the circulation of goods that provides the frame between multitudes of different cultural products:

> This process integrates all the elements of the production from the novel (shaped with an eye to the film) to the last sound effect. It is the triumph of invested capital, whose title as absolute master is etched deep into the hearts of the dispossessed in the employment line; it is the meaningful content of every film, whatever plot the production team may have selected. (Horkheimer and Adorno 1973:124)

Under such circumstances, art cannot flourish, and inevitably, succumbs to the forces of mass production leaving a wake of lifeless cultural landscapes devoid of any true meaning.

One of the fundamental themes of Marxist theory is that of commodity fetishism. Essentially, this refers to the way in which exchange and a market environment disguises the labour that originally produced the commodity that gave it 'value.' Instead, the commodity itself is assumed to inherently possess value that is, in fact, the result of and properly attributed to human activity. The social nature of the good is therefore lost as the human value is masked almost entirely. Thus, objects are said to take on a fetish character when they are assigned extraordinary value and power, and when we attribute greater value in the relations we have with such objects over and above what their use-value warrants (Marx 1992). The social relation formulated with goods has the potential to substitute for the social relations with others. The net result is a society shaped in large part by social relations to things. Eventually, the possession of commodities becomes the sole aim and object of social life such that individuals feel socially

connected and valuable only so long as their social relations are based on the possession of these commodities. Second, insofar as individuals confront each other as the possessors of objects and commodities, objects take on a false value (above and beyond 'use' value) and can, in fact, become more valuable than human relationships. Third, modern consumerism is all about distancing ourselves from the fact that many of our possessions have been produced by the labour of repressed 'Others' (Billig 1999). Commodity fetishism takes on particular significance for Horkheimer and Adorno. Their thesis proposes that the inherent nature of commodification and mass culture is one in which use-value is subsumed for exchange-value. Basically, individuals are only capable of evaluating aesthetic objects through assessment of their market value: "The universal criterion of merit is the amount of 'conspicuous production,' of blatant cash investment" (Horkheimer and Adorno 1973: 124). Citizens of the culture industry are conditioned to believe that the only real use-value of an object can be found in its exchange value. Famously, Horkheimer and Adorno write: "[Cultural] entities typical of the culture industry are no longer *also* commodities, they are commodities through and through" (Horkheimer and Adorno 1973:86).

Culture—the way it is perceived, produced and consumed— is now determined by the activities associated with capital. The aesthetic concerns of culture are now entirely subservient to the profit industry. Goods, services and people are no longer understood in terms of their intrinsic worth or merit, but rather based on their market value: "Purposelessness for the purpose declared by the market" (158). Furthermore, the commodification and rationalization of labour results in relatively precise control over the minds and bodies of workers; human activity is subordinated to the demands of efficient production. In essence, work and leisure have become opposite sides of the same coin.

The Mechanism of Conformity

Horkheimer and Adorno (1973) contend that the culture industry does our thinking for us resulting in restrictive cognitive processes or patterns: "[The culture] industry robs the individual of his function. Its prime service is to do his schematizing for him" (124). Television programs, popular music, films and even novels have been so extensively organized, sorted and classified that there is little left to interpret, question or challenge. The thrust to conform in mass culture is so powerful that it often overtakes the individuals' impetus or will to resist.

Horkheimer and Adorno describe the consequences of such a system where "not to conform means to be rendered powerless, economically and therefore spiritually – to be "'self-employed.'" When the outsider is excluded from the concern, he can only too easily be accused of incompetence" (133). Ultimately, conformism and cultural reproduction feed each other in a circuitous pattern to the degree that there is a constant reproduction of the same thing. Eventually, the individual receives his cues from an environment so limited in scope as to render any form of creative dissonance impossible. No independent thinking is expected from the audience; rather, the product prescribes every reaction through its proscribed structure. The capacity for reflective praxis erodes altogether under the barrage of disparate sound bites and visual flashes of sensory data so characteristic of modern film and television: "As far as possible developments must follow from the immediately preceding situation and never from the idea of the whole. For the attentive movie-goer any individual scene will give him the whole thing" (137). In short, both the products of the culture industry and the manner in which they are consumed militate against the fostering of critical thought. And the absence of such paves the way for a level of mass deception common to the consumer's world—that fulfillment is to be found in a buy-and-consume modality. Horkheimer and Adorno describe this phenomenon thus:

> The principle dictates that he should be shown all his needs as capable of fulfillment, but that those needs should be so pre-determined that he feels himself to be the eternal consumer, the object of the culture industry. Not only does it make him believe that the deception it practices is satisfaction, but it goes further and implies that whatever the state of affairs, he must put up with what is offered... Paradise offered by the culture industry is the same old drudgery. (142)

The commodification of culture means that culture is experienced as monotony, and a series of trivial experiences. Adorno further suggests that increasingly, individuals are unable to recognize, understand and experience contradictions within the culture. The capacity to draw comparative analysis between two sets of sensory input is virtually stunted: "Mass culture...identifies with the curse of pre-determination and joyfully fulfills it" (Adorno 1990:26). The culture industry promotes an identification with the mass-produced products that then negates the possibility to review them with any critical perspective. It holds therefore, that the citizens of capitalism, exhausted by the labour process and tempted by easy promises of the culture industry, tend to bypass reflective cognition and critical analysis in order to submerge themselves in the 'pseudo-immediacy' of the moment. Ultimately, 'pseudo-individuation' stems

from the belief that the culture industry is constantly providing one with new objects and experiences, when in fact it is re-hashing the same mould over and over. Mass culture thus cultivates a fictional sense of agency by coaxing the consumer to impose a (pre-determined) structure on its products. Most importantly, Adorno views the buying and selling of culture as the buying and selling of the practices of identification (false as it may be): "The masses are not primary, but secondary, they are an object of calculation; an appendage of the machinery. The customer is not key, as the culture industry would have us believe, *not its subject but its object*" (Adorno 1990:85 italics added).

The commodification of culture in modernity leads to the exclusion of many critical impulses that had previously been nurtured by aesthetic practice. Art had been one of the few sites of political resistance in which the status quo was challenged; with the private world virtually eliminated, colonized by the forces of mass culture, true art has little chance of survival. While art may have been the language of truth, a false language associated with mass culture has become the only one that most people can understand. Horkheimer and Adorno view the effects of commodification as more than just repressive or prohibitive. It takes on a far more sinister profile. The commodification process has the ability to strip individuals of their potency all the while indoctrinating them with the ideas and views generated by the culture industry. It is not that people have been stripped of their capacity to recognize the lies they are fed or to deny that capitalism favours business interests; it is the fact that while knowing all of this they still participate:

> The phrase, the world wants to be deceived, has become truer than had ever been intended. People are not only... falling for a swindle; if it guarantees them even the most fleeting gratification they desire a deception which is nonetheless transparent to them. They force their eyes shut and voice approval, in a kind of self-loathing. (Adorno 1990:89)

Eventually, we come to believe, knowing that success and a comfortable survival demands self-deception in an irrational world seeming to operate on its own terms. Indeed, self-deception becomes a necessity in a world of lies. Further, individuality transforms into a familiar persona of sameness that everyone scrambles to adopt, desperate to fit in:

> The sacrifice of *individuality*, which accommodates itself to the regularity of the successful, the doing of what everybody does, follows from the basic fact that in broad areas the same thing is offered to everybody by the standardized production of consumption goods. But the commercial necessity concealing

> this identity leads to the manipulation of taste and the official culture's pretense of individualism, which necessarily increases in proportion to the liquidation of the individual. (Adorno 1978:280)

The culture industry must keep us entertained, even laughing, as a means of smothering and defusing the latent rage from that part of the self that recognizes we are pawns. We find ourselves tolerating and even enjoying the fraudulent pleasures fed to us through self-deprecating humour that undermines attempts at social and political revolt. Horkheimer and Adorno (1973) capture this phenomenon in their writings: "[The culture industry] makes laughter the instrument of the fraud practiced on happiness...In the false society laughter is a disease which has attacked happiness and is drawing it into its worthless totality" (141).

Ironically, we treat the artefacts of the culture industry with a kind of a half-conscious tolerance, even amused scepticism, *including* values that oppose the system itself. Given that the culture industry has a monopoly over the production and distribution of cultural objects, it is able to integrate and absorb any and all aesthetic dissidence. Conformity is thus guaranteed with the eradication of critical messages while at the same time using such messages as evidence of pluralistic tolerance. The presence of dissenting voices even helps, ironically, to sustain the myth that unmediated experiences are possible:

> The most intimate reactions of human beings have been so thoroughly reified that the idea of anything specific to themselves now persists only as an utterly abstract notion... The triumph of advertising in the culture industry is that consumers feel compelled to buy and use its products *even though they see through them*. (167, italics added).

Culture Industry and Totalitarianism

Adorno depicts the culture industry in terms that invite comparison to fascism:

> [The] voice of the monopoly will tell them as they wait in line precisely what is expected of them if they want to be clothed and fed... Anyone who fails openly to parade their freedom, their courtesy, their sense of security, who fails to observe and propagate the established guidelines, is forced to remain outside the pale. (Adorno 1990:78-79).

What seems to disturb Adorno most is that the culture industry dehumanizes people and robs them of their freedom and chance for happiness. Furthermore, Horkheimer and Adorno assert that even the very language in which culture (and particularly advertising) is inscribed has become corrupted. In the culture industry language means only what it denotes, the connotation having been eradicated; what this means to Adorno is that the un-literal aspect of language, the

poetry of language if you will, that which expresses real human experience, is no longer accessible. By removing these meanings, the use of language is severely compromised, especially with respect to anti-establishment discourse:

> The blind and rapidly spreading repetition of words with special designations linked advertising with the totalitarian watchword. The layer of experience which created the words for their speakers has been removed...In this sense, words are trade-marks which are finally all the more firmly linked to the things they denote, [and] the less their linguistic sense is grasped. (Horkheimer and Adorno 1973:165-66)

Just as no one really believes fascist propaganda, no one really believes advertising's claims and yet, in both cases, we are compelled by the force of the message, both implicitly and explicitly. Advertised culture, then, in its essence, constitutes a command for obedience to the social order. Power will remain in the same hands—not unlike those economic decisions made by those in charge of a totalitarian state. Advertising today is representative of a negative principle, the opposite of that which is put forth by marketers (Horkheimer and Adorno 1973). Even when the tendencies of cultural production operate in a 'free' market, the individual has little choice but to succumb to the dictates of the culture industry. What was once an effort to achieve individuation, has been replaced by efforts to imitate the dominant modality. Adorno leaves little optimism for the future as he predicts a world in which virtually any possibility of rectification, let alone redemption, has been all but squelched.

One-Dimensional Man and Totalitarianism

The notion that so-called democratic societies could operate in a totalitarian manner is not unique to Adorno. Herbert Marcuse, in his well-known treatise, *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), contends that, in 'advanced' technological societies, the development of consumer capitalism constitutes a profound threat to freedom and individuality. By technology, Marcuse means the forces of production including the control and containment of the economy, political structure and media:

> By virtue of the way it has organized its technological base, contemporary industrial society tends to be totalitarian. For 'totalitarian' is not only a terroristic political coordination of society, but also any non-terroristic economic-technical coordination which operates through the manipulation of needs by vested interests. It thus precludes the emergence of an effective opposition against the whole. (Marcuse 1964:3)

The main thrust of *One-Dimensional Man* suggests that capitalist societies are "totalitarian" because the capitalist mode of production and the "vested interests," or what Marx referred to as the ruling class, use technology to manipulate needs, indoctrinate, manage and administer society in accord with their own interests. It is in this sense that advanced capitalist societies are totalitarian, and entirely controlled by the hegemony of capital. Indeed, as capitalism and technology develop, society expects increasing adjustment to the economic and social apparatus and ultimately, submission to its administration. As a result, conformity is rampant throughout consumer-driven society. Like Adorno, Marcuse believes that under capitalism citizens lose their capacity for critical analysis; hence, a 'one-dimensional society' and 'one-dimensional' man.

Marcuse's theory argues that those who possess the most capital control the activities of the state, including its media and social institutions. The motivation behind such control is to maximize economic gain and maintain social domination by eliminating opposition through the continuous integration of people within the capitalist "machine:" "The brute fact that the machine's physical (only physical?) power surpasses that of the individual, and of any particular group of individuals, makes the machine the most effective political instrument in any society" (Marcuse 1964:3). The crux of Marcuse's one-dimensionality, therefore, is that the instruments of culture, including mass persuasion, manipulation, consumerism and controlled gratification, function to lure individuals toward a capitalist lifestyle that is to embrace "one-dimensionality." By doing so, individuals lose their autonomy and freedom; they must relinquish the power to know what they need and want, to choose or deny, and be able to resist obstacles. Indeed, one-dimensional man is incapable of knowing his true needs because they are not his own, they are instead administered, superimposed. Individuals under such conditions are not able to resist domination rather they identify with the popular culture, imitating and submitting to the powers that be. As such, one-dimensional thought and behaviour begin to take form, develop and eventually become habitual. The cognitive cost of such conditions involves loss of the ability to imagine a different way of being, to transcend one-dimensional thought and society, to control one's own destiny—to become a subject rather than an object of domination. One of the more serious consequences of surrendering one's subjectivity is the proneness to conform to the cultural whims of any given time.

Within Marcuse's analysis is an outline of how mass consumption produces "the false needs" that serve the purpose of integrating individuals into consumer society; he is explicit about how non-coercive social control powerfully 'persuades' the individual to conform, submit and adopt the norms of sameness:

> False [needs] are those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression...The result then is euphoria in unhappiness. Most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to this category of false needs. (Marcuse 1964:4-5)

It would appear that capitalism's freedom and democracy are based on manipulation, and a new form of social control found within mass culture and its source of propaganda—advertising: "The products indoctrinate and manipulate; they promote a false consciousness which is immune against its falsehood. And as these beneficial products become available to more individuals...the indoctrination they carry...becomes a way of life...[that] militates against qualitative changes" (11-12).

Paradoxically, societies built on slogans of freedom, steeped in the proclamations of the advantages of consumer capitalism (such as the access to goods and services), rely on constraints or restrictions as a condition of success. It is only when the individual is relieved of the burden of 'false' needs, and the ongoing manipulation to market such needs, that freedom is attainable.

As with Adorno, Marcuse recognizes that failure to conform to the status quo is dangerous to one's survival. Thus, "the intellectual and emotional refusal 'to go along' appears neurotic and impotent" (Marcuse 1964:9). Individuals become incapable of grasping or identifying the true nature of their interests and attribute false motives to the causes of their suffering. Consumer needs for money, possessions, property and security are binding to the extent that they perpetuate conformity and alienated labour. For Marcuse, the "benefits" of consumer culture are repressive and the needs created are false because such culture binds individuals to a way of life that actually restricts their freedom and possibilities for happiness. It is a way of life that impedes development of a more rational social order. The social order perpetuated by capitalism is false because its infrastructure rests on exploitation, in that it forces unnecessary labour and consumption on its population. Paradoxically, the representation of liberty can be made into a powerful instrument of domination. The freedom to choose goods

and services does not signify freedom if the system in which they are delivered sustains social control (Marcuse 1964).

Throughout *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse (1964) argues that freedom and individualism are being eroded in late capitalist societies and, at the same time, dissenting views are "quickly digested by the status quo" to inoculate against any possibility of reform (14). Marcuse, like Adorno, identifies mass culture as an agent of "manipulation and indoctrination" to the extent that consumable goods have been reified to a point of utter alienation from the self: "People recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment...Control is anchored in the new needs which it has produced" (9). It is thus the consumer's endless quest for products that keep him or her vulnerable to the dictums of mass culture. In Marcuse's view, advertising agencies or corporations contribute to the pseudo-individualism that is prefabricated and synthesized within capitalist cultures. The system is such that freedom has become a pseudo-freedom in which people fail to comprehend the extent of their bondage.

Marcuse maintains that consumer culture has become a mode of domination through the hegemony of the corporations whose structures keeps it intact. Mass culture bombards its citizens with ideologies, images, advertisements and values that reproduce and legitimate the way of life that capitalism offers. Mass culture, in this view, promotes conformist behaviour and conventional values, thus taking on the role of an instrument of socialization. Finally, Marcuse makes claim to capitalist society as reconfiguring into a totalitarian state by virtue of the fact that capitalism permeates every aspect of culture and easily operates through the manipulation of needs by vested interests (corporations). In essence, the ruling elite is able to control which items ordinary citizens demand and the type of lifestyle needed to maintain consumptive behaviour patterns.

The Inception of Mass Culture

Ewen (1976) traces the origins of mass culture to the 1920s when industry engaged in **a** process of socialization that aimed at stabilizing and inculcating fidelity among those whose labour was being solicited. By the 1920s, many industries outside of the automobile industry had begun to employ mass production as part of their manufacturing. With a burgeoning productive capacity, industry had access to potential consumers from middle to upper classes.

The impetus of industry was to lure the masses into a modality of more buying power. Marketers strove to establish an ideological bridge across traditional social gaps—region, class, culture, religion—which would work in their favour. At the same time, the movement toward mass production severely changed the character of labour in that the worker had become a decreasingly significant unit of production. Marketers sought to soften the blow by speaking of "economic freedom" and "industrial democracy" as the reward promised for the labourers' participation (Ewen 1976:26). Shorter hours and higher wages were deliberate strategies used to habituate the American population to the exigencies of mass production, as was more leisure time. Increasingly, new priorities demanded that the worker spend his wages and leisure time bolstering the consumer market. Ewen maintains that entry into and participation with the consumer market was presented as a "civilizing" experience. And yet, the discrepancy between wages earned and that of industrial growth was significant, so much so, that marketers realized they needed to habituate people "psychically" to accept consumerism as an equitable way of life (30).

Advertising's main role was to efficiently create a consumer body so as to feed the needs of mass industrial capitalism. Thus began the long-term relationship between industry and psychology; "experts," particularly psychologists rooted in the school of behaviourism, were hired to research how people responded to varying stimuli. Advertising was seen as a way of homogenously controlling the consumption of a product. Ewen (1976) is clear that early on marketers realized that mechanical quality was no longer sufficient to induce sales at the necessary rate and volume required by mass production and made deliberative efforts to create need where there was none: "Advertisers were concerned with effecting a self-conscious change in the psychic economy, which was altogether different from trumpeting individual products... Advertising literature, following the advent of mass production methods increasingly...appeals to instinct" (35). One advertising strategy was to offer products that claimed to ameliorate social and personal frustration. Further, a new cultural logic was being projected by advertising, that of social responsibility and social self-preservation tied to the consumption of goods. Indeed, it was felt that capitalism, through an appeal to instincts (of which social insecurity was major), could "habituate men and women to consumptive life" (37). Thus, the functional goal of advertising was the creation of desires and habits previously dormant so that personal needs would become dependent on the market.

One of the outcomes of advertising on a mass scale in the early twentieth century was the production of a homogeneous national persona; consumption took on a cultural tone in keeping with an ideological veil of nationalism and democratic lingo. Common desires, rather than common ethnicity, language or class, began to define the "American type" (Ewen 1976:42). By transforming the notion of "class" into "mass," business hoped to persuade individuals to seek the fulfillment of needs in the consumption of goods. Ironically, advertising offered up visions of individualism as a strategy for people to extricate themselves from the masses. Advertisements intimated that through the use of certain products one might become a success—"the capitalist notion of self-fulfillment" (Ewen 1976:46). As well, advertisements constantly hammered away at everything personal—bodily functions, self-esteem—suggesting products to be used as effective remedies for social maladaptation. The individual on his own terms was thus, pathologized. Ewen notes that: "advertising offered the next best thing – a commodity self – to people who were unhappy or could be convinced that they were unhappy about their lives" (47).

Consumerism developed throughout the 1920s in a way that suggests the mere selling of products was no longer an adequate goal. Rather, what appeared to be desired by industry was a broad-scaled strategy aimed at selling a *way of life*. Consumerism emerged not as a gradual progression from earlier patterns of consumption but rather as "an aggressive device of corporate survival" (Ewen 1976:54). Marketers believed their job had an educative role concerning cognition and behaviour. Indeed, widespread within the literature of the 1920s and 1930s is a notion of educating people into acceptance of the products of mass-produced culture. Industrial development became far more than a production process but also a process of attenuating to impulses, those which provide the social underpinnings within capitalist systems.

Ewen, like Adorno, notes how art transformed from a means of expression to a sales tool and weapon of manipulation. Put differently, creativity was sacrificed to the authority of commerce. In large part, the arts were conscripted as part of the broad cultural movement that characterized consumerism; namely, the eradication of indigenous cultural expression. Furthermore, where art was once regarded as a source of cultural "truth," markets co-opted the new "art" of advertising as the only legitimate form of truth. For those who sought to educate the masses to the logic of consumerism, the elevation of the goods and values of mass production to the realm of "truth" was a primary task. Attempts to turn modern marketplace

precepts into "universal validity" were central to the stability and survival of modern industrial capitalism (Ewen 1976:69). In particular, the elevation of advertising was such that it laid out the terms of what was accepted and denied as reality. Perhaps of greater significance is what advertising excluded from its reified conception of the world. Under the guise of consumer protection, advertisers equated their message with 'truth' as a means of dominating ordinary citizens. As Ewen explains:

> Within such a vision of the future, the notion of the truth was "of interest" to the "citizens of industry" who were not expected to recognize or to particularly care about what was of social importance for them. Only the "great international broadcasting organization" was to determine what was important and what was not. (75)

It was expected that the consumer would passively and even happily accept the rule of corporate judgment.

According to Ewen, advertising's selective version of "truth" was being formulated in order to bring about a widespread social dependency on the goods of mass production. Even as early as the 1920s, however, industry was aware that the hardships of factory life (which many experienced) undermined attempts to create a widespread acceptance of capitalism. Therefore, it became necessary to eradicate the productive process from ideology associated with industrial commodities. It was an essential principle of commercial propaganda that the reality of life within the factory be avoided at all costs. In order to sell the commodity culture, it became imperative to confront people with a vision in which the class dissatisfaction became invisible. Advertising played a vital role in this process: "The basic impulse in advertising was one of control, of actively channelling social impulses toward a support of corporation capitalism and its productive and distributive priorities" (Ewen 1976:81).

Whatever aspect of the "good life" that could be achieved by the individual within the home and community was attacked and demeaned as corporate enterprise attempted to formulate and commoditize sensual gratification. Businessmen became diligent in their task to eradicate attitudes which were antithetical to a consumption ethos. Under the guidance of psychologists, as early as the 1920s industry called for the implementation of a "mass psychology" by which public opinion might be controlled (Ewen 1976:83). As the industrial machinery produced standardized goods, so did the psychology of consumerism attempt to forge a mindset of consciousness en masse.

Consumerism also assumed a positive political character in the ideology of business by allegedly combating class politics. Thus, the political ideology of consumption depicted democracy as a natural expression of American capitalism, if not a by-product of the commodity system. The association of the consumption of goods with political freedom made such a configuration possible: "Within all of the democratic pronouncements the essential political impulse was one of entrepreneurial domination, a structure in which *political* choice was limited to the prescriptions formulated by business and politicized in its advertising" (Ewen 1976:91). Consumerism was a process that not only sustained big business economically, but also politically. Through buying, individuals were democratically legitimizing the dominant role that marketers aspired to play in all levels of political life and otherwise. Ewen's theory maintains that American industrial barons, in essence, became the "social directors of the nation" (92). Democratic rhetoric or not, the architects of the consumer market and the advertisers who publicized it hoped to instil an authoritarian obedience to the dictates of consumer life in the industrial age. One of the important strategies to achieve such an end was to encourage people to find a replacement for "outdated" communities and the sustenance they afforded. Communities were depicted as antiquated social structures that bred mistrust. Ewen's analysis, shows that many of the advertisements of the time capitalized on fear to reinforce the notion that individuals were constantly being judged by others, and that there was an absence of positive bond between people. Industry hoped not merely to sell goods, but also to benefit from and conscript the basic emotional makeup of people. The corporation was made out to be a bastion of strength and safety under all circumstance. Thus:

> In drafting an affirmative conception of human characteristics, the business community was setting up itself [as] a model of emulation. Ads and public relations portrayed the corporation as a function of social intercourse which created positive bonds where all else had failed. The authority of industry was being drawn as a sustaining *father* figure while the traditional arenas of social intercourse and the possibility of collective action were pictured as decrepit, threatening, and basically incapable of providing any level of security. (102)

The advancement of consumerism touched on the intimacies of social relations, as marketers developed a new definition of family, one which would jive with the goals of industry. Ewen claims that in the early days of industry, and what has marked its history since, has been the displacement of home production by social production; even social customs began to be separated out of the home and into the realm of "planning and engineering" (Ewen

1976:102). The authority of industry worked to successfully encroach on the authority of the home whose productive capacity was being outmoded. The factory became the basis of social organization as the family faded to that of a relic of the past, solely needed for its wage earning capacity (almost entirely that of the father's). The family was rendered impotent, mediated and authorized by the industrial process. While the family still provided a semblance of social life, its erosion as the center of production dramatically altered cultural experiences. Men were still maintaining the ideological role of patriarch, but women were considered to be a "violation of morality" when attempting to enter the world of industry (122). And, because it was from industry rather than the home that the means to family survival was secured and dictated, compliance with industry's values and norms was relatively easy to obtain.

While individuals lamented the loosening bonds of family life, businessmen in the 1920s saw this phenomenon as an essential step in their rise to dominance. Industrial propaganda drove home the point that the economic well-being of women and children came from the organization of industry rather than the family. The cultivation of the successful household spoken in terms that revered family was, in fact, characterized by a shift of authority away from the family: "Love, like democracy, had become implicated in a broad patriotic program which revolved around the mass distribution of commodities, focusing the human psyche on the issue of accumulating goods as a primary social bond and activity" (Ewen 1976:136). Each family member, despite the continuation of a family ethos, was bound to the burgeoning authority of business. The conditions of both production and consumption were simultaneously connected in a newly espoused ideology where the "proper" roles of each family member required individual faith in the authority of business. And, with respect to children, their consumption of goods and services provided a conduit between the family and marketers.

To businessmen, the fact that childhood was increasingly a period of consuming made children a powerful tool in the ideological framework of consumption. Advertisements began to convey a message that the needs of children were better understood by industry; such advertisements were a microcosm of the steps taken to shift authority from the family to industry and the psychologists they employed. The symbolic ascendancy of children meant the infiltration of daily life by corporations that sought to ensure a family structure ruled by the ideals and desires of children. Indeed, adults were instructed to look toward children for an

understanding of the new age of social behaviours and customs. Children were heralded as having the capacity to cope with modern life above and beyond that of their elders.

Despite the firm roots of patriarchal dominance in families, Ewen believed that the male role was divested of all social authority except insofar as his wages underwrote family consumption. At the same time, women were elevated to a managerial status; it was understood early on that women would greatly influence family purchases. In order to appease the feminists' demand for equality and freedom, businessmen appropriated feminist values into the discourse of consumerism. Even when it came to mothering, marketers aimed to convince women that modern science, as a subsidy of corporations, should guide and define their roles. This campaign had enormous success; by 1929, more than 80 percent of the family's needs were satisfied by purchases by women. Advertisers were convinced that it would be through women that the values of mass production would best be conveyed. Women were repeatedly told that through consumption they could procure for their children the kind of life-long security and happiness that was associated with perpetual youth. As well, the discourse of "free choice" was linked to the consumption of mass-produced goods affording women a "new and liberated role" (171). Ewen is clear that every aspect of family life was seen as a business opportunity:

> For each aspect of the family *collective* – the source of decision-making, the locus of child rearing, the things which elicited affection in response – all of these now pointed outward toward the world of commodities for their direction. Corporate America has begun to define itself as *the father of us all* (172).

Ewen maintains that the industry "captains of consciousness" attempted to sell capitalism as the social fabric from which all meaningful relationships be constituted. By the early twentieth century, capitalism had entered a period in which all spheres of existence were informed by industry and the commodity had taken on a universal form. The culture of the marketplace actively worked to generate an image of positive regard to detract from the less appealing aspects of modernity including: the monotony of work, the decay of traditional social arenas, and the political repression that was encountered by those who resisted corporate politics. In fact, corporate ideology contended that a bolstered consumer society was more than capable of neutralizing political opposition to capitalism. Ewen details how the market surreptitiously infiltrated the very social fabric of America in the early stages of consumer culture:

> Brand names had inserted themselves into the idiom of daily expression, prepackaged foodstuffs were increasingly the culinary fare of the population, the automobile – perhaps the archetypal commodity – was no longer merely an idiosyncratic mode of transport but an artifact of multidimensional significance within the culture. (202)

Marketers succeeded in posing an idealized, consumerized and increasingly advertised vision of society made up of people who were basically inadequate and thus, dependent on industry for success. Ewen argues that this process was not a random evolution over time but rather, was calculated and deliberate. Ultimately, industry chose to depict human beings in a pejorative light for the purpose of generating and prolonging behaviours, attitudes and values conducive to consuming.

Corporate Rule

> The conquests of the market are made by grabbing control and no longer by lowering costs, by transformation of the product more than by specialization of product. Corruption thereby gains a new power. Marketing has become the center or the "soul" of the corporation. We are taught that corporations have a soul, which is the most terrifying news in the world. The operation of markets is now the instrument of social control and forms the impudent breed of our masters. (Deleuze 1992:4)

Ewen, Horkheimer and Adorno all theorize that the production, distribution and sale of goods for the masses are deliberate means of mind control on the part of the capitalist elite whose power culminates within the corporation. Further, culture propagated by media is a form of rationalized and systemic control of labour and leisure; the consumer is in essence a capitalist pawn, beholden to the system and relatively well controlled by a constant bombardment of "entertainment." And, if the masses are controlled by their labour and leisure, the companies that manufacture cultural artefacts inevitably retain control.

Since Adorno's writings, mass culture has grown in terms of its potential to influence society to such a degree that the corporation has become the most powerful institution of our time (Bakan 2004). Horkheimer and Adorno (1973) observed, at the time of their writing, that those who control the culture industry wield enormous influence over civil society as well as political society. The culture industry is a means of keeping social order, which is then being reinforced by political, social and economic initiatives and more specifically, the cultural and social institutions under corporate domain. Regardless of the existence of democracy, and often because of democracy, dominance can still be maintained with consent of the cultural and social

groups. Capitalism can therefore be defined as part of the core structure of the social order that has gained ideological dominance. And, social dominance and cultural control is essentially, that which is propagated by the corporations of mass media. Horkheimer and Adorno state that:

> All are free to dance and enjoy themselves, just as they have been free, since the historical neutralization of religion, to join any of the innumerable sects. But freedom to choose an ideology – since ideology always reflects economic coercion – everywhere proves to be freedom to choose what is always the same. (166)

Consent in the form of compliance is given by citizens (consumers) who are themselves "captivated by the myth of success" and believe in capitalist ideology such as the "free" market, and the opportunity to be as financially free as the capitalist elite whose dominance eludes them (Horkheimer and Adorno 1973:133-34). Enlightenment has all but disappeared and is not possible within the confines of the culture industry where society is suppressed by, and subservient to, the ubiquitous financial machinery. Horkheimer and Adorno show that as the culture industry develops into a tool for mass domination, it is the commercialisation of all aspects of society that is at its core. Horkheimer and Adorno argue that this process is leading to the intellectual impoverishment of society, favouring commercialisation over individuality and authenticity. In their view, the culture industry projects a disguised form of ideological propaganda, employing "pop culture" to mask oppression, all the while reducing cultural standards. The culture industry is capable of smothering all forms of individual expression that could pose a threat to the capitalist rule of order. Hence, creativity takes a back seat to the mechanisms that give rise to mass-scale conformity.

The Infantilist Ethos and Totalism

Benjamin Barber, a political theorist, offers a review of the nature of present-day consumer capitalism steeped in methods of manipulation of consumers, both children and adults, and the business of generating needs. *Consumed* (Barber 2007) discusses how capitalism has shifted from serving nations and their citizens to a consumerist capitalism, driven by an "infantilist ethos" and fulfilling false needs. Barber believes that markets are consciously creating a youthful commercial constituency which is vulnerable to corporate manipulation via advertising, marketing and branding. In fact, corporations are selling consumer goods for which there is no discernible need other than the one induced by marketer's own frantic imperative to sell. This "ethos" catalyzed a new form of identity politics in which the ownership of branded

goods came to define who we are, more so than race, religion, nationality, etc. Not only was adult consumer culture turning towards an infantilist modality, children themselves became the new market focus. The misuse of normative terms like "autonomy," "empowerment," and "choice," typical of an infantilist ethos, rationalizes selling to children. Barber is harsh in his criticism of "corporate predators" who rationalize the application of an "altruistic ethic" all the while applying self-serving and immoral means (33). As Barber sees it, we have moved from an era (1800s and preceding) when corporations were under the authority of government and in which capitalism served society and abided by its democratic principles to an era of capitalist narcissism wherein business mandates profligate spending on false needs. The infantilist ethos means the 'dumbing down' of adults even as it accelerates the maturation of children into "empowered" consumers.

Barber believes that the infantilist ethos generates a set of habits, preferences, and attitudes that encourage and legitimate childishness. He characterizes infantilization by distilling it down to three archetypal dualisms: easy over hard; simple over complex; and fast over slow. While the tensions between easy and hard have challenged every culture, modernity is perhaps the first in which the adult institutions of a civilization lean on the side of easy; mass culture rewards easy and penalizes challenge. As Barber describes: "Weight loss without exercise, marriage without commitment, painting or piano by numbers without practice or discipline... athletic success through steroids" (87). Lying, cheating and deception, though features of being human, have become more acceptable today, in part because they are seen as a justifiable form of taking the easy way. Barber maintains that adult civilizations have generally been defined by their capacity to embrace nuance and complexity in their thinking and behaviour. Consumer culture embraces the easy route because it is so profitable: "Fast foods and moronic movies, revved-up spectator sports and dumbed-down video games, for example, [are] linked in a nexus of consumer merchandising that the infantilist ethos nourishes and promotes" (91).

Teenagers, in particular, are an ideal market for a society steeped in an easy over hard modality; old and disciplined enough to spend, and sufficiently conditioned to consume music, movies or athletic commodities, but young enough to embody the puerile taste required to reinforce 'easy over hard.' Remaining ignorant and youthful is easy—it requires nothing more than self-indulgence.

Speed has become the paramount modern form of youthful vanity: “Time whipped, time mastered, time accelerated, time overcome” (Barber 2007:99). For example, video games are all about rapid neurological responses and instant reactions to stimuli. Such goods are intrinsically tied to the perpetuation of youth and represent one of the most successful sectors of merchandising to children and enticing adults to consume children’s commodities. In a culture of fast over slow, one has to be a quick study to be counted as bright, reaching conclusions in the blink of an eye and cutting to the quick on multiple levels. Speed is seen as the promise of a thrilling experience. Not only do we like the sensations that speed provides, we like them even when experiencing them strictly through images. Indeed, the most consequential speed-up of our time is the onrush of images; it is on screen that life seems most to accelerate.

As an example of the quintessential lifestyle devoted to speed, Barber (2007) cites the emblem of American-style consumerism for the rest of the world—fast food. The fast food franchise has cropped up in astounding numbers both in North America and globally to the extent that a counter movement (“slow food”) became necessary to preserve indigenous culture’s relationship to eating. Infantalization plays out across the board in consumer society, privileging digitized images and pictures over words for their speed, efficiency and simplicity. Barber believes that infantalism’s preference for simple, easy and fast, gives it an affinity for solitaries rather than communities that deliberate together before they act together. Put simply, the infantalist ethos is fortified by an ideology of entitlement in which “human beings are seen first of all as individuals—what political scientists might call rights-bearing legal persons—rather than as family members, lovers, kin-people, or citizens of the civic community” (108). Barber believes that for the first time in history, society has felt its economic survival requires a “controlled regression,” hence, a culture that promotes puerility rather than maturation. The motivation to infantilize society is solely based on an “instrumental need to sell unnecessary goods to people whose adult judgment and tastes are obstacles to such consumption” (112).

The infantilist ethos has helped to create a culture conducive to laxity, shopping and spending. At odds with the democracy it once helped inaugurate, Barber (2007) sees how laissez-faire liberalism continues to mistake popular sovereignty for illegitimate coercion that insures the repression of the true liberty. Market philosophy is more than just a threat to democracy. It is, the source of capitalism’s most troubling problems today namely, its incapacity to meet the needs of the poor. Indeed, capitalism is all about promoting faux needs all the while

ignoring real needs of citizens in developed and under-developed societies. Barber believes that the market basically dictates what it is we 'need' and then proclaims to have the answers. Somehow, the average citizen accepts his or her circumstance, participating in the charade as though bereft of choices.

The main artery of consumer culture is the process of privatization in which all aspects of human exchange and relationship are commoditized. Barber believes this represents more than just an economic ideology. Privatization acts in league with the ethos of infantilization to embrace and reinforce narcissism, personal preferences, and puerility. Additionally, it misconstrues liberty and thereby distorts how we understand civic freedom and citizenship, often ignoring, even undermining, the meaning of public goods and the public weal:

> Privatization turns the private, impulsive me lurking inside myself into an inadvertent enemy of the public, deliberative we that is also part of who I am. The private me screams "I want!" The privatization perspective legitimizes this scream, allowing it to trump the quiet "we need" that is the voice of the public me in which I participate and which is also an aspect of my interests as a human being. (Barber 2007:128)

Consumer capitalism reinforces a cult of "me" on the model of the narcissistic child and discourages "we" thinking of the kind adult citizens recognize as wisdom. It is the combination of capitalism set asunder by an infantilist ethos made the more effective by its alliance with a privatization ideology that is corrosive to civil society. Infantilization acts to continuously induce the preference for the private and the trivial by treating the impetuous child as the ideal shopper, and the shopper as the ideal citizen. One of the outcomes then, is that individuals are motivated by a bifurcated sense of liberty, one in which they are internally divided and dissatisfied with both their private and public options (Barber 2007).

Barber (2007) theorizes that the forces of capitalism play a vital role in forging identities conducive to buying and selling; ultimately, the commercialization of identity responds to and reflects the infantilist ethos in significant ways. For example, commercial identities tend to be simplistic, reinforcing the infantilist ethos, as well as undermining agency, community and democracy. Barber makes a strong case that identity formation is almost entirely built on an individual's commercial persona:

> Branded lifestyles are not merely superficial veneers on deeper identities but have to some degree become substitute identities – forms of acquired character that have the potential to go all the way down to the core. They displace

> traditional ethnic and cultural traits and overwhelm the voluntary aspects of identity we choose for ourselves. (167)

Brands are no longer associated with the specific content of the products and services they label; they are instead affiliated with styles, sentiments and emotions and at best, remotely linked to these products and services. And, it is in this process that they become compelling, new purveyors of infantilism. It is no longer in the products themselves, but in the names and brands they represent that the commercial value of consumer companies resides. The challenge of building brand loyalty is one of the key reasons why companies are so very eager to engage young consumers. For consumer identity, appearances are of maximum importance. Barber maintains that "in a commercial society where identities are linked to cars that people 'wear' and churches they 'shop' for, it is little wonder that identity can be bought, borrowed or stolen" (194). Thus, branding and privatization turn out to work in tandem. As identity drifts from public influences rooted in religion and nationality toward commercial categories associated with brands, identity itself is privatized. For Barber, this means that identity politics are part and parcel of the infantilist ethos which mistakes brand for identity and consumption for character, all the while treating citizens as consumers of brand USA. Marketing becomes everything when identity itself is shaped to its needs and the whole of society is subordinated to consumer culture's marketing requirements.

Barber (2007) exclaims that not only is consumer society privatized, commercialized, infantilized and branded, it is "totalizing," in that all aspects of being are devoted to consumption. Barber believes that Adorno and Horkheimer overstated the ills of mass culture by labelling it a totalitarian society. He does however, agree that consumer culture is both "totalizing and homogenizing" under the influences of the infantilist ethos (214); he argues that consumer society robs liberty of its civic meaning (or democratic meaning) and threatens pluralism. Further, one of the consequences of "totalism" is that consumers buy products and engage in services they do not necessarily need or want. The market consciously aims at producing a firm and encompassing grip on all aspects of life—a total immersion. Thus, the market controls:

> each and every of our waking moments and [infiltrates] the psyche's most remote and private geography. This is a necessary condition for capitalism success: an all-consuming people who shop or think about shopping, who conceive or exercise consumer wants, all the time. (220)

Barber (2007) describes five forms of market domination, the first being *ubiquity*. By this he means that the market is everywhere, so that any space not yet occupied by industry is viewed as a target for commercial occupation. Every open space, (e.g., on the bus, the clothes we wear, on buildings, on park benches) invites a brand logo or advertisement. Second, the market is *omnipresent* in that it wishes to be ever present, occupying time with the same intensity that it conquers space. Another indicator of the totalizing and homogenizing character of consumer culture is its *addictiveness*. In a hyper-consumer society, addiction has a cultural and economic dimension – it is an ideal means of securing market omnipresence. Addicts of consumer culture are often "multi-addicted" say to alcohol or drugs as well as to shopping. Shopaholics are addicted to shopping and the media that integrally connects them to the fruits of their shopping such as television shopping networks and the internet. Fourth, the market has the capacity for *self-replication* as it operates with little public oversight or regulation. Self-replication means market monopolization is rewarded as is that of conformity. Commodification is the venue by which consumer cultures reproduce, aiming to create monopolies of taste and behaviour. As Barber describes it, "to commodify is thus to colonize, to impose singular meanings on multi-dimensional goods" (247). Consumer capitalism has an endless capacity for self-replication at the cost of alternative sectors and thus interferes with, even prevents pluralism. The last form of market domination can be labelled as *omnilegitimacy*. By this, Barber refers to the ways that commerce successfully places consuming at its core while shutting out rival spheres virtually unchallenged. Consumerism is constantly propounding its legitimacy, not just in economic terms, but at a gut level as well. Indeed, the goal of marketing is to impose an omnilegitimacy of positive feeling not only on the products and brands it peddles, but also on the entire process by which it runs.

One of the outcomes of consumer capitalism gone 'hyper-drive' is the disintegration of identity formation, the hollowing of individual sovereignty. Barber goes a step further than Marcuse, claiming that consumers are less one-dimensional than *no*-dimensional as their identities are literally manufactured, bought, worn and imbibed; the self transposes in the car, computer, Nike shoes or whatever other objects resonates with the desired image. The end effect is the eradication of unique character traits and the multiplication of consumer clones. Barber leaves us with only a margin of hope that totalism and homogeneity can be staved off. He concludes that in order to lessen the impact of the infantilist ethos, individuals must reclaim

their citizenry, resist the hold of marketing and branding on identity so as to mitigate the destructive impulses of consumers who are disconnected and self-serving. As long as consumers find themselves trapped in a cage of infantilization, reinforced by privatization and an identity based on branding, true democracy remains at peril.

Inverted Totalitarinism

> The corporation's legal mandate is to pursue, relentlessly and without exception, its own self-interest, regardless of the often harmful consequences it might cost to others. (Bakan 2004:2)

The whole sphere of the culture industry, which Horkheimer and Adorno (1973) suggest is controlled by the creators of popular 'entertainment,' is also interwoven into the economic infrastructure, that which is at the heart of corporate dominance. Today's culture of capitalism includes a small number of elite corporations that wield control over political decisions, financial investments or 'money industry,' as well as media in all forms. The corporation, as an institution, is virtually unchallenged, holding power over that of ordinary citizens. The ability to shape culture largely rests with those who take control of channels of communication. Countries like the US and Canada are beholden to the corporation for this reason. The Frankfurt School scholars, despite all their criticism of the culture industry could hardly imagine the degree to which culture has been generated in the hands of just a few corporations (Chomsky 2002). This section of the chapter focuses on the evolution of corporate-dominated democracy and its ensuing ramifications.

Sheldon Wolin (2008), a political theorist, maintains that we are currently witnessing in the US (and to a similar degree in Canada) the most advanced form of corrupted democracy, what he labels as "inverted totalitarianism." Wolin's theory is important because it explains how powerful corporations have a stranglehold on citizens, even those living in a democracy. Wolin is quick to say that inverted totalitarianism is something entirely new, distinctly different from the twentieth century totalitarianism of a Stalin or Hitler; rather, it is a type of political system so entrenched in corporate politics as to be essentially under corporate rule. For Wolin, democracy in the US has been steadily eroding since the time of the New Deal following the Great Depression. The New Deal was conceived as a means of redressing inequalities within American society but when World War II broke out, it was superseded by governmental control of the entire economy. The war had a profound effect in halting the momentum of political and

social democracy and contributed to the increasingly open cohabitation between the corporation and the state. To a large extent, Wolin attributes the diminishment of democracy to the rising power of global corporate interests and select elitist groups particularly those associated with the presidency of George Bush II (2000 – 2008). Wolin uses the term inverted totalitarianism as primarily representing the political coup by corporate power with the simultaneous demobilization of citizenry. While classic totalitarianism uses available technologies to control, intimidate and manipulate in order to force societies into a preconceived totality, inverted totalitarianism is not found in ideology or overt expression such as public policy. Rather, inverted totalitarianism "projects power inwards" and gains its dynamic by the conflation of the state with other forms of power (e.g. evangelical religions) particularly, private governance represented by the corporation (xxi). Wolin cites some of the symptoms of inverted totalitarianism as including pre-emptive wars (Iraq), widespread use of torture, domestic spying and widespread corruption in both government and corporate infrastructures. Tendencies in American culture now point in a direction away from self-government, the rule of law, and egalitarianism toward "managed democracy." Fiercely capitalistic, the US, and Canada under Harper, have both prided themselves on adhering to a decentralized power structure in which no single person or governmental agency could or should attempt to direct. The economy was said to be working best when left alone so that the "free market" could operate unfettered. Yet, Wolin claims laissez-faire economics has produced and sanctioned trusts, monopolies, holding companies and cartels. As a result, economic ideology reinforced by business corporations and science and technology has overtaken, even replaced politics. Wolin summarizes this phenomenon: "The emergence of the corporation marked the presence of private power on the scale and in numbers hitherto unknown, the concentration of private power unconnected to a citizen body" (xxi).

Wolin (2008) argues that the current situation is comprised of unprecedented combinations of power distinguished by their "totalizing tendencies" that challenge political, moral, intellectual and economic boundaries on a continual basis (xxiii). One such power base is the media conglomerate which has restricted the free circulation of ideas to that of "managed circularity" (7). For example, the media representation of the 9/11 terrorist attacks served a didactic end of establishing the images of American vulnerability; September 11 was quickly consecrated as a type of national "holy" day. Furthermore, in the aftermath of 9/11, the

American people were propelled into a world of mythology in which myth-making shaped decision-makers despite obvious ambiguities of facts. Such conditions lent themselves to abuses of executive and judicial power characteristic of inverted totalitarianism. Inverted totalitarianism relies on "private" media rather than on public agencies to disseminate propaganda that reinforces the so-called official version of news. It is important to note that in inverted totalitarianism is not driven by personal rule but by "abstract totalizing powers" seemingly difficult to hold accountable for their lack of direct actions (44).

Inverted totalitarianism evolves and thrives by encouraging political disengagement of citizens rather than mass mobilization typically used in totalitarian states. In classic totalitarianism, the conquest of total power is a conscious aim of those heading a political movement. With inverted totalitarianism, the leader is the product of the system rather than its architect. In fact, inverted totalitarianism is largely independent of any particular leader and requires no specific authority to survive. It is best understood by examining how corporate heads hold sway over society and wield power within political and social systems. Wolin (2008) characterizes this process as follows: "Inverted totalitarianism has emerged imperceptibly, unpremeditatedly, and in seeming unbroken continuity with the nation's political traditions. For our purposes an inversion occurs when seemingly unrelated, even disparate starting points converge and reinforce each other" (46). Inverted totalitarianism disclaims its real identity so as to normalize deviations from true democracy. An inversion that is present in a system, such as a democracy, engages in a number of significant actions ordinarily associated with its antithesis: for example, George Bush II sanctioned the use of torture or imprisoned individuals without due process, all the while instructing the nation about the sanctity of the rule of law. Totalitarianism involves attempts to realize an ideological, idealized conception of a society in which the social systems are envisioned and coordinated to support and further the purpose of the regime, a system controlled from the top down. Inverted totalitarianism continuously trumpets the cause of democracy on a global scale though in reality supports governments legitimated by bogus elections or even dictatorships. In the case of the US, its government claims to be the showcase, the ideal of how democracy can be managed without appearing to be suppressive. Capitalism, the "regime ideology" of the West, is virtually as unchallenged as the Nazi doctrine was in 1930s Germany.

Wolin (2008) believes that corporate power has exponentially increased, and while ostensibly non-political in its origins, corporations are now unbounded by constitutional limits or democratic processes. The recent US Supreme Court (2009) decision allowing corporations unlimited campaign contributions in any and all election processes (including presidential) is a prime example of how government is in collusion with corporate rule. Wolin's theory develops from the premise that democracy and totalitarianism are not mutually exclusive. He opines that it is possible for inverted totalitarianism to evolve from a putatively "strong democracy" instead of a "failed" one (54). In other words, inverted totalitarianism does not require the overthrow of an established legitimated system. On the contrary, it operates by defending the very system in which it thrives. Inverted totalitarianism learns how to exploit political and legal obstacles especially to facilitate certain favoured forms of corporate power while checking rival ones. This is possible in part because US law upholds the corporation as having all the legal rights of a person (Bakan 2004). Wolin notes: "Our totalizing system has evolved its own methods and strategies...Its genius lies in wielding total power without appearing to, or enforcing ideological uniformity, or forcibly suppressing dissident elements" (57).

While the scope of government has receded, corporate power has increasingly assumed governmental responsibilities and services, many of which were deemed to be the special preserve of state power. To the extent that corporation and state are inextricably linked, "privatization" becomes the norm and state action in defiance of corporate control a mere aberration. Wolin (2008) contends that privatization encompasses a major component of managed democracy by diminishing the political and its democratic content. Perhaps what characterizes inverted totalitarianism's greatest harm is the abdication of governmental responsibility for the well-being of its citizenry. Wolin continuously repeats that the ethos of the twenty-first century corporation is one of competition rather than cooperation, of aggrandizement and profitability at the expense of community: "The [corporation] is both the principal supplier of political leadership and the main source of political corruption..."'Shareholder democracy'" belongs on the same list of oxymorons as "'Superpower democracy'" (139-40). Inverted totalitarianism marks a political moment when corporate power is no longer a purely economic phenomenon within the confines of "private enterprise." As a co-partner with the state, the corporation has become more of a political entity and the state more market oriented. Corporate power infiltrates government in the form of lobbyists and contributes

to the degradation of political dialogue through privately organized media. The $700 billion plus corporate bail-out in 2008, described by Congresswoman Kaptur as an *economic coup d'état* (Moore 2009), that Congress sanctioned and implemented, is a stark example of Wolin's theory in practice and how the welfare of ordinary citizens is disregarded when pitted against corporate interests.

Theoretical Implications for Children Living in Consumer Cultures

> The corporate teaching that we can find happiness through conformity to corporate culture is a cruel trick, for it is corporate culture that stokes and feeds the great malaise and disconnect of the culture of illusion. (Hedges 2009:138)

All six of the theorists examined take issue with late capitalism, in which culture and humanity itself is subordinate to economic imperatives, and democracy suffers. History appears to be moving in a regressive direction for each of these theorists in which escape from cultural influence and its concomitant, economic dominance, is increasingly remote. As a result, what were once citizens of the free world are now clones of mass culture; those who believe their "individuality" has been preserved when in fact, their actions and attitudes confirm an entrenched level of compliance. True individuality is about establishing a position of moral autonomy and when appropriate, finding the courage not to cooperate, a process that holds little merit in mass-produced consumer cultures.

The culture industry seeps into thought, emotion, language and behaviour and its products provide the normative framework of expression; it is the means with which we experience the social and material conditions of our lives. What of the receiver of such culture? We now have the technology and power to create a virtual world at the beck and call of the consumer. The result is a vehement defence of individuality paradoxically seen to be upheld by the mechanisms of mass culture and spurring citizens to guard popular cultural values against all other authorities, even government. Yet, it is widely admitted that the basic incentive of culture production is profit-making, not human betterment. And were there any doubt that acquisition of capital is a prime motive, a mere surface glimpse will reveal the gross misappropriation of wealth between ordinary citizen and industry. Somehow the mendacity is never exposed in a way that catapults a cultural revolution of magnitude necessary to evoke real change. Pockets of

dissent are isolated and rendered ineffective as generations of new believers, those raised in the swath of the culture industry, know of nothing else.

In the case of adults, there is room to charge that the embrace of mass culture is a conscious choice. Horkheimer and Adorno (1973) were under no illusion that the masses are dupes or merely suffering from false consciousness. Their final conclusion in *Dialect of Enlightenment* purports that: "the triumph of advertising in the culture industry is that consumers feel compelled to buy and use its products even though *they see through them*" (167, italics mine). Perhaps the most alarming aspect of the culture industry is that we feel compelled to partake without having critically examined the reasons why, as though operating out of some instinctual unconscious drive. Even so, Horkheimer and Adorno (1973) held out some hope for resistance and creativity for adults though this was not a well-developed piece of their theoretical treatises. Their central message remained that the ubiquity of consumerism, the power of media and the mass production of culture all helped to create a totalizing cultural ethos. Many have elaborated beyond Adorno's central theses 60 years after their publications including current academics who concur that hyper-consumerism continues to erode both culture and the political environment that supports its dominance (Hickel and Kahn 2012; Perez and Esposito 2012).

In the case of children however, the argument of 'knowing yet still persuaded' becomes increasingly more difficult to make. From infancy, children are being introduced to consumer culture and media such that a world without is unimaginable. Children's most elementary mode of expression—play—has become the target of marketing strategies, allowing corporations to "define the limits of children's imaginations" (Kline 1989:299). Children are so immersed in mass culture that they spent, on average, an astonishing 7 hours and 38 minutes in total time with media on any given day (this includes, television, music, computers, video games, movies) (Rideout, Foehr and Roberts 2010). When not engaged with media, the modern child is encouraged to play with mass-produced toys and games, all of which have been carefully scripted. As Kline (1989:315) chillingly notes: "Imaginative play has shifted one degree closer to mere imitation and assimilation." Even for adults, there is little variety within the culture industry which unabashedly reproduces the forms that capitalism continues to generate, seeking to disguise their ever-sameness with trivial differences (Gunster 2004).

Media of all forms, the prominent distributor of the culture industry, is now the main, though largely unacknowledged, educator. For children, the omnipresence of television, computers, DVDs, etc. and the amount of time devoted to their viewing far surpass that of schooling. As marketing criteria begin to dominate all aspects of children's lives, they underwrite the most important modality of socialization namely, children's imaginations. We are preoccupied with safety from physical and psychological harm yet seem to have ignored the unfettered access that corporations have to our children. We must ask how it is that, as a culture, we have abdicated our responsibility to ensure children retain freedom of mind. We allow a battery of professionals from psychology, sociology and neuroscience, among others, to apply themselves to the child market as a means of ensuring the continued 'successes' of the culture industry. The rights of children in this regard have been cast aside. Children now exhibit the same consumerist concerns and lifestyle preoccupations of their parents—they are old before their time.

CHAPTER TWO: CHILDREN'S 'CULTURE INDUSTRY': LITERATURE REVIEW

Corporations have inculcated children's culture with the belief that consuming commodities is the predominant path to happiness and fulfillment. This literature review focuses on evidence from multiple sources that contradicts the corporate message that consumer culture is beneficial, if not harmless, with respect to a child's well-being. The chapter begins by examining the history of the children's culture industry, how marketers infiltrated children's media entertainment. Next, I review marketing strategies and their effects, how even young babies have become the new target market as well as the socially constructed 'tween.' I also discuss the phenomenon of "cool" and how corporations have co-opted cool as an effective market strategy to encourage consumptive habits that are damaging to children's health including: eating junk food, aggression, early sexualization, alcohol consumption and smoking. Empirical research on consumerism, materialism and children is offered as substantiating evidence that aspects of consumer culture are harmful to children. Following, is a section that reviews theories, and definitions of identity and how this relates to the branding phenomenon. Research specific to branding is then reviewed. Further discussion about consumer culture and gender issues, as it relates to identity, is also presented. Finally, I provide an evaluation of the 'other side,' how consumer culture is constructed as valuable, or at minimum, less harmful than its critics maintain.

Advertisers spend billions of dollars a year encouraging, persuading and manipulating children into a consumer lifestyle. Access to children is achieved through the media in which advertisers exploit insecurities, create extraneous wants, and foster unyielding desire, instant satisfaction and dissatisfaction in rapid succession to ensure a cycle of perpetual consumption. I argue throughout this chapter that consumption is now an intrinsic part of children's everyday lives and identity formation. In fact, the extent of children's immersion in consumer culture, at present, is unprecedented, regardless of culture and geographical location, though the extent of consumerism is particularly salient in the Western world. For example, while only six percent of the world's population, the US consumes 57 percent of the world's advertising; the average American will see or hear more than seven million advertisements in their lifetime (Pratkanis and Aronson 2001). Consumerism has become a powerful and evocative symbol of modern capitalism. Today, materialism and consumption have never been so prevalent, affording

opportunities of self-expression (Kearney 2006; Miles 2000), as well as cause for great concern in regards to children's health and well-being (Acuff and Reiher 2005; Kasser & Kanner, 2004; Linn 2004; Quart 2003; Schor 2004; Thomas 2007). After modest increases from 1960 to the mid-1980s commodity consumption per child in the 1990s seemed to know no bounds—by 2004 it was at $670 billion (money spent on or by children in the US) (Pugh 2009). In 2000, the teen market alone was worth $155 billion in direct expenditures (Schor 2005). Statistics from 2002 reveal that those under 13 spent over $40 billion, in comparison to $17 billion less than a decade previously (Williams 2006a). Consumption plays a major role in day-to-day living and leisure through the endless availability of media technology in the form of television, computers, digital accessories and a wide array of goods. Children living in consumer societies are exposed to an ever-growing number of products and services produced by corporate entities that include the largest of business conglomerates. Children comprise the largest consumer economy in the world (Aird 2004). Specifically, two to 14-year-olds have sway over $500 billion in household purchasing each year; in 2003, 33 million US teens each spent on average $103 a week (Calvert 2008). Shopping has become *the* number one past-time for most American children (Williams 2006a).

Children, especially in the past two decades, have experienced a barrage of media encouraging purchasing behaviour and consumption much like adults who are already firmly established in this lifestyle. Children are more and more defined and evaluated by their spending capacity. A child's identity appears to be increasingly constituted through their status as a consumer. Living in a culture of consumption is to be exposed to enormous pressures to conform to the apparent beliefs and values of the culture. Part of the allure of consumer culture is due to the way commodities have evolved to be symbols of caring and affection (Williams 2006a). Indeed, parents have come to believe that money and gifts are symbolic expressions of their love for their children. As well, commodities are used to express who we are and who we want to be. As corporations search for new markets and maximum sales, they are crowding children in a sense, by leaving them little unmediated space within which to develop their own identities. Driven by a relentless effort to promote consumerism, regardless of the effect on the child, companies are guilty of what Enola Aird (2004:143) refers to as "marketing authoritarianism." Indeed, childhood has been co-opted by marketing conglomerates. In contemporary marketing, children are portrayed as 'naturally' desiring beings with an

unmediated drive to consume that is said to arise from within (Kenway and Bullen 2010). Not surprisingly, children are behaving more and more like adult consumers. They are shopping in greater numbers, whether it is at the mall, or solo visits at stores. According to Juliet Schor (2005), economist and sociologist, by age 10 children are making an average of 5.2 shopping trips per week, matching statistics on adults.

To a child growing up, immersion in a culture of images appears to be the most natural thing in the world. Indeed, children are taught to operate and accept consumerism as ordinary (Stearns, Sandlin and Burdick 2011). Expecting images and sounds to appear on command has become second nature to millions of children. American youth spend more time per week with media than they do with their parents, friends, or in school (Pugh 2009). In fact, children are surrounded by electronic media to the degree that they are more often engaged with technology than doing anything else except sleeping (Levin and Linn 2004). Today, media forces compete with adult caregivers in their ability to capture the attention of children and guide them accordingly. It is in this respect that childhood is precarious, pitted against the ubiquitous presence of media images and sound bites, all of which persuade children to conform to a mode of living that may not necessarily be in their best interests. At the heart of the struggle between childhood and consumerism, child identity formation is at stake; children are invited to believe that what they consume defines who they are. Consumerism reduces a child's potential to express and activate their capacities. Thus, the corporate producers of what Steinberg and Kincheloe (1997) refer to as 'kinderculture,' the purveyors of consumer ideology, are constantly destabilizing children's identities. Even those children whose financial means restrict them from the market, suffer in terms of identity. They are cast as an "underclass," as individuals with no market value, "failed consumers" (Bauman 2007).

Academics have engaged in a love-hate debate with media as far as children are concerned. Media and mass communication technologies have been accused of interfering with and retarding children's physical and emotional development (Healy 1998). Media is said in large part to be responsible for a burgeoning crisis of childhood (Acuff and Reiher 2005; Postman 1985; Thomas 2007). Many of the technologies associated with mass culture including television, videodiscs, video games, computers and other digital display units, it has been argued, are bad for the brain and the body (AAP 2009a; AAP 2009b; Levin and Linn 2004; Primack et al. 2008; Sargent et al. 2001; Singer et al. 1998; Worth et al. 2008; Zurbriggen et al.

2007). Media culture and technology are also said to induce anomie and anti-social behaviours (Turkle 2010), as well as, be responsible for reinforcing divisive patterns like racism and sexism (Giroux2000). In general, many feel that children's innocence should be protected from unregulated advertising (Linn 2004; Molnar et al. 2010; Schor 2004; Thomas 2007). On the other hand, media technology has been praised for its advancement of children's education. Computers and other electronics are heralded for enhancing learning at an unprecedented pace (Healy). There are those who feel that children have the right and ability to make consumer choices, to exercise free agency (Buckingham 2000; Fiske 1987; McNeal 2007). The anti-consumer position is based on the conception that childhood is, universally, a critical time of development independent of cultural variances (Gopnik 2009; Leach 1994). This notion is in sharp contrast with a constructivist paradigm, argued for on the pro-consumer side which hypothesizes that the human core is superficial, and manipulable, such that there is no fixed state of childhood, that historical context is critical to its understanding (Buckingham 2011). Those who herald consumer culture's benefits believe that the consumer-child is representative of a 'new' breed of childhood, and that childhood must be viewed as pliable, fluid and endlessly evolving (McNeal 2007). Both of these theoretical positions will be presented with a review of the associated literature to determine their merit and validity.

According to Gitlin (2001), in the US television, VCR, and radio use does not vary significantly among white, black and Hispanic children, or between girls and boys; for television and radio, rates do not vary significantly according to the economic status of the community. Furthermore, poor families are not insulated by their poverty from the consequences of consumer marketing. Indeed, most research shows that low-income families spend proportionately more on their children than wealthier families (Pugh 2009). Moreover, there appears to be no direct correlation between parents' income and children's media possessions; what children own is constant until their parents' earnings are more than $500,000 per year (Kindlon 2001). It appears that the ubiquity of corporate operations and media has, to a large extent, infiltrated beyond differences of class, ethnicity and gender. It can be argued that many children are being deprived of a 'full' childhood or series of experiences that distinctly differentiates them from that of the adult world and that meets their developmental needs as children.

One of the more significant outcomes of consumer culture with respect to children has been the steady 'erosion' of childhood whether it is measured in terms of health trends, consumer behaviours or accessibility to adult culture. There are many academics (Jenks 2005; Kline 1995; Postman 1985; Steinberg and Kincheloe 1997; Winn 1983) who are concerned about the fact that childhood, at least as we know it in the West, is fading out altogether. Developmental psychology posits that children and adults are intellectually, physically, emotionally and psychologically different, and children are incapable of making the same sorts of judgments that adults do. Children are, arguably, distinct from adults and should therefore, be shielded from adult responsibilities and harmful influences (Leach 1994; Linn 2004). Yet, the medium of television, for example, regardless of content, is accessible to anyone. Kline (1993:74) presents a compelling argument that television is not only a significant socializing agent for children, but is also "the undisputed leader in the production of children's culture." The culture of childhood has an important play component that is impoverished and under nourished by pre-programmed play and passive time associated with television, computers and other electronic media (Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, and Eyer 2003). Furthermore, play has become professionalized and tainted with adult cues, imagination and expectations; it no longer solely belongs to the creative mind of a child (Kline 1995). Kline (1993) further argues that television advertising and programming has commercialized childhood to such an extent that the images sold through advertising now substitute for the symbols of childhood. Further to this, cultural critic Neil Postman (1994) opines that children's experience of culture is now one that treats them as though they are adults and can absorb adult information. Indeed, there is no aspect of adult life including perversity, promiscuity, dishonour or aggression that seems outside the realm of today's children (Acuff and Reiher 2005; Schor 2004). Television programming is, for the most part, not governed by theories on child development; rather, it is driven by profit-seeking conglomerates with few governmental regulations.

Children are embracing technology in unparalleled numbers, growing up in increasingly media-saturated environments. The Kaiser Family Foundation estimates that 99 percent of families with children own televisions, 97 percent own video or DVD players, more than 80 percent own a video game and 86 percent own a computer (Vandewater and Lee 2009). The 1999 Kaiser Family Foundation study reported that children between the ages of two and 18 spend 5 hours and 29 minutes per day with media (Schor 2005). More recent statistics reveal a

marked increase to 7 hours and 38 minutes (Rideout, Foehr and Roberts 2010). The 2003 Kaiser Family Foundation study found that, in a typical day, 59 percent of children watch television, 42 percent watch a video or DVD, five percent use a computer and three percent play video games. Indeed, technologies of all forms have become the backdrop against which the lives of children and adults are set.

Historical Growth of the Children's Culture Industry

The participants chosen for this study were young children in the 1990s. Consequently, this section of the dissertation will primarily focus on the time period leading up to and highlighting that of 1990 – 2000 so as to provide a backdrop against which to better understand the results of the study. To begin with, television was critically responsible for the rise in marketing to children. Experts promoted children's ability, even their right, to make their own decisions and choices— a boon to advertisers. Government officials went so far as to proclaim that television was a necessity for the maintenance of family harmony (Spigel 1998). Children's influence was instrumental in promoting television ownership in the home—the origin of "nagging" power. The child audience was also critical in determining the type of television shows that were offered. Yet as Kline (1995) notes, television marketers did not initially latch onto the child audience. In fact, advertisers had little interest in sponsoring their programs. It was not until 1953, when Disney inaugurated the *Disneyland* show, that marketers realized the potential of television for merchandising to children. The show was infused with all kinds of advertisements for Disney products and was proof that children's commercial entertainment could be sold as fun for the entire family (Spigel 1998). Walt Disney was perceived to be an upholder of the traditional American family, valued for his creation of media that helped preserve a child's innocence (Griffen 1999). The enormous popularity of Disney's *Davy Crockett* led to the sale of several million *Crocket* hats within the first three months of the show's inception (Kline 1995). Disney's next success was the *Mickey Mouse Club* which resulted in sales of mouse guitars and ears, capturing the attention of corporations who began to realize the gold mine children's television represented. By the 1960s, Saturday morning and after-school timeslots were regarded as the "children's ghetto" when smaller adult audience time meant lower than prime-time rates for advertisers. Advertising was soon to become the life force of children's television (Engelhardt 1987). The show *Winky Dink and You,* a cult classic of

the 1950s, was one of the first programs completely dependent upon the product it advertised. By purchasing a special *Winky Dink* kit, children could draw on the television set. The *Winky Dink* show/ kit became the harbinger of the shifting age limits of consumption in which parents would have diminishing control over the products children desired (Spigel 1998).

Toy-Based Programming

Guided by effective marketing methods, toy-making emerged as a big business. Toy sales increased 10 fold between 1955 and 1985. By the late 1980s, the toy industry directed its gaze to the production of toys tied to licensed characters, though this practise had long been in effect on a smaller scale (Kline 1995). Manufacturers had already capitalized on the popularity of children's media heroes and heroines by developing licensed characters toys such as Mickey Mouse watches and Shirley Temple dolls (Bruce 2008). As a result, the conception of play narrowed in scope to mean activities that revolved around the relationship between child and toy. Kline writes that (1995:148) writes: "Mass-produced playthings, like compulsory schooling, reflected the universalizing expectations increasingly shaping children socialization and penetrating North American culture." The licensing of character products allowed for new investment capital for production, product visibility and demand, and advertisement revenue (Pecora 1998). For the toy industry, licensing was a highly lucrative practice as licensed characters offered an easily identifiable toy or storyline, as well as, "extra income" from royalties. As an example, in the mid-1970s the major animation house was grossing $40-50 million from its licensed products alone; in 1985, Mattel grossed $10 million as income from royalty fees (Pecora 1998). The toy industry welcomed the stability that licensing allowed for as it ensured that children would retain some degree of familiarity and possible affiliation with media characters, practically guaranteeing sales. As well, products based on licensed characters were more likely to stand the test of time. For example, the *Smurf* characters and program were introduced to children in 1981 and still runs on television in syndications with *Smurf* toys continuing to sell at Toys "R" Us (Pecora 1998). The business of children's television was driven by the principal that advertisers needed an audience of active consumers and not mere viewers.

The Walt Disney Company successfully employed licensing from the earliest days of its business. While not every program on the Disney Channel offered a line of products, each time

one of their star animations appeared, they fulfilled the role of an advertisement (Pecora 1998). Other studios, such as Hanna-Barbara also profited from licensing characters from a plethora of children's shows. The *Flintstones* alone produced over 100 licenses including a Pebbles doll, cereal and brand of vitamins (Kline 1995). The *Star Wars* trilogy that began in 1977 was the biggest boost to spin-off licensing the toy industry had seen (Kline 1995). By 1988, licensing had become a $54 billion annual business representative of 15.5 percent of the toy market. The Star Wars figurines of Luke Skywalker, Princess Leia, Obi-Wan Kenobi and Darth Vader became the most coveted, and often acquired, boy toys of their time (Engelhardt 1987). George Lucas had in fact, financed the making of *Star Wars* through a licensing agreement with a toy company named Kenner. The licensing itself was deemed to be so profitable as to be able to front-end film production when necessary. Character licensing exploded as toy and media producers realized that they could meld media production and product merchandising as one streamlined process; toy, card and cereal companies all began to embrace licensing of the characters to which they made claim (Engelhardt 1987).

Not long after the enormous success of *Star Wars*, the American Greetings Corporation came up with the idea of creating licensed characters that would appeal to the interests and fantasies of young girls. These characters would be put on greeting cards, as well as licensed out to various manufacturers. Eventually, they developed the *Strawberry Shortcake* line of characters in conjunction with the Kenner toy company. *Strawberry Shortcake* quickly became America's number one baby doll appearing on hundreds of products and selling an aggregate of more than $1 billion. Marketers had proven that a saleable image could be created out of virtually nothing. It quickly dawned on the toy industry, card companies, cereal companies and others marketers that if they created characters with the same appeal as *Strawberry Shortcake* immense revenue could be had. As Englehardt (1987:73) describes:

> The advertising and promotion budgets of all the producers add up to an advertising and promotion campaign of unheard of size and coordination in the world of child consumerism. The result: a child surrounded by an advertising image reflecting off every object that catches the eye.

In 1981, under Ronald Reagan, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) employed a policy of deregulation. This meant television stations were allowed to air as many commercial minutes of their choosing, a ruling that, in effect, sanctioned the program-length commercial. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and Federal Communications Commission

(FCC) no longer objected when licensed character tie-in programs aimed to promote new toy lines such as *Strawberry Shortcake* for girls and *He-Man*, later developed for boys. By the early 1990s, there was no television show without at least one associated license. The US toy market reflected the success of licensed characters as industry profits rose from $2 billion in the mid-1970s to well over $12 billion by 1986 (Kline 1995). Character licensing was successful because the characters themselves operated like present-day brands, creating memorable and visually distinctive images in the minds of children.

Supersytems and Licensing

According to Marsha Kinder (1991) comprehensive character licensing has evolved beyond simple television programming into what she coins as sophisticated strategies of "commercial supersystems."

> A supersystem is a network construction around a character or group of characters from pop culture who are either fictional or real. In order to be a supersystem a network must cut across several modes of image productions; must appeal to diverse generations, classes and ethnic subcultures, who in turn are targeted with diverse strategies; must foster "collectibility" through a proliferation of related products; and must undergo a sudden increase in commodification, the success of which reflexively becomes a "media event" but dramatically accelerates the growth curve of the systems commercial success. (Kinder 1991:123)

Examples of commercial supersystems abound in children's culture: Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Star Wars, the Muppets, Harry Potter or "real" ones, like Madonna, Michael Jackson, and the Beatles. The supersystem, in effect, fosters an endless collection of components from cereal boxes to movies. Three distinct genres of children's television programming developed as a result of the collectability of licensed characters including: muscled superheroes, mechanical transformers and nurturing caretakers. In all three cases, the more characters and accessories there were, the more toys that could be created, and the greater the potential market share.

Action for Children's Television (ACT) was the first prominent activist group to focus on children's television and dispute the commercialization of shows that were in essence program-length commercials (Hendershot 1998). ACT lobbied the FCC in the late 1980s calling for the regulation of toy-based programming, claiming the shows were really "commercial speech." Neither Presidents Reagan nor Bush were prepared to rule against broadcast content despite ACT's demands that broadcasters serve children, and not advertisers. The result—

license programming successfully continued into the 1990s (Hendershot 1998). In fact, by 1980, close to 60 different product-tied animation programs had been aired during children's television time slots (Kline 1995). Further, approximately 50 percent of toys produced in 1997 were licensed products related to television and film (Kapur 1999).

In addition to Saturday morning cartoons, three big children's networks had been established: Nickelodeon, The Disney Channel and The Cartoon Network (Schor 2005). The Disney Channel, which began programming in 1984, has had a continuous stream of commercial messages geared towards their licensed characters. The Nickelodeon channel also directed its programming to children around the same time as Disney. While Nickelodeon did not own any characters to license, its imprint could be found on 400 items by the mid-1990s. While the Disney Channel, Nickelodeon and Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) were intent on 'advertising-free' children's entertainment, all three increasingly adopted a commercial broadcasting orientation, turning to advertising for capital (Pecora 1998). As media multiplied into numerous technologies available to children and embodied the supersytem, the use of licensed characters moved from television into other forms of entertainment including: movies, albums, videocassettes, storybook, computer games and videogames. One such example is the *Lion King* released by Disney, in the late 1980s; the proliferation of associated merchandise from this film included books, comic books, coloring and activity books, CDs MTV videos, board games, home-video cassettes and video games. Pokeman is a more recent example of a supersytem that was enormously lucrative. Pecora (1998:152-153) remarks that,

> Children's entertainment has become defined by profitability...Small islands of creativity exist on public broadcasting and in places such as Nickelodeon, or with independent companies that find a niche in the video or music or book industry, but mostly the air is filled with Mickey Mouse or the character *du jour*.

Marketing Strategies and their Effects

The typical North American child is now immersed in the world of consumerism to a degree that dwarfs historical experience. In 1983, $100 million were spent in television advertising directed at children and by 2004, that figure had jumped to $15 billion (Calvert 2008). It used to be that mothers were the conduit for marketing to children; now, marketers have aligned themselves solely with children. Marketers feel justified to interact directly with children as sovereign beings, independent of family (Schor 2005). They no longer attempt to

assuage mothers that their products will improve their child's well-being. Rather, they send their messages directly to children themselves. The marketing industry does this by exploiting children's likes, dislikes, interests, and activities for the purposes of profit, commodifying their experiences. For example, Big Tobacco specifically targeted children by using animated cartoon figures to sell cigarettes. By championing children's "intelligence" and "sophistication" as a positive rationale, marketers are able to justify the onslaught of child-targeted advertisements. We now know that young children, including babies and toddlers, are highly susceptible to many forms of suggestion, including marketing (Borzekowski and Robinson 2001). The stakes are high, as children between two and 14 years-old now influence purchases of $700 billion annually in the US ($40 billion of their own, $340 billion influenced) (McNeal 2006).

Marketing strategies have increasingly focused on the very young, that is, zero to three years of age; this group of children has now become the first segment in "cradle-to-grave" marketing (Thomas 2007). These children are at the most impressionable stage of life and are particularly vulnerable to the marketers' influence. As media analyst Douglass Rushkoff (Aird 2004:145-146) comments:

> Today the most intensely targeted demographic is the baby—the future consumer...By seeding their products and images early, the marketers can do more than just develop brand recognition; they can literally cultivate a demographic's sensibilities as they are formed...This indicates a long-term coercive strategy.

Babies and toddlers have come to represent potential adult consumers. Thomas (2007) estimates that a corporation can potentially reap $100,000 per child over the course of his or her lifetime by establishing brand loyalty at a young age. Younger children are more open and gullible to believing an advertising message is the truth. It should be noted that, traditionally, babies were considered off limits to advertisers because of ethical concerns. That seems to have all changed as "cradle-to-grave" marketing represents more than $20 billion a year. Remarkably, by the time they are three, many children are able to ask for specific brands. Marketers have unleashed what Thomas refers to as the "baby genius virus," a zeitgeist that reinforces the belief that technology makes you smarter and better, despite an absence of research to substantiate these claims (i.e. the "Mozart effect" in which advertisers claimed listening to Mozart's music would make babies and toddlers smarter though no empirical evidence supported this position). On the contrary, babies may be suffering from "problem-solving deficit disorder" resulting from over-stimulation

by screen technology (12). As a result, they begin to experience a kind of sensory overload and may be incapable of focusing to their full capacity. Twenty-nine percent of babies younger than 12 months of age are watching screens daily; 23 percent have televisions in their bedroom (CCFC 2012).

By 2000, babies and toddlers were watching preschool shows in record numbers of which *Teletubbies* was prominent, a program touted as appealing to this age group. And though parents did not always approve of television, they were more easily persuaded when the notion of education was introduced. Even mega-corporations like Wal-Mart are in the baby/toddler business, retailing large quantities of books complete with accessories. Disney has been sending out "educational" kits to daycare centers and preschools as a means of claiming market share (Thomas 2007). In spite of this, research demonstrated that young children were not learning anything that the producers of *Teletubbies* intended; on the contrary, background television was found to diminish the length of children's episodes of play and capacity to stay focused during play (Thomas 2007).

Constructing the Tween

The social phenomenon of the "tween" is one of the more striking examples of how consumerism shapes children's culture, values and identities. The tween category refers to children from eight to twelve years of age. The tween rapidly became a definable, knowable *commercial* persona and stage of youth starting in the 1990s (Cook and Kaiser 2004). Nowhere is age compression (children getting "older" at younger ages) marketing more evident than in the eight to twelve age range (Quart 2003). These children, in particular, are being enticed and encouraged into adopting an identity older than their developmental age. It is worth noting that in North America, 25 million children in the eight to twelve age brackets form the most powerful consumer group since the baby boom and are spending billions annually (Leung 2009). In addition, the four to twelve years-old group annually influence $565 billion of their parents' purchases (Rice 2001). Thus, it comes as no surprise that marketers are clamouring for tween's attention. The somewhat conservative McDonald's Corporation launched its "Big Kids Meal," complete with its McWorld advertising campaign in an attempt to capture the tween market. Other examples of age compression include advertisements designed to attract children to cigarette smoking and drinking of alcohol. In 1998, two such advertisements, Joe Camel and

the Budweiser frogs, were the most popular children's commercials of the year (Schor 2005). As more countries (including Canada and the US) imposed bans on tobacco advertising, the industry found ways to promote their brands globally, especially with young people. Such "indirect advertising" methods include sponsoring sporting events and teams; promoting rock concerts; placing their brand logos on t-shirts and other merchandise popular with children; and giving away free cigarettes and brand merchandise in areas where young people gather, such as rock concerts, discos and shopping malls (Hammond 2000).

Advertisers have capitalized on the insecurities of pre-adolescence, a vast need to be "cool," and desires to break free from the confines of parents when catering to tweens. Marketers are hiring child psychologists and other experts to maximize their understanding of the segments and nuances of the tween market. Even though the term tween does not exclude boys, the tween idol phenomenon is more closely associated with girls; female youth are one of the most lucrative consumer niches (Kearney 2006). Television programming has catered to the tween, including such programs as Nickelodeon's *Carly* and *Zoey 101*, as well as the Disney Channel's *Hannah Montana*. Television executives showcase a 'hip' star that embodies all of the qualities tweens aspire towards like independence from parents, and being popular at school. For example, marketers have created tween toy lines such as the *Bratz* doll, which exemplifies girl power and attitude. The tween persona has been characterized to feel empowered by separating themselves from adults and partaking in a world free of their rules. Indeed, marketing research reveals that children over the age of 11 no longer think of themselves as children, and neither do the Toy Manufacturers of America; their target demographic used to be zero to fourteen-years-old and is now zero to ten-years-old (MediaAwarenessNetwork 2010). By coining a term like 'tween' and creating a persona to emulate tween characteristics, the industry helped to transform what it means to be a child.

Gauging Children's Health

Trends on children's health, including their physical and psychological functioning, are important indicators of the effects of culture. Close examination of children's health in North America reveals much about the way media, including advertising and all forms of technology, impacts children in North American. This section of the dissertation focuses on key health problems that plague today's children including obesity, poor nutrition, diabetes, smoking,

drinking, emotional and behaviour problems, and suicide as a means of understanding the direct or indirect impact of consumer culture.

In Canada by 2012, 31.5 percent of children were overweight or obese (CBC: 2012). In the US, obesity rates for children have nearly tripled as have those for teens since 1980 (CDC: 2010). Research demonstrates that overweight and obese girls are significantly more likely to grow breasts earlier because body fat can produce sex hormones (estrogen). Some girls are entering puberty as early as age seven and eight, earlier than they did even just a decade ago. Furthermore, early maturation in girls is associated with lower self-esteem and less favourable body image, as well as greater rates of eating problems, depression and suicide attempts (Biro et al. 2010). At the most concrete level, physical effects, including obesity and its concomitant, Type II diabetes, may be strongly tied to the high number of food advertisements viewed by children. Food advertising on television is dominated by breakfast cereals, confectionery, savoury snacks, and soft drinks, with fast-food restaurants taking up an increasing proportion of television advertising (Livingstone and Helsper 2006). Dietary patterns established in early childhood play a critical role in the prevention of childhood diseases such as obesity, and Type II diabetes both of which can persist into adulthood (Zuppa, Morton, and Mehta 2003). Furthermore, poor diet in childhood can lead to heart disease and cancer in adulthood; an estimated 65 percent of chronic diseases are diet-related and thus, preventable (Zuppa et al. 2003). Studies have shown significant associations between hours of television viewing and the prevalence of both high cholesterol and obesity in children (Zuppa et al. 2003). Children see one food commercial about every five minutes on Saturday morning television programs (Levin and Linn 2004). Borzekowski and Robinson (2001) found that a 30-second food commercial impacts children's brand choice as young as age two; repeated exposure has more impact (Levin and Linn 2004).

Promotion of fast food containing relatively high proportions of fat, sugar and salt is rampant in food advertisements for children (Buijzen, Schuurman, and Bomhof 2008). For example, in 2002, McDonald's spent over $1.3 billion on advertising in the US, followed by Burger King's $650 million; PepsiCo spent more than $1.1 billion, only marginally outspending Coca-Cola (Endicott 2003). The food industry is estimated to spend $33 billion a year in advertising, and increasingly, those dollars are targeted at children (Nestle 2007). Research shows that foods heavily advertised on television are rated highly by children (Zuppa et al.

2003). In the US, the FTC has recently proposed new guidelines that may influence the food industry to moderate how it advertises to children. As an example, regulators have flagged *Toucan Sam*, the brightly coloured *Froot Loops* cereal character, as a questionable marketing tactic (Neuman 2011). Like the US, Canada relies on the food industry to self-regulate in the area of food marketing to children. In 2008, the Canadian Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CAI) was established. This initiative, comprised of 17 food and beverage manufacturers, pledged to allocate 50 percent of their advertisements directed at children towards "healthier dietary choices" (Kent, Dubois and Wanless 2011). Kent et al. (2011) conducted an analysis to determine whether the CAI was, in fact, doing what it proposed. The results showed that the CAI food/beverage promotions were *higher* in fats, sugar, and sodium than non-CAI. Further, the CAI promotions were considered '*less healthy'* than those of non-CAI corporations (Kent et al. 2011).

Despite encouraging children to eat foods that can lead to obesity, marketers also place great emphasis on looking physically attractive, a scenario which can contribute to eating disorders (Twenge and Campbell 2009). Remarkably, patterns of disordered eating are now occurring in preschool-aged children. Indeed, a study published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* (Nicholls, Lynn, and Viner 2011) noted that eating disorders are occurring in about three in every 100,000 children in the UK and Ireland, some of whom are as young as five-years-old.

By the time children are in the eighth grade, three percent of them are smokers and that number quadruples by the twelfth grade (Wallman 2008). Health Canada reported in 2010 that the number of youth who identify themselves as daily smokers is on the rise in certain age groups; furthermore, their survey showed that young smokers were more likely to use drugs than their non-smoking counterparts (Weeks 2010). Approximately 10% of 12-year-olds say they have used alcohol at least once. By age 13, that number doubles and by age 15, approximately 50 percent have had at least one drink (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2007). Forty percent of alcoholics were drinking excessively between the ages of 15 and 19 (Levine 2006).

Rates of emotional and behaviour problems among children ages four to fifteen soared between 1979 and 1996 (Kelleher et al. 2000). For example, childhood and adolescent depression is prevalent, frequently recurrent and highly impairing; depressive disorders occur in

approximately two percent of primary school-aged children and between four to eight percent of adolescents (Olfson et al. 2003). The average age for the onset of depression is now 14.5 compared to 29.5 in 1960 (Ben-Shahar 2007). According to Jean Twenge (2006), a psychologist, who studies generational patterns, 21 percent of teens between the ages of 15 and 17 have already experienced major depression. To put it in perspective, only one to two percent of Americans born before 1915 experienced a major depressive episode during their lifetime. Twenge is clear about the fact that these changes are too large and verified by too many studies to be explained solely by reporting bias. The evidence bears out—the number of children on mood-altering drugs tripled between 1987 and 1996. "Normal" children, those free of psychiatric disorders, reported higher levels of anxiety than child psychiatric patients in the 1950s. As Twenge concludes "when you were born has more influence on your anxiety levels than family environment." Teens who agreed with the statement "Life is a strain for me much of the time," quadrupled between the early 1950s and 1989 Almost 75 percent of teenagers polled in 2001 said they felt nervous or stressed at least some of the time, and half said they often felt this way. Finally, suicide rates for children 10 to 14 almost tripled between 1968 and 1985 (Goleman 1995) and have quadrupled for adolescents since 1950 (Levine 2006). In a 2003 survey, 16.9 percent of high school students admitted that they had seriously contemplated attempting suicide during the past year (Twenge 2006).

Research suggests that the problems children struggle with in consumer cultures may have something to do with too much indulgence. Indeed, children of privilege or affluent cultures, like that of the US, are no better off emotionally and psychologically than their less-financially-advantaged counterparts (Levine 2006). In fact, America's newly identified at-risk group is preteens and teens from affluent, well-educated families. According to Levine (2006), a psychologist who has devoted her practice to privileged adolescents, many of whom are deeply troubled despite having significant material advantages—they lack spontaneity, creativity, enthusiasm and, oddly, the capacity for pleasure. Affluent adolescents seem to lack a fundamental sense of identity, instead having what psychologists call a "false self" that correlates with a number of emotional problems, most notably depression. In spite of such evidence, marketers promote the belief that increased wealth is essential to happiness mainly because of the increased capacity to acquire commodities and all the 'benefits' that ensue.

The Potency of Television and Advertising

> Indeed, if the basis of advertising is to make us feel good and it has surrendered any objective basis for this feeling, in what way is it different from religion? Why not also tea leaves, Ouija boards, black cats, dice, sounds that go bump in the night? Why not God? (Jhally 1989a:225)

Television is one of the more prominent media through which advertisers communicate to children, and this is happening at younger and younger ages. A recent study cited that 40 percent of three-months-old babies are watching television (Zimmerman, Christakis, and Meltzoff 2007). The exposure of American children and adolescents to television continues to exceed the time they spend in the classroom: 15,000 hours versus 12,000 hours by the time they graduate from high school (Bar-on 2000). Almost three years will have been spent watching television by the time children are adults. This figure does not include time spent watching DVDs or playing video games. To put it further in perspective, based on surveys of the type of television children watch, the average child sees about 12,000 violent acts, 14,000 sexual references and innuendos, and 20,000 advertisements *annually* (Bar-on 2000, italics added). Levin and Linn (2004) place it at 40,000 advertisements annually. Not surprisingly, the American Pediatrics Association (APA) recommends that children under two watch *no* television (Certain and Kahn 2002). Research indicates that children as young as one-year are responsive to the positive and negative emotions exhibited on television programs (Mumme and Fernald 2003); this increases their vulnerability, especially considering their limited capacity to moderate emotions. Corporations, through advertising, aim to capture a child's attention so as to shape attitudes, motivation, behaviour and ultimately, identity. As an example, Public Broadcasting Service, a US cable network, partnered their children's programs with the fast food industry to sell children food that is not good for them as a promotional strategy (Linn 2004).

Advertising, marketing and related activities are now the tasks of multi-billion dollar industries aiming to promote the sale of goods and services produced. Advertising and marketing drive much of the programming created by the media (Aird 2004). Twenty-five years ago, advertising to young children was largely discouraged because it was believed they were incapable of viewing it critically or with a discriminating eye. A comprehensive review of the literature over the past twenty-five years by Roedder-John (1999), however, reveals that by age five, most children are able to discriminate between advertising and programming. A deeper understanding of the persuasive intent of advertisements occurs by about age eight, and it is also

at this age that children begin to recognize advertisements are not always truthful. Children's conceptual understanding of brands or the more abstract features are not mastered until children reach approximately 12 years of age (Achenreiner and John 2003). Although children have been found to remember television advertisements, their intent is not fully comprehended, even by many 10-year-olds (Oates, Blades, and Gunter 2002). While advertising is not the entire story behind children's consumer expenditures, it plays a critical role in understanding their relationship with consumer culture. Advertising has become a *tour de force* that the majority of children cannot reckon with—notably, between 1990 and 1998, advertising to children increased twentyfold (Schor 2005). As previously discussed, the lines between commercials and program content are so regularly blurred that corporate advertisers get away with continuous promotion of their products and services. Marketers have used the "educational" angle of advertising as a cover, by framing their sales pitch in terms of learning (Cook 2000).

Evidence is growing that strong emotions, such as fear, induced by media viewing are sometimes severe and long-lasting. A survey of more than 2,000 elementary and middle-school children revealed that heavy television viewing was associated with self-reported symptoms of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress; watching more than six hours of TV a day put children at greater risk for scoring in the clinical range of trauma symptoms (Singer et al. 1998). Also, heavy exposure to television violence as a child predicted increased physical aggression in adulthood (Huesmann et al. 2003). On the other hand, viewing pro-social programming does in fact enhance children's pro-social behaviour such as altruism (Mares and Woodard 2005). It should be noted that while computer and interactive game use is being marketed for children as young as six months of age, the effects of such technology is an unknown. Still, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, 61 percent of children under the age of two are exposed to screen media on a typical day (Kirkorian et al. 2008). A recent study found that children in middle childhood who exceeded the recommended two hours per day of screen time (television, computer, video games combined) were one and a half to two times more likely to have attention problems in the classroom (Swing et al. 2010).

One of the indirect negative effects of advertising to children is the stimulation of wants leading to frequent demands on parents—what has been coined the "nag factor" (Henry and Borzekowski 2011). Not only do children influence purchases that directly affect them such as groceries, clothing, and games, they also impact purchases of bigger items including cars,

holiday destinations, and electronics. Parents give their children's preferences serious consideration when making major purchases (Buijzen, Schuurman and Bomhof, 2008). A child's familiarity with commercial television, in particular, appears to be a reliable and significant predictor of nagging (Henry and Borzekowski 2011). Aggressive marketing strategies seek to maximize the chance that parents will relent to persistent nagging. This tactic is particularly concerning when applied to babies and toddlers who are only just beginning to form the critical capacity for self-control and regulation of emotion (Aird 2004). Furthermore, the nag factor phenomenon may result in the production of negative effects between parent and child (Henry and Borzekowski 2011).

Usurping Play

> Play, the most important modality of childhood learning is thus colonized by marketing objectives making the imagination the organ of corporate desire. The consumption ethos has become the vortex of children's culture. (Kline 1989:311)

Play comes naturally to children, as a means of self-expression, to gain a sense of control over their world (Weininger 1979). Children's play is not only about how they create their culture, but also about how they learn. Unfettered play is extremely important—it is one of the prime modalities in which children develop and form a sense of identity (Suransky 1982). When children are flooded with stimuli from television, computers or video games, they have fewer opportunities with which to initiate action or to influence the world they inhabit, and less chance to exercise creativity. The lure for sophisticated electronic technology has made it increasingly difficult to provide children with an environment that fosters creativity or original thinking through play (Olfman 2005). As children are assaulted by a stream of media messages, accompanied by a flood of accessories including toys, books, videos and clothing, the time and space available for their own ideas and images is compromised. Today, comprehensive marketing campaigns, or supersytems, are still in effect—the Harry Potter brand alone has been licensed to products in the 200 to 500 range (Sekeres 2009). The implicit message is that children's creativity is simply not adequate—they are seen to "need" toys to fully experience their environment and develop in an optimal way. Consequently, children learn at an early age that defining self-worth by what you own, and seeking happiness through the acquisition of material goods, are traits toward which to aspire. Such attitudes are antithetical to creativity

which is characterized by originality and the capacity for critical thinking. A child's sense of self is shaped in numerous ways through creative process or play and, if suppressed, identity formation suffers (Leach 1994).

Children everywhere are now largely playing with the same mass-produced goods and as a result, are pressured to abide by the parameters set by mass-mediated discourse or narratives (Kline 1995). Stephen Kline interviewed children between the ages of six and eight to assess whether or not television hinders creative expression. He found that the majority of participants in his study either structured their play to match television characters and scripts, or incorporated elements from television programs into their fantasies. Kline encapsulates the play dilemma for the modern child: "Although it is difficult to prove that kids are more isolated, consumer-conscious or less creative than they were, say, ten years ago, it is hard to deny evidence of an emergent pattern or 'orthodoxy' of play being promoted through television" (327). Advertisements reinforce for children that engaging in play is much more exciting if you have the 'right' toy and accessories, and use them in the 'right' way.

Children's books are a good example of how the commercialization of childhood has changed the nature of play. Today, only a handful of mega corporations control the publishing industry; however, between 1980 and 1990 virtually hundreds of independently owned publishing houses and bookstores controlled which books would be printed or sold. Consequently, there has been an overall increase in the number of books available each year, but a *decrease* in the number of unique books that were written without attachment to merchandise (Sekeres 2009). Children's books have succumbed to the branding phenomenon and are often physically in the same retail space as the other branded products. These products range from a line of goods that includes several series, graphic novels, television shows, clothing, dolls, blogs, stage adaptations, translations into multiple languages, family-themed travel, and websites. The underlying message is that children's play should be highly ritualized and prefabricated as seen fit by marketers.

Corporate Control of Children's Space

In North America, few places remain for children that are devoid of corporate influence, even schools. Molnar et al. (2010) discovered that commercial activities are thriving in schools where marketers are able to attach their brand to programs and activities designed to enhance

learning. Corporations have also infiltrated schools using stealth marketing and engagement. For example, corporations "assist" in fundraising for school programs and activities by donating their products (typically food). They also provide incentive programs whereby students are rewarded for good behaviour by receiving a 'reward' through a corporate sponsor. On occasion, a percentage of corporate profits may be donated to schools with the understanding that such companies can then promote their product. Corporations also sponsor programs and activities such as one-off school events. Finally, corporations also engage in electronic marketing in which they provide electronic programming and equipment in exchange for advertising rights.

Selling Cool

The marketing and selling of "cool" has become one of the major marketing campaigns directed at children over the past number of decades (Kilbourne 1999; Linn 2004; Schor 2004). Cool is now revered as a quality every product tries to be and every child needs to have. The selling of cool can lead to the exploitation of psychological vulnerabilities, most visible in the marketing of violence, sex, and drugs (particularly cigarettes and alcohol). Engaging in behaviours that responsible caregivers disapprove of, such as smoking and drinking, is a large part of what cool represents. Additionally, how one looks, in terms of clothing, weight and overall style of dress is tied in with cool. Brands now denote social status, like a caste system, convincing children that cool is the only way to succeed. If a child is not wearing *Billibong*, or another currently cool brand, then they face peer rejection, a sentence seemingly worse than death for many teens.

Violence in the Media

> The scientific debate over whether media violence increases aggression and violence is essentially over. (Anderson et al. 2003:81)

Children's culture is rife with violence in entertainment, often portrayed as socially acceptable and in some media, such as video games, is treated as "fun" (Murray 2008). After deregulation in the 1980s, violent content became one of the most lucrative approaches used for marketing to children. The majority of toys and other products advertised were linked to violent television programs. According to Levin and Linn (2004), each successive violent program launched was significantly more violent. For example, the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* in the 1980s had an average of 50 violent acts per episode and by the 1990s *Mighty Morphin Power*

Rangers averaged 100 acts of violence per episode (Levin and Linn 2004). The *Power Rangers* movie, one that was highly violent, grossed over $1 billion. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP:145) issued a policy statement in 2009 in which they acknowledge the effects of media violence, imploring paediatricians and parents to take action: "The evidence is now clear and convincing: media violence is one of the causal factors of real-life violence and aggression." The AAP quantify the association between viewing media violence and aggression as nearly as strong as the correlation between cigarette smoking and lung cancer (AAP 2009a). According to the National Television Violence study (Coyne and Whitehead 2008), the highest proportion of violence in television is reported to be in children's shows. Indeed, 70 percent of children's television shows contain displays of physical aggression, a number significantly higher than those for adult programs (Ostrov, Gentile, and Crick 2006). Children's television programs average 30 violent acts per hour (Coyne and Whitehead 2008). By the time a child is 18 years of age, they will have viewed an estimated 200,000 acts of violence on television alone (AAP 2009a).

Violence and children's programs/movies is often justified, rewarded, accompanied by humour and portrayed by attractive characters, all characteristics that have been shown to induce imitation by viewers (Coyne and Whitehead 2008). Murray (2008) mapped children's brain activation patterns while they watched violent video clips and found both violent and nonviolent viewing activated regions implicated in aspects of visual and auditory processing. However, areas of the brain activated only during violent programming included those involved in arousal and attention, detection of a threat, episodic memory and coding and retrieval, and motor programming. Moreover, brain imaging studies suggest that a child's brain does not distinguish between real acts of violence and viewing media violence, even if children are able to report the difference (Worth et al. 2008). Additionally, passive viewing of violence induces significant amounts of fear, visible in the brain, not all that different from witnessing the violent act live (Restak 2006). In general, exposure to media violence affects the viewer in the following ways: increased aggression and violent behaviour, including bullying; desensitization and increased acceptance of violence as an appropriate means of solving problems in achieving one's goals; increased fear, depression, nightmares and sleep disturbances; normalized use of weaponry (AAP 2009a). Within the context of media, violence is not treated seriously as a human

behaviour that causes suffering, loss and sadness for the victim and perpetrator. Rather, entertainment violence is promoted as a medium that elicits visceral 'thrills' (AAP 2009a).

Approximately 91 percent of movies on television contain violence according to the National Television Violence study (Worth et al. 2007). Children now have unprecedented access to adult media with the advent of DVDs, movie channels, pay-per-view channels, and even Web-based movie downloads. Furthermore, advertisements for adult films, including those that are extremely violent, are marketed on television during programming that is seen by children (Worth et al. 2008). Regardless, 90 percent of the top-rated PG-13 films have some content that is violent. An estimated 12 percent of 22 million 10 to 14-year-olds saw 40 of the most violent movies in 2003 (AAP 2009a). Many of children's favourite movies are produced by Disney and while these films almost always contain a "moral message," this does not protect them from the harmful effects of the violence they view (Coyne and Whitehead 2008). Furthermore, indirect aggression (gossiping, ignoring, dirty looks, social exclusion of others, generally hurting or manipulating other people's feelings) is quite common in animated Disney films with a frequency of 9.23 acts per hour (Coyne and Whitehead 2008). Whether or not children can discriminate between fantasy and reality does not inoculate them against the effects of media violence, an argument that is particularly relevant to movie/television violence (AAP 2009a).

Music accounts for more than one-third of adolescents' exposure to electronic media; on average, they listen to 2.4 hours of music per day, or more than 16 hours per week (Primack et al. 2008). Adolescents aged 14 to 16 listen to approximately 40 hours of popular music per week and children eight to 10 years old listen one hour per day (AAP 2009b). Lyrics have become more explicit in reference to drugs, sex and violence; of the top ten CDs, there is at least one song with sexual content and 42 percent of all songs have very explicit sexual content (AAP 2009b). The lyrics of some genres such as rock, heavy metal and rap are associated with sexual promiscuity, death, homicide, suicide and substance abuse. Rap in particular includes messages of violence, racism, homophobia, and hatred and violence toward women. Drugs, cigarettes and alcohol use also tend to be glorified in rap music (AAP 2009b). Not surprisingly, watching rap music videos is associated with increased promiscuity, misogyny and use of drugs and alcohol. Frequent watching of music videos has also been related to an increased risk of believing in false stereotypes, perceived importance of appearance (and weight in particular), and increased

acceptance of date rape. About 75 percent of 10 to 12-year-olds watch music videos with the content of violence ranging from 11.5 percent to 22.4 percent (AAP 2009b).

More than half of the videogames surveyed contain elements of violence yet 90 percent of games are rated as appropriate for children 10 years or older (AAP 2009b). Research reveals that 78 percent of boys report owning M-rated games (those deemed for a mature audience) (AAP 2009a). Additionally, a survey of 1,500 10 to 15 year olds revealed that 38 percent had been exposed to violence scenes while using the Internet (AAP 2009a).

The Worldwide Wrestling Entertainment Corporation is one of the top watched sports programs and is particularly popular among children. Over one million children under the age of 12 watch professional wrestling on television. In fact, in 2007, the number one show watched by two to 11 year olds was the WWE show *SmackDown* (Twenge and Campbell 2009). Fans buy over $44 million of licensed wrestling-themed paraphernalia ranging from clothing to toys to videos. The WWE claims that it is the number one entertainment site for males in the 12 to 17-year-old age range (Bernthal and Medway 2005). Brown notes (Berenthal and Medway 2005) that within each episode of televised wrestling, one can observe: 12 uses of weapons, 5 groin kicks, 33 incidents of crotch-grabbing, 21 incidents of simulated sexual activity. Professional wrestling is associated with negative outcomes such as aggression, perpetuating racial stereotyping, desensitizing viewers to violence, and a narrow portrayal of masculinity (e.g. white males are the voice of authority) (Bernthal and Medway 2005). Research reveals an association between heightened wrestling involvement and increased clinical maladjustment, internalizing problems, as well as school difficulties (Bernthal and Medway 2005).

Sex in the Media

More often than not, children are learning about sex through the media. The group most impacted in this regard are tweens. Music videos, television shows, and movies are rife with implicit and explicit sexual references. Some scholars, notably Kilbourne (1999), Schor (2004), and Linn (2004) hold media directly responsible for the early sexualisation of children. Indeed, approximately 47 percent of high school students reported having had sexual intercourse (Wallman 2008). The US has the highest rate of teen pregnancy among developed nations according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Center for Disease Control 2010). Today's young women are twice as likely as the Boomer generation to have had multiple sex

partners by age 18 (Twenge 2006). Persuasion and enticement for sexual activity among adolescents is problematic on two counts: the risk of sexually transmitted infections and costly, unwanted teenage pregnancies. About 750,000 teenagers become pregnant each year in the US (Kost and Henshaw 2012). Furthermore, the US has the highest rate of sexually transmitted diseases of any industrialized nation, with almost half of the nation's total STDs occurring in young adults (Hust, Brown, and L'Engle 2008). For example, cases of chlamydia in young women increased by six times from 1987 to 2003 (Twenge 2006).

Sex and Television

In 2004, a study of almost 2,000 teens found that those who watch television with high sexual content are twice as likely to engage in sexual intercourse compared with those who watch less (Twenge 2006). A Kaiser Family Foundation study revealed that 75 percent of television shows contain sexual content, but only 15 percent mentioned safe sex practices; the same holds roughly true of movies (Twenge 2006). As well, research reveals that watching sexually explicit television may lead to teens having sex two to three years earlier than might otherwise occur (Twenge 2006).

Sex and Popular Music

Current popular music contains more references to sexual activity than any other entertainment medium. Music connects deeply with adolescents, influencing identity development in profound ways. For instance, adolescents often model themselves in terms of dress, behaviour and identity after music superstars (Primack et al. 2008). Longitudinal data show that individuals exposed to degrading sexual references in popular music are in fact, more likely to engage in sexual intercourse at a young age. By "degrading sex," Primack et al. (2008) are referring to the following construct: 1) one person (usually male) is sex-crazed; 2) their partner (usually female) is objectified, and 3) sexual value is directly tied to physical appearance. Primack et al. (2008) found that more than one third of popular songs had sexual intercourse in the content; degrading sex was associated with substance use, violence and weapon carrying. Degrading sex is particularly prevalent in rap and R&B/hip-hop, the most popular genres among young people regardless of demographic characteristics. Further research found that exposure to televised music videos was associated with increased acceptance of date rape (Primack et al. 2008).

Sexualization of Girls

In 2007, the APA (Zurbriggen et al. 2007) set up a task force to file an extensive report on the sexualization of girls in the media and its concomitant effects. Their findings, based on an extensive review of the literature, are briefly summarized. In mainstream media, more often than not, women and girls are depicted in a sexualized manner and are thus, objectified. These representations are present in virtually every medium including television, advertisements, music videos and magazines. To begin with, on television, there are a disproportionate number of males; female characters are more than likely attractive and provocatively dressed. In music videos, women are often portrayed exclusively as a decorative sexual object. They are far more likely to wear revealing clothing compared to men featured in such videos. Even in cartoons and other animated programs, girls are portrayed as domestic, interested in boys, and highly concerned with appearance. Disney's female characters exude a sexuality that was not present in former times. The content of teen magazines encourages young women to think of themselves as sexual objects and depicts rigid norms of physical attractiveness through the consumption of clothes and cosmetics. The media highlight “deficit" so that girls who fail to pursue their beauty ideals are portrayed as those who lost out, vilified for their rebellion. In top-selling video games, only the female characters were found to be highly sexualized.

Approximately 12 percent of all websites are pornographic and when surveyed, 70 percent of teens said they encountered pornography on the Internet. In advertising, the sexualization of women is particularly pronounced. Girls often appear in conjunction with sexualized adult women posing in matching clothing, or seductively. Products for young girls also promote the sexualization of girls. For example, the *Bratz* dolls come in sexualized clothing and are marketed to girls as young as four years old. Toy manufacturers also produce dolls for 8 to 12-year-old girls that wear black leather miniskirts, feather boas and thigh-high boots. The thong, an article of clothing based on what a stripper might wear, is marketed to tweens along with cosmetics associated with the desire for sexual attractiveness (Zurbriggen et al. 2007). Babies can wear bibs embroidered with “Supermodel” or “Chick Magnet” (Twenge and Campbell 2009). Push-up bras for preteens are now a marketable product as are tanning salons that cater to children (Durham 2008). A 2007 survey revealed that 55 percent of six to nine-year-olds wear lip gloss or lipstick, and 65 percent said they use nail polish (Twenge and Campbell 2009). Cosmetic companies regard this age group as their “starter market” (Twenge

and Campbell 2009). Indeed, many third-graders now wear make-up, get professional pedicures and have makeover sessions for their birthdays (Twenge and Campbell 2009).

There are many negative outcomes for girls as a result of being sexualized: 60 percent of all rape victims are girls under the age of 18; 75 percent of all child sexual abuse is perpetrated on girls; girls between the ages of 16 and 19 are four times more likely to be victims of rape than the general population (Durham 2008).

Alcohol, Tobacco, Drugs and Media Exposure

Advertisements for beer, alcohol, tobacco and drugs proliferate in venues that attract large numbers of children (Strasburger and Wilson 2002). Advertisements are designed to grab the interest of children by exploiting the same vulnerabilities as those for clothing—"you need this to be and feel cool." Although tobacco can no longer be advertised on television, it is less strictly regulated in the online world; marketers use sites to create one-on-one relationships with children as a means of attracting them to their products (Calvert 2008). Interactive media have an edge over television by being able to 'read' each learner's knowledge base and adapt messages accordingly. As well, the surreptitious presentation of messages about products in online forums can access implicit memory (Calvert 2008). For example, one tactic is to entice children to interact with online characters who promote specific brands. Research shows that children and adolescents are more likely to smoke, drink and use drugs when they are exposed to advertisements and programming depicting these types of products (Sargent et al. 2001). As with the food industry, or with the producers of media violence, executives in the alcohol and tobacco industry claim there is no causal relationship shown between advertising and underage drinking and smoking.

Stereotypes

Corporations such as Disney have commodified and created commercial space based on mythological tales that exhort childhood innocence (Giroux 1997). In the so-called apolitical atmosphere of Disneyland, children are exposed to sanitized versions of the issues surrounding identity and culture. Giroux (1997) claims there are numerous cultural themes in Disney's animated films that are problematic for children to absorb including female subordination and racial stereotyping, to name two. In general, children's television can be faulted for its blatant stereotyping based on class, gender, race and ethnicity (Seiter 1998). Even television for adults

reveals programs that are largely centered on a "man's world" (Signorielli and Bacue 1999), television that many children will view long before they reach adulthood. The phenomenon of stereotyping is also prevalent in the culture surrounding wrestling; wrestling is unabashedly about the promotion of stereotypes for men and boys with respect to the expression of physical violence and domination of femininity (Gresson III 1997). In addition, Kenway and Bullen (2001) believe that video games aimed at boys also create discrimination based on gender in that many of these masculine-oriented games are misogynistic and homophobic. The mediated world that children are exposed to is a type of hyper-reality in which issues of class, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation and gender struggles are largely ignored. For example, in media simulations there is a dominance of images of white boys and blonde girls. The world of television and its cast of characters are thus likely to be driven by the narrow restriction of formulaic writing, rather than going beyond stereotypes. The effect of television on conceptions of gender roles remains deleterious to social equality of the genders. The media is, largely, a purveyor of a *uni*-dimensional ideology that exudes a militaristic, patriarchal, class-biased and racist-type imagery (Steinberg and Kincheloe 1997).

Undermining Adults

The marketing industry has found it more lucrative to solicit children at the exclusion of, and even against, parental influence (Schor 2005). Children's consumer culture often involves a subversion of adult values by incorporating the "carnivalesque," which is characterized by an element of perversion. As Kenway and Bullen (2001) describe, one of the appeals of consumer culture is that it coincides with the taboo-breaking of many youth cultural forms. For example, advertising and television construct school as a dystopia by depicting how children are governed and restrained, rather than guided and nurtured. Children's culture is touted to be separate from, and even superior to, that of education. Children are often encouraged to regard adults as the negative 'Other,' as 'uncool.' Many of Hollywood films, such as the *Home Alone* series, depict the way adults are cast as immoral, irresponsible and above all, easily outwitted by kids. By the same token, these films depict the child as pleasure-seeking and self-indulgent yet, an autonomous rational decision-maker (Kenway and Bullen 2001).

Empirical Research on Consumerism, Materialism and Well-being of Children

In her seminal study on consumerism, Schor (2004) addressed the question: "How does children's involvement in consumer culture affect their well-being?" Her research results revealed that consumer culture appears to be harmful to the overall well-being of children. The methodology of Schor's quantitative survey study requires close examination particularly because of her claim that the results indicated causality and not just correlation. As a first step, she applied regression analysis to satisfy whether or not a correlation existed between the dependent (e.g., depression, anxiety) and independent variables (e.g. use of media). Using this model, she was able to specify all possible causal relationships in advance and then test to see which were best supported by the data using computer estimates. To resolve the question of causality Schor employed "structural equation modeling" to establish with some certainty that the dependent and independent variables were indeed causally related (Schor 2004:166).

To begin with, Schor surveyed 300 children between the ages of 10 and 13 in the areas of media use, consumer values, involvement in consumer culture, relationships with parents, and physical well-being. Schor's intent was to connect media use, advertising and children's involvement in the marketplace and then test to see whether their involvement had any effect on their well-being. Four measures were used as indicators, namely that of anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and psychosomatic symptoms (i.e. headache, stomach-ache, boredom). As well, children were asked to describe their feelings toward their parents to ascertain the quality of the relationship. The results from Schor's study were significant; children who are more involved in consumer culture tended to be more depressed, more anxious, have lower self-esteem and suffer from more psychosomatic complaints. Schor believes it is fair to conclude that psychologically healthy children will likely be made worse off to the extent they engage in consumer culture. As well, children with emotional problems can expect improvements to the extent they disengage from the world of digital media. Schor also found that children who spend more time watching television and using other media are more likely to involve themselves in consumer-type behaviours. The latter finding may be a result of the fact that, with its emphasis on materialism, television induces discontent, and causes children to place greater emphasis on brands and products, and to adopt consumer values. Also, in this study, higher levels of consumer involvement resulted in worse relationships with parents. And as children's relations with their parents are compromised, there is an additional negative effect on well-being. Schor describes it

as: "Consumer culture packs a double wallop" (170). Finally, of significance, Schor found no differences based on gender despite widely held beliefs that media comparisons are more difficult for girls than boys. Schor's findings strongly suggest a causal relationship between consumerism and negative physical and psychological health. Specifically, high consumer involvement may be a significant cause of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and psychosomatic complaints. The reverse was not true for her sample—being depressed or anxious or having low self-esteem did not cause higher levels of consumer involvement.

As to why Schor's results revealed such outcomes, two possibilities can be considered. First, it may be that high consumer involvement is accompanied by strong feeling of dissatisfaction, unfulfilled longing and a keen sense of social comparison. These types of mental states lead to, or are often accompanied by, depression and anxiety. Second, it may be that consumer involvement detracts from other positive or beneficial activities and behaviours which could alleviate negative mental processing.

While demonstrating a powerful connection between consumer culture and well-being in children, Schor's 2004 study also raises a number of questions. For instance, the sample size was relatively small considering the generalizations made about the wider culture: Can the study be replicated? As well, the results may have varied if the study had been longitudinal, looking at the long-term effects of consumer culture with the same cohort over time: Do children grow out of anxiety, depression and negative parental attitudes the older they get given their consumer involvement remains relatively high? Finally, there may have been other factors contributing to symptoms of depression and anxiety for children in the study, those working synergistically with high levels of consumer involvement. Finally, the complexity of children's mental health makes it difficult to assign linear causality.

Roeser et al. (1998) found that emotional distress (e.g., internalized sadness or shame, guilt, and anxiety) is associated with diminished academic functioning. Symptoms of depression such as sadness, hopelessness and loneliness have also been associated with lower achievement on standardized tests, lower teacher-rated grades, challenge avoidance in the classroom and poorer peer relations (Roeser et al. 1998). Furthermore, there are reverberating effects from academic problems that can emerge in late adolescence, including drug use and abuse, delinquency, teenage pregnancy and failure to complete high school (Roeser et al. 1998).

It is helpful to look at research on materialism and well-being to gain further understanding as to the impact of consumer culture, considering how closely linked consumerism is with materialism. Materialism can be defined as: "The importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions. At the highest levels of materialism, such possessions assume a central place in a person's life and are believed to provide the greatest source of satisfaction" (Belk, 1985:265). Over the past two decades, a number of psychologists have demonstrated that individuals who strongly upheld values such as wealth, possessions, image and status reported lower subjective well-being. Specifically, Kasser and Ryan (1993; 1996; 2001) found repeatedly, using quantitative survey analysis, that when extrinsic, materialistic values were rated as high in comparison to other pursuits such as self-acceptance, affiliation and community feeling, lower quality of life was reported. Kasser and Ryan's 1993 study showed that when financial success is central to young adult's goals, low well-being, high distress and difficulties adjusting to life are evident. These same adults also appear to be lower in social productivity and general functioning, and higher in conduct disorders. In their 1996 study, Kasser and Ryan found that when extrinsic goals concerning the attainment of rewards were relatively central to an adult's personality, lower well-being and greater distress were found. These same adults also demonstrated less self-actualization, vitality, and more depression, narcissism and physical symptoms, when compared with subjects who valued intrinsic goals.

In 2001, Kasser and Ryan found that individuals who are extrinsically-oriented (e.g., drawn to wealth, appearance, fame) use drugs, cigarettes and alcohol more frequently than those who are more intrinsically-oriented. They speculated that people who are more extrinsically-oriented would experience ongoing stress from their less satisfying goal pursuits, lower self-esteem and feelings of insecurity (with a tendency to self-medicate). In the Kasser and Ryan (2001) study, college students were asked to rate how much they felt they had attained extrinsic materialistic goals (money, fame and image) and intrinsic non-materialistic goals (personal growth, close relationships and community contribution). They found that almost equivalent well-being was reported by those who had attained *both* extrinsic and intrinsic goals, and only intrinsic goals. Those who attained *only* extrinsic goals were low in well-being. Results also suggested that high frequency of television watching was especially related to endorsing extrinsic goals possibly because television frequently/often models this type of orientation (Kasser and Ryan 2001).

In his book *The High Price of Materialism,* Kasser (2002) describes a study by Williams et al. (2000) which found that high school students who smoked were more oriented toward materialistic values than toward values such as self-acceptance, affiliation and community feeling. Williams et al. also found that materialistic teens were more likely to engage in risk behaviours including smoking cigarettes or marijuana, chewing tobacco, drinking alcohol and engaging in sexual intercourse (Kasser 2002).

Cohen and Cohen (1996) found that adolescents who hold others in high esteem because of their possessions were at increased risk for personality disorders. Indeed, highly valuing being rich was associated with virtually every Axis I and Axis II psychological diagnosis analyzed in their research. Sheldon and Kasser (1995) reported that young adults with a strong materialistic orientation described fewer experiences of positive emotions. In fact, a materialistic orientation in this study was associated with pursuing one's goals because of feelings of internal guilt and external pressure, rather than for reasons of enjoyment or wholehearted identification. Sheldon and Kasser (1995) also tracked the progress of university students' self-identified goals at the beginning and end of the study, and daily over a three-month period. Students rated the extent to which they believed success with these goals would help them attain materialistic outcomes, as opposed to other outcomes. They found that making progress towards materialistic goals did not improve participants' well-being at either the daily or monthly level. It is significant and important to note that the negative association between materialism and well-being has been replicated in samples of different ages and cultures from around the world including: Britain, Denmark, Germany, India, Romania, Russia, South Korea and Australia; German adults and business students in Singapore; and adults in China, Turkey, Australia, Canada and Singapore (Kasser 2002). The studies on materialism and well-being reveal that beyond providing for basic needs, increased wealth does little to enhancing people's level of happiness.

Interestingly, Kasser (2005) found, when looking at frugality and generosity in children ages 10 to 18, that females are more generous than males, and that males were more materialistic than females. As well, older children are less frugal and less generous than younger children. Kasser (2005) also reported that those low in frugality reported lower self-esteem, more use of cigarettes and increased incidences of fighting with others. Moreover, those low in generosity reported being less happy, having lower self-esteem, drinking more alcohol and

getting into more fights and trouble at school. In this same study, consistent with previous findings, those high in materialistic values reported less happiness, more anxiety and lower self-esteem (Kasser 2005).

Clearly, successfully pursuing materialistic goals fails to increase one's happiness; at most, one might experience a temporary improvement of mood, but it is likely to be brief and superficial. One of the reasons that materialistic values of wealth, status and image fail to deliver contentment is that they work against interpersonal relationships and meaningful connections to others—two of the hallmarks of psychological health and quality of life (Kasser 2002). Pursuits of materialistic values are generally associated with deep-rooted feelings of insecurity, trying to prove one's competence, and a diminution of personal freedom (Kasser 2002). Personal freedom may feel compromised due to the tendency to feel pressured, or compelled to obtain rewards and praise, so characteristic of the pursuit of high-materialism (Kasser 2002).

Twenge et al. (2010) looked at whether MMPI[2] scores had changed between the 1930s and the present among high school and college students to determine what, if any, generational changes in mental health had occurred. Specifically, Twenge et al. (2010) hypothesized that cultural change over the last few decades may be a contributing factor for the dramatic rise in symptoms on the MMPI, indicating increased psychopathology in young people. Large changes over relatively short periods of time cannot be attributed to genetics and are therefore, likely to be linked to environment. The data suggest that the rise in mental health disorders amongst young people coincides with greater emphasis on extrinsic goals such as material wealth and less emphasis on intrinsic goals such as valuing community (Twenge et al. 2010).

Buijzen and Valkenburg (2003) conducted a quantitative study to re-investigate whether and how television advertising is related to materialism, parent-child conflict, and unhappiness. They found that children who watched television commercials on a regular basis held stronger materialistic values than their counterparts (those who watched commercials infrequently). Since television is replete with advertisements designed to promote and encourage consumption, it is no surprise that it shows up as positively correlated with materialism. The authors, employing a quantitative analysis, also found that advertising exposure leads to an increased

[2] Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory is a survey used to identify mental health symptoms.

number of purchase requests, thus contributing to parent-child conflict. This relation was stronger for younger children and for boys. While Buijzen and Valkenburg did not find a *direct* relation between advertising and disappointment, or between advertising and less life dissatisfaction, they did find an *indirect* one. The results showed that advertising exposure led to an increased number of purchase requests, which were associated with increased levels of disappointment (Buijzen and Valkenburg 2003).

Russell and Tyler employed a combination of methodologies in their 2005 study focusing on the relationship between young girls lived experience of consumer culture and gender role acquisition. They engaged the participants by having them collate material on the relationship between childhood, femininity and consumer culture. Russell and Tyler also used ethnography in the form of participant observation and focus groups. It was therefore, predominantly a qualitative analysis in which the participants' opinions and views were central to understanding the issues at hand. The authors found that shopping occupied a pivotal role. They found that girls pursue their ideal of femininity largely through their role as consumers. The results of the Russell and Tyler study indicated that girls recognize that they are being targeted for commercial interests. They also concluded that cultural emphasis on the individual means that children have to assert and maintain an identity while participating in consumer cultures, thus embracing two parallel processes, namely, identification and differentiation.

In a qualitative study of British teenagers aged 16- to 19-years-old, involving participant observation, Miles (1996) found that individuals were constructing their individuality according to sub-cultural parameters that were already well established, rather than forging into 'unknown' or risky territory as a means of defining the self. Specifically, these young consumers were using commodities (shoes) to represent 'who one is' in relation to the everyday 'street' culture, but in a relatively safe way—conforming while appearing to express individuality. Although the teenagers knew that they were adopting a trend that was popular amongst their peers, they justified this by convincing themselves that they were still, in fact, different from the crowd. Based on his data, Miles believes that consumption performs the role of solidifying an individual's identity. He arrived at this conclusion by noting that peer relations in particular, are mediated through consumption as a means of reasserting "stable" identity formation. In other words, there is a need to believe we are distinctive individuals, despite conforming to standards established by others.

Currrie (1999) conducted a qualitative study to determine how female teenagers used teenzines (magazines aimed at a female teenage audience) and what the magazines meant to them in terms of culture. The girls in this study indicated that they were enamoured with teenzines because they represented a site where their concerns, ideas and needs were addressed; teenzines are in fact, one of the few popular texts available to adolescents that highlight the positive values of teens. Ironically, the discourse of teenzines, and cultural context in which they are produced, is one in which women are oppressed. Teenzines normalize dominant cultural values and behaviours that shape how femininity should be projected and conceived. Nonetheless, Currie believes that teenzines offer a text that validates the importance of female adolescents' struggle and holds significance for girls as a result.

Identity in Relation to Consumer Culture

The topic of identity is vast, complex and beyond the scope of this dissertation. That having been said, some theories that specifically address the modern dilemma of identity formation will be briefly covered because they provide a context within which to understand the impact of consumer culture. Indeed, the realm of consumption provides an important source for children's identity construction.

Theories and Definitions

In the world of modernity and globalization, social scientists (Bauman 2000; Giddens 1991) believe that identity, which has always been vital to the understanding of the self, has become problematic. The fast-paced global network in which many of us live is such that identities have had to become extremely adaptive to social change (Bendle 2002). Today's individual seems to be in a continuous developmental crisis, engaged in an identity process that lasts a lifetime. Regardless, identity is considered to be fundamental to personal well-being and merits discussion, particularly in relation to how children fare in consumer-driven societies. Identity can be defined simply as the subjective concept of oneself as a human being (Vignoles et al. 2006). Burke and Stets (2009) offer a more comprehensive definition, one that includes both the role of the psyche and that of the collective:

> An identity is the set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person. (3)

They also stipulate that people possess multiple identities because they occupy multiple roles, are members of multiple groups, and are comprised of multiple personal characteristics (Burke and Stets 2009). The self is said to originate in the mind and is that which characterizes an individual's consciousness of his or her own being or identity; each of the smaller "selves" operate under the umbrella of the larger identity structure (Burke and Stets 2009). Identity can be said to be "all inclusive," by virtue of the fact that it encompasses individual, relational and social levels of self-representation. A person's identity is not to be found in behaviours, nor in feedback from others, but in the capacity to "keep a particular narrative going;" thus, the self is reflexively understood by an individual in terms of his or her biography (Giddens 1991:54). The traits from which such biographies are constructed vary both socially and culturally. Feelings about one's identity can vary in extremes from robust to fragile depending upon the "story" that is dominant (Giddens 1991). Again, identity is located at the level of subjective psychological experience, rather than an objective "essence." Identity therefore, sustains a sense of self that is alive, and within the scope of reflexive control, rather than as that of an object (Giddens 1991). Identity can be understood as developing through a complex interplay of cognitive, affective and social interactive processes all of which occur within a particular cultural context that must also be considered. There are ongoing pressures toward certain identity states, and away from others, all of which guide the fluid process of identity construction. Consciously or otherwise, individuals strive to maximize satisfaction and minimize dissatisfaction when making decisions that lead to the continued construction of their identity (Giddens 1991). In addition to having both cognitive and emotional processes, identities encompass functioning at both conscious and unconscious levels (Burke and Stets 2009). Thus, the concept of identity has several facets including individual, inner and psychic dimensions, as well as, external, collective, social and cultural influences that are dependent upon context for understanding (Fornäs 1995).

Consumer capitalism, with its efforts to standardize consumption and to shape desires through advertising, plays a basic role in forming superficial identities, even narcissism. Giddens (1991) notes that "the idea of generating an educated and discerning public has long since come to the pervasiveness of consumerism, which is a society dominated by appearances" (172). Furthermore, consumption addresses the alienated qualities of modern social life and claims to be the most viable solution, promising the very things narcissistic identity-types desire, namely, attractiveness, beauty and personal popularity through the acquisition of the

'right' kinds of goods and services. Citizens of consumer cultures live as though their reflection is ubiquitous, ever searching for the appearance of an unblemished, socially-valued self. The task of building identity in consumer capitalism is fraught with obstacles; an identity has to be created and more or less continually reordered against the backdrop of shifting experiences in the fragmenting tendencies of modern institutions and patterns of consumption. Moreover, the sustaining of the narrative that accompanies identity in its chameleon-like formations directly affects and to some degree constructs the body as well as the self.

Bauman (2000) proposes that the modern identity is fraught with the difficulties that come with addiction, namely, an insatiable desire to shop. In a consumer society, the universal dependency on shopping is the *sine qua non* of freedom—the freedom to be different, to 'have identity' (Bauman 2000). Bauman (2000) imagines the modern individual as one who is guided by seduction, rather than normative regulation, running after pleasurable sensations, but at the same time trying to find an escape from "the agony called insecurity" (81). The modern identity strives to be sure of itself, confident and trusting by chasing after objects deemed to be desirable and claiming a promise of certainty; each attempt is followed by another in an endless cycle—clinging to things solid and tangible, yet chronically unfulfilling. Thus, identities seem fixed and solid only when observed from the outside. Beneath the surface lies a fragile, vulnerable self, torn asunder by an ever-raging desire to appear whole and solid. In essence, consumer culture is about the continual reinvention of the self as Bauman describes:

> Given the intrinsic volatility and unfixity of all or most identities, it is the ability to 'shop around' in the supermarket of identities, the degree of genuine or putative consumer freedom to select one's identity and to hold to it as long as desired, that becomes the royal road to the fulfillment of identity fantasies. Having that ability, one is free to make and unmake identities at will. Or so it seems. (83)

Bauman also theorizes that the identity which is most desired in modernity can be seen on the 'screen,' that which strips the 'lived' life of its charm. It is the lived life which comes to be seen as unreal, hence, the desire to meld with fantasy (Bauman 2000). The capacity to shop, to pick and eventually, shed one's identity, to regard it as a commodity, has come, ironically, to signify freedom.

The balance within consumer culture has tilted from bodies producing commodities (an externalization of labour) to commodities producing bodies (an internalization of consumption)

(Williams and Bendelow 1998). For example, the popularity and normalisation of plastic surgeries reflect the commodified nature of the body and indicates the extreme lengths to which individuals strive to achieve the cultural mandates of beauty. Cleaning, adorning and exercising the body are now intimately tied to corporate profit. Bodies, in other words, have become objects to be bought and sold in keeping with the latest corporeal fads and fashions (Williams and Bendelow 1998). Erich Fromm (1947), social psychologist of the Frankfurt School, describes modern man's commodification as self-esteem beyond his or her control—meeting market standard brings 'success,' failure to do so invokes a sense of worthlessness. No longer is one's own value constituted by the human qualities one possesses, but by a competitive market in constant flux. This explains the frenetic drive to strive for success and fear of setback which could then lead to feelings of inferiority or loss of self-worth. Individuals feel empty because they lack a secure, reliable internal structure known as "the self". This is why according to Levine (2006) many adolescents are unable to initiate internal exploration, a necessary precursor to a well-developed sense of self. Fromm (1947) also suggests that identity becomes shaky in modern capitalism because "man encounters his own powers as commodities alienated from him"; both his powers (capacities) and what they create are no longer a part of one's identity, but are there for others to judge and use (72). Identity formation is thus determined by what the market dictates. The individual is forced to rely on the judgments and opinions of others to the degree that genuine feelings of identity are lost. Fromm (1947) writes that:

> The difference between people is reduced to a merely quantitative difference of being more or less successful, attractive, hence valuable. This process is not different from what happens to commodities on the market...[The] difference between people is reduced to a common element, their price on the market. Their individuality, that which is peculiar and unique in them, is valueless and, in fact, a ballast. (73–74)

In consumer cultures, equality no longer represents the individual's capacity for the development of his or her true nature, but paradoxically, represents the eradication of individuality. Ultimately, when the self is neglected, the relationships between people take on a superficial quality, only sharing the part of them that is saleable; the relationship is strictly valued primarily for its utility as a commodity (Fromm 1947). Thus, affluent cultures, those that embrace materialism, value performance over learning and external motivation over internal

motivation by overemphasizing competition and devaluing integrity, cooperation and altruism (Levine 2006).

One of the greatest challenges to identity formation within modernity is the pace with which the self has to be shaped, altered and sustained in relation to rapidly changing circumstances of social life, both on a local and global scale. Indeed, the period of consumer capitalism is characterized by rapid social, economic and cultural change, a key feature of daily life, particularly in the West (Rattansi and Phoenix 2005). Additionally, as society becomes more differentiated in terms of groups, organizations and roles available to individuals, persons who take on more of these identities become more complex themselves. The pre-modern self where there was more sharing of cultural meaning and expectations across a relatively small number of identities, was generally, simpler than the postmodern self: not only are there more identities available to the modern individual, but they have less in common with one another (Burke and Stets 2009). While children generally have fewer identities available to them than adults, modernity still presents numerous challenges particularly as media encourages a quick exit from childhood and rapid adoption of roles more 'suitable' to that of adults. Corporations have commodified the ideal adult persona for which to strive, thus actively shaping children's identities.

Children's Identity in Modernity: the Double-Edged Sword of Technology

It is widely believed that the pressure on the young to establish an identity is now greater than any previous time in history (Ganetz 1995). The "new" media including video games, MP3 players, iPods, 'smart' phones and computers provide endless opportunities to reinvent the self. Additionally, millions of teens now create and manage their social worlds through instant messaging (Stern 2007). On average, children are spending five to six hours per day on weekdays in front of a screen and up to seven and a half hours per day on weekends (Active Healthy Kids Canada 2008). It should be noted that the recommended leisure-related screen time guidelines of Canadian and US Paediatric Associations is limited to two hours per day (Active Healthy Kids Canada 2008).

Since identity is a process of constant negotiation, online communities allow participants to alter the self in the hopes of gaining social status. For many children, technology becomes *the* means with which to express one's "true" identity, a place free from adult intervention (Ermann

2004; Stern 2007). The Web sites children create function as a form of identity expression, self-disclosure and communication. In 2000, a study reported that girls between the ages of 12 and 17 were considered to be the fastest growing group of Internet users; girls are more likely to use email and instant messaging, while boys are more likely to download games and music (Mazzarella 2005). The use of Facebook, for example, seamlessly allows for the reinvention of the self. The screen seemingly offers a benign place to write about oneself, to formulate who you are, as you wish to be seen; it is not uncommon for individuals to 'practice' on the internet, expressing emotions and ideas that would be difficult to do in the 'real' world. The latter can lead to a false sense of security, and a desire to share our intimate selves with virtual strangers. Shirley Turkle (2010), a technology specialist who undertook a study on the use of technology over 15 years, discovered that anxiety is part of the new connectivity. She noted that while technology is clearly a useful tool, it also puts children in a position of constant surveillance. Being accepted into a virtual clique is risky—whatever gets posted online can haunt someone for a lifetime. Hence, the title of Turkle's 2010 book, *Alone Together*, suggesting that today's young people often feel deprived of attention and security despite having hundreds of cyber-friends. Communication, mediated by technology, has become so inextricably linked to identity that the fear of disconnection is a common anxiety; to feel safe is to be connected. At the same time, online friendships can be demanding and stressful. We like it that the Web 'knows' us, but have given up our privacy in return. In a life of texting and messaging, children can accept or, just as easily, dismiss each other on demand.

Narcissism and Personality Disorders

Psychologists Jean Twenge and Keith Campbell (2009) assert that US culture is suffering from a narcissism epidemic affecting both narcissistic and less self-centered people, including children. They note that the rise in narcissism appears to be accelerating—the increase between 2000 and 2006 was especially sharp. Nearly one out of ten Americans in their twenties has experienced some of the characteristics of Narcissistic Personality Disorder compared with only 3.2 percent of those over 65 years old (Twenge and Campbell 2009). Young children (middle schoolers) have skyrocketed in self-esteem, up markedly from a similar cohort of the 1980s. Narcissism is the "darker side of the focus on the self" and should not be confused with positive self-esteem which encourages an acceptance of the self, and reward of genuine effort

(Twenge 2006:70). Narcissism is rooted in the belief that you are special and more important than other people, entitling you to privileges that are not necessarily deserved. According to Twenge and Campbell (2009), the central feature of narcissism is a very positive and inflated view of the self. The outcome of such cognition is a fundamentally imbalanced self with a grandiose, inflated self-image, a sense of entitlement, and a lack of deep connection to others. While narcissists work to keep up their positive self-views and emotions, those around them suffer. Indeed, narcissism is a significant risk factor for aggressive behaviours, as well as for cheating, particularly when rejection is perceived (Twenge and Campbell 2009).

The increase in narcissism is reflective of a massive shift in culture toward a greater focus on self-indulgence and a superficial admiration of self. Consumer culture, with its intense focus on children and adolescents, fuels narcissism by encouraging engagement with materialism and superficial lifestyles. Adjusted for inflation, children in the 2000s spent 50 percent more than their parents did at the same age, and many of these kids failed to earn their own money. American advertising appeals to our desire to be unique and different—yet another feature of narcissism. The emphasis on uniqueness is rampant in advertising as evidenced by the sale of customized T-shirts, M&M's, fortune cookies, playing cards and calendars (Twenge and Campbell 2009). Even the desire for a unique education has taken off; one of the many reasons behind the movement toward homeschooling according to Twenge and Campbell (2009).

Perhaps the most popular cultural message is to repeatedly tell children how special they are. The results are reflected in current statistics: In 2006, 51 percent of 18 to 25-year-olds said that "becoming famous" was an important goal of their generation—nearly five times that of "becoming spiritual" (Twenge and Campbell 2009). As well, a 2006 poll in Britain revealed that children's most popular answer to naming the "very best thing in the world" was "being a celebrity," "good looks," and "being rich" (Twenge and Campbell 2009). The media plays into the narcissism epidemic with a variety of television shows including one on MTV called *My Super Sweet 16* which features rich teens planning their extravagant sixteenth birthday parties. Even younger children are inundated with narcissistic media messages like one PBS show that proclaims, "You're Special Just for Being You!" The internet is a place where presenting yourself as better, cooler and more attractive thrives. Narcissists also thrive on social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook where self-promotion is the norm; with YouTube, individuals can have their own 'show.' Unlike traditional media that focuses on other's lives and

experiences, social networks foster an obsession with 'me' by making children the stars of their own stories (Bakan 2011). A 2008 survey found that one out of four teen girls sent a nude or nearly nude picture of herself via the internet or cell phone (Twenge and Campbell 2009).

Branding

> This generation of young consumers has been singled out as the most brand conscious ever by virtue of the depth and breadth of their brand knowledge and preferences. (Achenreiner and John 2003:205)

Over the last decade, there has been an exponential increase in the use of brands directed at children. Branding is the process by which corporations use products to create and communicate specific concepts for the purpose of marketing. The overall aim of branding is to associate cultural content with a brand. It would appear that all available space, every desire and thought, will reflect the meaning and values of some brand (Morris 2001). Corporations are relying on the value of the image of their product, rather than its utility as a marketing tool. There is some evidence to suggest that children are incorporating the associations belonging to brands into their self-concepts, a process referred to as "self-brand connections" (Chaplin and John 2005:119). The intimate entangling of brand and identity is nowhere more evident than in the experience of childhood over the last 20 years. Brand promotion is comprehensive, so much so, that the division between entertainment and advertising, and day-to-day functioning is seamless. As Langer (2004:263) describes it: "The colonization of children's lives by the entertainment product cycle has woven Disney, Hasbro, Mattel and McDonald's into the fabric of everyday life for urban children across the globe." Children have been bombarded by brands defined by name products with intrusive and clever advertising strategies such that branding has become a way of life. Through licensing and merchandising, everything from television shows to toys and other products generate sales, keeping corporate brands and logos in the minds and psyches of children. Corporations invest grandly in design strategies to acquire the right logos, constantly reinventing their image in the most eye-catching way. Journalist and consumer critic Naomi Klein (2000) exposed how corporations are more about brands than products—a strategy of imprinting on the very identity of those who desperately seek brand 'status.' Klein writes that, "the product always takes a back seat to the real product, the brand, and the selling of the brand [can] only be described as spiritual...Branding, in its truest and most advanced incarnations, is about corporate transcendence" (21). Children are an especially desirable brand

audience because they represent potential for lifetime loyalty. Unlike adults, who are relatively fixed in their brand preferences, children and teens are viewed as exquisitely pliable.

Children as young as three can be avid consumers and devoted media watchers; by age five many begin to show interest in brands and can recognize them in stores (Achenreiner and John 2003; Kline 2005). More specifically, conceptual brand meanings, the non-observable abstract features of a product, begin to be considered by children around the age of eight (Achenreiner and John 2003). Ross and Harradine (2004) found that early brand awareness and recognition is a guarantee of brand loyalty later in life. It has been established that by age 12, children are able to think about brands on a conceptual level and begin to incorporate these meanings into many types of brand-related judgments (Achenreiner and John 2003). However, it is unrealistic to assume that they also have the sophistication required to critically reflect on the true meaning and impact of brands.

Product placement now pervades throughout many types of media from television to video games, and aims to harness children's desires with branded images they cannot resist. Quart (2003) coined the term "body branding," or "branding of the flesh" because of the explosion in cosmetic surgery on teens 18 and under (124). Almost 306,000 of the 7.4 million plastic surgeries performed in the US in 2000 were alterations of teens and children (Quart 2003). According to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, teen surgeries doubled between 2002 and 2010 (Kelly 2010). And between 2002 and 2003, breast implants for 18-year-olds and younger nearly tripled (Zurbriggen et al. 2007). Television shows have made plastic surgery appear to be a cool thing; MTV's *I Want a Famous Face* features young people who get plastic surgery to resemble their favourite celebrity (Twenge and Campbell 2009). While boys typically are considered to be less at risk when it comes to appearance obsession, eight percent of twelfth grade boys in the US admitted to using steroids (Twenge 2006). The quest to transform the self physically, emotionally and psychologically is one of the outcomes of branding. Hence, identity formation is closely aligned with branded images, especially those that infiltrate deep into the psyche of children. More specifically, brands can perform two main roles for a consumers' identity: an emotional role by providing a means of identification, and a social role through shorthand communication about which we are (Dittmar and Howard 2004). According to Elliott and Wattansuawan (1998), brands are used by the consumer both for the construction and maintenance of identity.

Children also experience branding through contemporary consumer culture‘s obsession with celebrity (Boden 2006). Children are “encouraged” by marketers to adopt any aspect of the celebrity’s persona that can be sold for profit. The post-teen Britney Spears craze several years ago is a good example of how powerful these images become. The mechanism of identifying with a celebrity directly impacts a child’s social identity, or that aspect of the self that manoeuvres socially. Boden (2006), using a qualitative study paradigm, observed that children’s investments in sports stars and pop stars as commercial cultural icons appeared to directly shape identity. And since the celebrity is almost always an adult, the ‘style of life’ (cultivation of a particular look) that children come to crave leads them closer to a world for which they are not ready.

Research on the effects of branding

Elliot and Leonard (2004) examined the effect of brand-name shoes amongst poor children aged eight to twelve. This study is important because it is one of the few qualitative studies that explored children’s attitudes towards fashion brands and their symbolic meaning. The results indicated that children appear to identify with and desire the positive characteristics associated with brand-names. The majority of children in the study said that they would refrain from talking to someone who was not wearing the “right” shoes, and that they would be embarrassed to be seen with such a person. Elliot and Leonard (2004) coined the term "brand community" to characterize the fact that all of the children who participated in the study were united by a desire to own Nike shoes, in particular. McCracken (1988) states that fashion brands are part of a system of meanings that are transferred from within the culture to members of that culture. Within the Elliot and Leonard study, this type of transfer was evident; the child-participants attributed the shoes themselves with traits such as “cool” and “popular.” Elliot and Leonard concluded that sports branding seemed to offer children a fairly easy and obvious way of fitting in with their peers, as well as, providing a good barometer of status. One of the conclusions underscored by the researchers is that brands invoke “strong attachments” and that the children “appeared to be part of a ‘symbolic’ brand community” (357). Hence, brands exert a powerful influence in that “children want to own the branded trainers that their peers do in order to enable them to have equal status in the eyes of their friends” (357). Oddly enough, Elliot and Leonard (2004) concluded that “successful brand-building strategies” *may* be having

"unintended and undesirable consequences on various aspects of children's attitudes and behaviour." The researchers then summarized by warning that marketers are "playing into the hands of no logo anti-consumerists" (359) (with specific mention of Naomi Klein)—a rather misplaced conclusion considering the negative effects of branded-type advertising that became apparent in their own study.

In a somewhat related study to that of Elliot and Leonard's (2004), boys were found to admit that the opinions they had of their peers was based on their brand clothing (Frost 2005). A 1999 study by Frost (Frost 2005) revealed that girls identified 'cool' on the basis of attractive individuals in the "right" clothes and 'sad' for those who were not so privileged. Using a qualitative design, Pilcher (2011) found in her study of children aged five to twelve that the consumption of clothing, including branded clothing, appears to be an important way in which they construct their identities and perceive their relationships with peers. What all of these studies have in common is that young children have a fairly advanced recognition and application of the symbolic value of clothing, including branded clothing. Hence, children seem to have a somewhat sophisticated knowledge of clothing consumption both in terms of fashion retailers and the symbolic value of brands.

Branded children are a lucrative commodity—one that is now in global demand. Perhaps the most disturbing piece of the branding phenomenon is the extent to which it is voluntary, and embraced with enthusiasm, a highly desirable affiliation. As Gitlin (2001:70) observes: "Children today gladly turn themselves into walking billboards."

Materialism in Relation to Identity: Relevant Empirical Research

In consumer cultures, materialism is a significant factor and dominates as one of the central ideologies. Defining the self by one's possessions can contribute to feelings of well-being, as well as, those of emptiness and vulnerability (Belk, 2000). Specifically, three key beliefs are present in a materialistic identity construct: material possessions are a central life goal; material possessions are the main route to identity success and happiness; material possessions are a yardstick for evaluating oneself and others (Dittmar, 2004). Dittmar found, throughout her studies, that personal attributes were associated with individuals based on what they own and how they dress. In one of her studies, adults were shown a video of a person and asked for their first impressions. Their judgments of qualities such as friendliness and

assertiveness differed depending on whether the person was wearing expensive articles of clothing or not (Dittmar 2004). In general, materialism appears to play an important role in social perception; a person's socio-economic location influences his or her views about the world, particularly with respect to economic status and measures (Dittmar and Pepper 1994). Highly materialistic adolescents show a stronger tendency to judge the personal qualities of others in terms of the number and quality of material goods possessed (Dittmar and Pepper 1994).

Dittmar (2004) proposed that people often buy consumer goods because of their psychological benefits, rather than their economic and utilitarian value. As well, material goods can signify group affiliations and social standing, including sex-role identification, socio-economic status or belonging to a subculture; and to some extent their acquisition can be said to be motivated by unconscious desires. Within consumer culture, it appears that for both children and adults, material possessions are regarded as part of the extended self. The loss of possessions is experienced as a personal violation and a lessening of self; possessions, whether gained or lost, have complex implications for self-esteem and self-evaluation. Interestingly, degree of materialism is a relatively unstable trait varying with age, dependent upon numerous developmental changes (Chaplin and John 2007). Materialism appears to increase from middle childhood to early adolescence. Chaplin and John (2007) correlated self-esteem and materialism, noting that decreases in self-esteem, which tend to naturally occur between middle childhood and early adolescence, are correlated with increases of materialism. Likewise, as self-esteem increases from early to late adolescence, decreases in materialism generally occur.

Kasser et. al (2004:14) use the phrase "materialistic value orientation" (MVO) to capture the aims, beliefs, goals and behaviours associated with cultures of consumption. They contend that a strong MVO is indicative of the ways in which individuals compensate for worries and doubts about their self-worth. A growing body of research suggests that individuals become more materialistic when they experience environmental circumstances that do not support their psychological needs. As well, based on the research, it can be surmised that the diminution of interpersonal resources such as love and affection, rather than financial resources, leads to materialistic attitudes and behaviour (Kasser et al. 2004). Moreover, as previously discussed/described, people who strongly orient towards values such as money, possession, image and status report lower subjective well-being than their counterparts.

It appears that people employ material possessions to compensate for perceived inadequacies in their concept of self. Interestingly, whether people scored high or low in materialism, the positive emotions (happy, excited) were consistently present. However, individuals who are strongly materialistic experience more negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, guilt or fear after completing purchases. It may be that consumption is of such importance to the individual with a strong materialist value that greater expectations of the purchasing process are developed (Ditttmar 1992).

The media is full of images of ideal body types, coveted material possessions and successful relationships that the majority will never attain (Layard 2005). Many young people grow up thinking they have the potential to eventually become a movie star, sports figure, or at least, rich, like those seen on television. When youth surveyed in the 1990s were given a choice between fame and contentment, 29 percent chose fame as compared to only 17 percent of Boomers (Twenge 2006). It is telling that in 1970, 39 percent of college freshmen considered "becoming very well-off financially" as their number one objective and in 1998 that number jumped to 74 percent (Kindlon 2001). High school students in the 1990s were twice as likely as their 1970s counterparts to believe that the acquisition of money was very important (Twenge 2006). Not surprisingly, youth also expect to make a lot of money. In a 2011 survey, teenage Americans believe that once established in their careers, they will be earning $150,000; the average US household income is $50,000 (Charles Schwab Inc. 2011). The lure of money is particularly salient in cultures that foster narcissism: "Being rich is a narcissists's paradise. When our most cherished hopes are for ourselves, it is extremely easy to be drawn to the appeal of being rich...[You] can afford the best of everything (after all, you deserve it)" (Twenge and Campbell 2009: 172). Yet, study after study demonstrate that individuals who have good relationships are the happiest—consistently trumping even job satisfaction as a predictor of happiness (Twenge 2006). Teens in relatively well-off suburban neighbourhoods reported significantly higher use of cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana, and hard drugs than their poorer inner-city counterparts. Suburban teens also revealed significantly higher anxiety and depression than did inner-city youth; among affluent youth, substance abuse was linked with depression and anxiety, suggesting efforts to self-medicate (Luthar and Latendresse 2005). The problem is so serious that affluent youth have among the highest rates of long-term substance abuse, somatic complaints and unhappiness of any group of children in the US (Levine 2006).

Consumer Culture and Gender Issues

Children, and indeed adults, are all engaged in a continuous production of gendered identity via visual display. Appearance production is not something that we choose to do necessarily, but rather find ourselves compelled to do so as a form of reinforcing identity (Frost 2005). Frost describes this as, "Appearance-obsessed, image-obsessed and self-obsessed, the socially produced subject of late consumer capitalism attempts to exercise control over [existence]" (67) by an over-emphasis of the personal sphere. Both genders arrive at an understanding of the self and what is expected through dynamic exchange with culture. Specifically, consumer cultures place significant emphasis on appearance and stereotypical models of what it means to be male or female.

Girls and the Beauty Myth: Relevant Research

For many, perhaps even the majority of women and girls in consumer cultures, appearances are paramount to their self-definition. Mass media is the most powerful and vociferous purveyor of what is accepted to be the ideal beauty. Girls in particular, are inundated by such ideals in the form of dolls, figures that appear in comics, cartoons, television, movies and all forms of advertising. The synergistic effect of such exposure can have a profound impact on a child's developing identity. Girls learn to see themselves as objects to be scrutinized and evaluated on the basis of appearance. They are told by advertisers that their most important trait is physical appearance (Kilbourne 2004). This can result in a preoccupation with how to improve the body and enhance attractiveness, so as to become socially desirable. At the same time, while the cultural ideal is becoming progressively thinner, body weight of girls is increasing (Dittmar and Howard 2004). Thus, it stands to reason that girls are likely to experience body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem and identities that reflect both of these characteristics. Dittmar, Halliwell and Ive (2006) conducted a study to determine whether children, aged five to eight, were impacted by the figure of a Barbie doll, historically the most popular doll of all time. 'Barbie' is so extraordinarily thin that her weight and body proportions are not only unattainable, but are unhealthy. The ultrathin female beauty ideal for doll and bodies has been linked to the high prevalence of negative body image and unhealthy eating patterns now commonly seen among girls and women. To put the matter in perspective, fewer than one in 100,000 women have 'Barbie's' body proportions. Dittmar et al. found young girls

do experience heightened body dissatisfaction after exposure to Barbie doll images; when exposed to a neutral control image, there was no effect.

Girls aged 14- to 18-years-old, in particular, have difficulties associated with poor self-esteem emanating from appearance concerns that reflect negative self-perceptions. It is no surprise then that girls in this age group have the highest rate of body dysmorphic disorders, as well as, self-harming behaviours (Frost 2005). Media-saturated cultures do not easily accept those who fall outside the rigid scripts of gendered expectations (Little and Hoskins 2004). Negative comparing can be internalized in the form of an "inner-judge"—messages that were originally fed from an external source resound and thrive as an internal mechanism—to the detriment of the individual (Bloom 2000). Bloom identifies it as follows: "Our inner judges sentence us sternly or magnanimously depending on the snugness with which we fit our social network's needs" (145). Shame, the fallout of inner judgment and internalized concomitant to stigma, seems to have a particular resonance with teenage girls' somatic experiences. Exposure to media may erode positive identity components in which inner-judges do heavy battle.

From Disordered Eating to Ultra-Masculine: Understanding the 'Boy Code"

Like girls, boys also suffer from media affects and in many respects, on the same types of issues. The media counts on boys wishing to assume the role of characters they see on television or in the movies, many of which uphold traditional masculine constructs. Pollack (1998) coined the term "boy code" to capture the kind of constraints that boys face such as having to suppress many emotions with the exception of anger and rage. Another aspect of the boy code is to remain cool at all costs, even at academic cost. From elementary grades through high school, boys acquire lower grades than girls; consequently, boys in the eighth grade are held back 50 percent more often than girls. Pollack hypothesizes that one of the significant factors in academic instability for boys is the fear of not being perceived as cool, especially looking too smart. Moreover, young men in advertisements are often cast as loners or members of cool all-male groups and are rarely depicted as sons or brothers in a happy home environment (Pollack 1998). For example, risk-taking behaviours are often attributed to be part of a male psychology; bungee-jumping, sky surfing and fast driving to name a few, are everywhere in advertisements depicting men.

Chronic and frequent contact with violent media and aggressive depictions may influence the display of not only physical and verbal aggression, but also *relational* aggression among young children (Ostrov et al. 2006). Relational aggression refers to the transmittance of gossip or malicious secrets or lies, as well as shunning (Ostrov et al. 2006). Television watching has been found to correlate with both physical and relational aggression (Ostrov et al. 2006). Indeed, gender seems to be a significant risk factor for violence, as most youth violence is perpetrated by males (Feder, Levant, and Dean 2007). Indeed, young men are 10 times more likely to commit murder than young women; 95 percent of all juvenile homicides are caused by boys (Feder et al. 2007). There is considerable concern that the "new media" (video games, music videos, the Internet) are far more salient with respect to aggression than that of passive media (television, movies) (Feder et al. 2007). And despite data showing reductions in violent crime, youth violence remains a serious problem. Out of all homicides committed in a year, 10 percent are by individuals under the age of 18 (Feder et al. 2007).

Eating disorders are commonly believed to be a female problem, yet in a national study, one third of high school girls and 16 percent of all high school boys evidenced some symptoms of an eating disorder (Peterson, Paulson, and Williams 2007). Most significantly, eating disorders have among the highest mortality rates of all mental health disorders and thus deserve serious attention (Peterson et al. 2007). Some estimate that between 30 and 75 percent of pre-adolescent and adolescent boys are dissatisfied with their bodies (Markey and Markey 2005). Moriarty and Harrison (2008) established that media exposure is significantly correlated with disordered eating among adolescents and adults. Moreover, childhood media use is a significant predictor of adult body-image concerns For example, body dissatisfaction in males has been found to increase significantly when viewing advertisements with male models, especially images of muscular men (Moriarty and Harrison 2008).

Boys learn early on that masculinity is equated with being sexually active and that sexual responsibility is more a female burden than male (Hust et al. 2008). Women/girls are often portrayed by the media in a negative light when they initiate sexual activity. Sexual health topics covered in the media are ambiguous and inaccurate; as well, they reinforce traditional gender stereotypes. The media often use humour as a means of undermining sexually responsible behaviour. Overall, the media does little to promote sexual health among teens, as it is rarely discussed. Furthermore, teen pregnancy is often regarded as a "girl's problem" in which the

mother-to-be is considered to be solely responsible for the child. Even in nonfiction, accounts of teenage pregnancy, male responsibility is largely absent. Studies such as Hust et al. (2008) have found that more frequent exposure to sexual content in the media during adolescence predicts earlier initiation of sexual intercourse.

How Children Benefit From Consumer Culture: An Evaluation

Within the disciplines of sociology, psychology and media studies, the 'debate' fiercely continues as to whether or not children are being manipulated or empowered within consumer-oriented cultures. This dichotomous banter is characterized by a continuum of positions ranging from those lamenting the loss of innocence and safety of childhood to those celebrating the emancipation and empowerment of children. The debate often distils into a polemic between those who believe heightened commercialism and consumption is a positive thing that contributes to human betterment and even happiness (Buckingham 2011; Lindstrom et al. 2004; McNeal 2007) and those who believe it is a negative influence leading to dissatisfaction, disillusionment, and a reduction of overall well-being (Acuff and Reiher 2005; Dittmar 2007; Giroux 2000; Kasser et al. 2007; Linn 2004; Pugh 2009; Schor 2004).

Agency

Marketers of children's toys argue that they do not completely dictate what children do with the commercial materials given them or the meanings they ascribe, that children are not 'cultural dupes.' There are some scholars, most notably Buckingham (2011), who support this view and contend that all consumers (children included) have agency, regardless of the intensity of consumer culture and its wares. Agency means that the consumer takes an active role in determining the type of experience they will have with media and consumer goods. Furthermore, agency accounts for what individuals actually do with the media and consumer goods, how they veer outside the structuring influence of commercial producers. John Fiske, a strong proponent of the free agency position, suggests that media consumers are not just unwitting victims of corporate marketing: "They are not a passive, helpless mass incapable of discrimination and thus at the economic, cultural, and political mercy of the barons of industry" (Fiske 1987:309). Fiske also credits children with the ability to liberate themselves from the influence of commercial media by developing their own 'stories.'

The child consumer is now increasingly portrayed as an "active agent," co-creating with marketers on what products are desirable, or in establishing the meaning of brands (Buckingham 2011). Co-creation refers to a mindset that embraces the "*customers are in charge*" ideology. The consumer is deemed competent and should therefore, be put to work side-by-side with marketers (Zwick, Bonsu and Darmody 2008).

Empowerment

Play is serious business to children and is one of the means with which they express power by subverting the commercial intent of media. Seiter (1993) believes that children's involvement in consumer culture has vastly expanded their capacity to globally connect and hence, expand personal power using a "shared repository of images, characters, plots, and themes: it provides the basis for small talk and play, and it does this on a national, even global scale" (7). The fact that children from varying cultural backgrounds share a "language" means that through play their capacity to be viewed as a unified whole is more likely. As a result of the common identification with commercial culture, children are far more capable of fostering an empowering culture of their own (Seiter 1993). Seiter also contends that, within the shared sphere that consumer culture creates, children are able to express themselves unfettered by adult rules, authority and constraints, and operate with a type of freedom that would otherwise be difficult to impossible to attain. A child with extensive commercial knowledge may find pleasure in achieving some level of mastery with particular objects of play unattainable by an adult.

According to Buckingham (2000:76), children are achieving "economic empowerment" as they engage in consumer society. The fact that children (ages four to twelve) influence both directly and indirectly $700 billion of the parents' spending and spend $42 billion of their own money (McNeal 2007) means that they must be taken more seriously, not just as consumers but as citizens. Previously excluded from the exercise of social power, children are now being given legitimate access. For example, children now sit on product development boards of corporations and serve as peer consultants for such things as films and new products (Cook 2007). Even the issue of children's rights has taken a more prominent position as evidenced by new legislation in numerous countries with an aim to protect children's civil rights (Buckingham 2000).

Empowerment means that children's voices are finally being heard within a cultural and legal venue.

Opportunities for creativity, community and self-fulfillment

Engagement with media technology is a central part of participation as a consumer, as a means of facilitating purchases, gathering information, and partaking in numerous forms of entertainment. Whether it is through television or the Internet, children are communicating with one another, and adults, at levels previously unseen or imagined. The result is a complex web of interactions that afford children the opportunity of self-expression and creativity. The media in general, has become an important tool with which children can express their ideas, views and needs in order to gain higher levels of fulfillment without continual dependency on adults. Children are creative in their appropriation of consumer goods and media, developing their own meanings from the stories and symbols of consumer culture (Seiter 1998). Paul Willis (1990:1) states that young people's lives are full of expressions, signs and symbols of a "common culture" partly based upon their use of and investment in media and consumer goods through which they seek "creatively to establish their presence, identity and meaning." For example, soap operas, despite their puerility, nonetheless foster engagement to the extent that viewers contribute to the symbolic and creative work of culture. As Willis (36-37) declares: "The audience is not an empty room waiting to be furnished in someone else's taste... Young people have an active, creative, and symbolically productive relation to what they see on television." While the artefacts of children's culture originate with corporate conglomerates, children are still able to uniquely create their own meanings and uses from media.

Citizens of the free market

Children are said to be powerful, sovereign beings and are therefore, in the best position to identify and articulate their own needs. In essence, they drive the market. As one of the founders of the children's channel Nickelodeon, Geraldine Laybourne, declared "What's good for business is good for kids" (Buckingham 2000:148). The free market is representative of free choice and the ability to exercise decisions unfettered by social, cultural and familial constraints; to be a consumer is to embody such access.

Advertisements are educational

Marketers argue that advertisements provide children with needed information to experience the full embodiment of a consumer modality. They also maintain that advertising teaches children the consumption skills necessary to function in the marketplace, such as evaluating the attributes of different products and teaching children how to shop with discrimination. While advertisements can influence choice of brand, it is ultimately peers and family who are far more influential in dictating consumer spending patterns. And, while younger children are least able to remember and understand advertisements, considering them more a source of entertainment, there is a dearth of empirical evidence claiming that 'program-length' commercials are designed to deceive (Buckingham 2000). Advertisements make a fairly limited contribution to children's beliefs about the integrity of a product; parents and socioeconomic status are far more significant in this area. There is little to no research that supports the fact that advertising contributes to broader ideologies and values by making an individual buyer more consumerist or materialistic than they would otherwise be (Buckingham 2000). To be swayed by advertising is to be seen as incompetent or irrational and thus, uniquely vulnerable to persuasion—an argument used by adults to keep children in their 'place.'

Communication revolution

Digital technologies engage increasing numbers of children as both consumers and *producers* (Craft 2012). Indeed, children now behave as skillful collaborators, navigating around the clock in virtual space, contributing to the creation and production of social networks and other sites (Craft 2012). For the first time in history, children are declared as taking control of the critical elements of a communication revolution spurred by advanced media technology, one that is intricately tied to the persona of consumer. Tapscott (1998) outlines the 10 themes of what he calls the "N-Gen" (net generation) children's culture. To begin with he claims, these children are fiercely independent, characterized by emotional and intellectual openness and the desire to adopt a global orientation in the search of information, activity and communication. They operate under free expression, strong views and innovation. This type of attitude involves a level of maturity and investigation more characteristic of adults. In fact, relative to the N-Gen, adults live in a slow-motion world. Finally, this cohort of children has developed sensitivity to

corporate interests and a level of authentication and trust to navigate through the world of a consumer (Tapscott 1998). Children's competencies know no bounds:

> The gap between the narratives, games, skills and technologies that we knew as children and what our children know now is vast, and the distance continues to grow rapidly. *Children are no longer so dependent on parents for guidance in the world*. (Kapur 1999:129, italics added)

Which Side of the 'Debate' Holds the Greatest Merit?

Those who theorize that childhood is a distinct biological, emotional and psychological experience unique to children are more apt to view the commercialization of childhood as a negative force. One such theorist is Allison Gopnik, a cognitive psychologist, who suggests in her latest book, *The Philosophical Baby*, that "childhood is a universal fact" (2009:4). She cites recent breakthroughs in neuroscience that reveal how children have different, though equally complex and powerful, minds, brains, and forms of consciousness designed to serve their evolutionary needs. Childhood, she claims, is a distinctive developmental period in which specific brain changes occur that play a prominent role in the metamorphosis to adulthood. Gopnik's findings challenge social construction theory which states that childhood, especially modern-day childhood, is pliable and dependent upon cultural parameters (Buckingham 2011). Such theory cannot account for children's rights, interests and needs that are universal, and globally identified—those that all children deserve.

In their book *Einstein Never Used Flashcards*, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff and Ever (2003), like Gopnik, contend that childhood is a distinctive phase of development that has suffered damage by the deluge of marketing aimed at children. In particular, Hirsch-Pasek et al. (2003) maintain that parents have been hoodwinked into believing that they must make their babies smarter, faster, through purchase of so-called educational material. For instance, "Baby Einstein", "Baby Shakespeare" and "Baby Van Gogh" are media products promoted on the basis of enhancing a child's development and are marketed with strong claims despite lack of evidence. Hirsch-Pasek et al. assert their theory that authentic play, which is innately human, is the best means of maturation in children. This view has wide acceptance among scholars in early child development (Leach 1994; Linn 2004). Parents are urged to protect their children's imaginations by reducing the exposure of ritualized "creativity" that characterizes mass culture.

If we suppose that childhood is not an absolute, but in fact, is socially constructed, then concern about the commercialization or transformation of childhood seems misplaced; on the

contrary, some argue, childhood must always be understood within a given historical, social and cultural context. Consumer culture may be stimulating children to grow up at a faster pace, for example, but is still viewed as "normal." It can even be said that children are active participants in forming their own culture in more substantial ways than in the past (Lindström, Seybold, and Millward Brown IMS. 2004). This argument is akin to advocates of child labour who had also argued that children were no different from adults and that their labour was necessary and desirable (Kapur 2006).

James McNeal, a psychologist and market researcher, who was instrumental in spurring the commercial child market over the past 25 years, takes the argument that consumer culture is good for children a step further. He claims that Piaget's theory of child development maps out how consumer behaviours contribute to a child's intellectual growth—it is in large part based on a child's interactions with objects in his or her environment:

> Beyond genetics, the growth of the mind and that of the body are largely a result of consumer behaviour, of perceiving and consuming commercial objects. Impoverish a child's environment by taking away all commercial objects, and the child is unlikely to become a normal functioning human being. (18 - 19)

McNeal (2007) adopted Piaget's theory of child development, then infused it with consumer 'language' to produce a new theory, one that claims children are innately possessed with consumer behaviours from the time of birth. He maps out a five stage learning process of the child consumer that is purported to be non-gendered and universal. McNeal does not provide his own or other's research to substantiate his theoretical position rather, it is all conjecture.

In *Brand Child*, Martin Lindstrom (2004) bases his entire book on a study that he conducted to determine tween attitudes and brand relationships. He offers a cookbook on brand know-how as it pertains to children. Notably, the methodology of the study including design, sample size, data collection and analyses are absent from the discussion. Interestingly, the 'study' was funded by a private corporation, Millward Brown, a "research agency" specializing in "brands and communication," one that had much to gain monetarily from supporting data. Lindstrom advocates the use of "nonconscious" methods to instil brand imagery for which he makes no apology.

The examination of the literature for the zero to five-year-old age group yields a paucity of studies demonstrating that being a consumer at this young age leads to positive benefits. It

has been repeatedly determined that young children do not distinguish advertising from programming and are incapable of understanding the persuasive intent of advertising. The APA, in 2004, published a startling paper on the negative psychological effects of advertising and strongly recommended an advertising ban for children under eight (Kunkel et al. 2004). For children between the ages of eight to twelve it has been shown that they are only starting to become aware of the impact of media and its significance (Buckingham 2003) and are, therefore, also vulnerable. This explains why cultures, such as Sweden and Quebec, wishing to protect children from marketers have banned advertising to children under the age of 12. It should be noted that Buckingham (2003), maintains that media literacy, if applied properly, does mitigate the negative effects of advertising. However, he cautions that knowledge alone does not provide immunity from advertising influences (Buckingham 2009). Put differently, knowing that advertisements manipulate does not then mean they hold no sway. Indeed, there is evidence that media literacy interventions do not effectively counteract the impact of advertising to children, particularly the younger ones who are most vulnerable to its influence (Kunkel et al. 2004).

With regard to teenagers, it is not enough to develop "agency" as a means of warding off consumerism—teens, traditionally viewed as having too much agency, also succumb to consumer demands that are not necessarily in their best interests. Statistics on teen's physical health including drinking, smoking and prevalence of psychiatric disorders speak to this issue. Furthermore, it takes considerable maturation for teenagers to perceive the differences between 'realism' and fantasy and develop the wherewithal to grasp the way television messages are delivered (Buckingham 2003). As a result, they are susceptible to all sorts of media influence with limited discriminatory capacity. However, relative to younger children, teenagers are generally more capable of navigating through the consumer maze.

The integrity of the research reviewed, including the overall design and analyses, tends to be more robust from those who cite harm as opposed to those who cite benefit (with some exceptions). Interestingly, the majority of those who vociferously align themselves on the pro-consumer side have some affiliation with marketers. Those on the anti-consumer side tend to be academics from varying fields including sociology, psychology and neuroscience as well as, child advocates and social activists. Both McNeal (2007) and Lindstrom (2004), staunch

marketers that they are, concede that corporations are preying on children in ways that children cannot resist. For example, McNeal (2007) states on the last page of his extensive treatise,

> Parents have put their children pretty much in charge of their own consumption levels. If children ask for more, they get more. The net results are too many children taking risks, getting fat, becoming unhealthy, not studying enough, not sleeping enough, and, in general, *endangering* themselves through overconsumption (389, italics added).

'Blaming the parents' has been the battle-cry of corporations for years, all the while undermining parental's roles. Indeed, marketers have successfully displaced parents or extended family from their role in mediating a child's experience of the world. McNeal goes on to remark that the solution lies in "consumer education." This begs the question as to how a six-month-old, or even a four-year-old, can be "educated," so as to outsmart marketers and the psychologists who work for them. For instance, Buckingham (2003) talks about the intricacies of "media education" and how complex it is to implement within schools, never mind teach. But, it is the lack of logic in his argument that is the real flaw. If adults have difficulty understanding how they are being manipulated and losing their capacity for "rational" thinking, then what chance does a child have to embrace a level of critical thinking that has not yet manifested? Lindstrom (2008) states that with the development of neuroscience it will take great effort to withstand the onslaught of consumerism:

> Neuromarketing is still in its infancy, and in the years ahead, I believe it is only going to expand its reach....Can we, as individuals, escape the reach of marketers and brands and the new face of advertising that appeals to our subconscious minds? It's not easy to do in today's world....we, the consumers, can [learn to] escape all the tricks and traps that companies use to seduce us to their products and get us to buy and take back our rational minds. (Lindstrom 2008:204)

The discourse of empowerment renders marketing to children a morally defensible and an ethically sound undertaking. Yet, the mandate of corporations is profit for the shareholders with little other motivation or intention (Bakan 2004). Furthermore, the 'debate' splits on lines of gender, expertise and evidence. It is predominantly women with extensive expertise in child development backed by research who reject the pro-consumer side. Those advocating that consumerism is of benefit to children are generally male with little to no expertise in child development, and a dearth of 'evidence.'

In his latest publication *The Material Child*, David Buckingham (2011) attempts to reframe the problem of the child consumer by suggesting that both sides of the debate are rife with misplaced conceptions. The commercialization of childhood 'battle cry' is one full of rhetoric about moral panics and the dangerous, corrupted childhoods that children now experience. By the same token, he states that marketers' insistence that children are savvy autonomous consumers is overstated. Buckingham believes that the situation is more complex than either of the two polarities represents, and that understanding the child consumer, in the modern world, is a complex and diverse field. He is also highly critical, like Cook (2008), that children are largely absent in consumption theory and writings, and that much of the research, including Schor's (2004), Linn's (2004), Quart's (2003), and the APA's, to name a few, is weak and generally, inconclusive. Upon closer examination of Buckingham's theories, it becomes obvious that his understanding of childhood development is lacking. To begin with, he states that children should not be "singled out as a special case" from that of adults, that they do not have "different needs and vulnerabilities" and thus require "different forms of provision and intervention" (Buckingham 2011:45). He goes on to write that children are not "merely passive or incompetent consumers" and that "claims about the power of advertising and marketing are often absurdly exaggerated" (255). It may be true that children, like adults, use commodities as a means of self-expression, identity formation and even have the skills of being a type of 'consumer' from an early age. However, Buckingham seems to ignore recent evidence, from the field of developmental psychology, that children's needs are vastly different from adults, and they require emotional and psychological safety from appropriate caregivers (Gopnik 2009).

Buckingham scoffs at the view that children are innocents, victims, and maintains that the histrionics about children's consumption ultimately harms them because it distracts from the 'real' issues concerning income inequality, and other social problems that impact diverse groups of children. While it is true that today's children experience the world differently, dependent upon socio-economic status, ethnicity, familial history and so on, all children living within consumer cultures cannot escape the wide swath of marketers who see their development as a commercial opportunity. It is on this point that Buckingham appears naive or misguided about the modern corporation and the extent to which it is motivated by control, power and monetary gain (Bakan 2004).

Today's marketers are touting 'co-creation' as a way to engage with the so-called empowered and entrepreneurial consumer who they attribute as ruling the digitally networked marketplaces. They believe that by 'consulting' the customer in market production, by seeking their technical, social and cultural knowledge, they will gain a market edge that would otherwise be lost to a competitor. The consumer/customer, they hypothesize, should now be regarded as a type of marketing partner rather than just a potential buyer. As corporations have to increasingly rely on skilled and flexible employees who are able to innovate rapidly in order to keep up with the fast-changing times, who better to partner with than the prospective buyer? Yet, Zwick et al. (2008) maintain that the co-creating model is more about exploitation than consultation, since the "crux of value co-creation, to paraphrase Deleuze (1992), is to provide the surest way of delivering the customer over to the corporation" (186). By enlisting customers and charging them for their work, the co-creation model must engage a discourse that re-frames the traditional methods of consumer control into one of relating (Zwick et al. 2008).

Conclusion

Consumerism has won out over every political system in the past century. Communism, socialism, and even democracy, have all taken a backseat to the spread of consumer culture. Corporations have come to regard children as a means to their own ends, increased profit, a better bottom line and, most importantly, a lifetime of brand loyalty. In order to achieve this, marketers have become extremely adept at manipulating children's emotional needs, unabashedly using whatever available information they have to ensure their financial success. (Bakan 2011). Children have been losing their grip on childhood as a result of the gradual, but steady, encroachment of media into every aspect of their lives. There is no doubt that childhood of the past was not so enmeshed with marketers' agendas. Though corporate interests in children had commenced by the early twentieth century, the trend for more permissive regulations (especially under Reagan in the US) has resulted in a daily onslaught of advertisements that many adults, let alone children, cannot process. As well, the revolution in technology added to the venues in which marketers could attract the child consumer including: DVD players, computers, iPods, 'smart' phones, video-gaming, and so forth. Children, as opposed to mothers, have thus become a prominent conduit for the transfer of goods from the mall to the home. This dramatic cultural shift has led to a fiercely competitive market to capture children's attention.

Marketers have upped the ante, imposing their logos on the minds of pre-schoolers too young to even recite the alphabet (Thomas 2007).

Under the dubious justification of "empowerment" corporations were able to forge ahead with new goods, brands, and media with virtually unchallenged deft and ingenuity (Cook 2007). The depiction of the child consumer has been fashioned in such a way that marketing and advertising toward children appear as a benign, even a liberating undertaking. Ironically, since the 1990s, marketers have touted that children are better equipped to resist the power of advertising than their counterparts of several decades ago. They have argued that the "free" market inherently teaches children to become savvy, discerning consumers. The discourse of empowerment, not unlike that of socialization, renders marketing to children a morally defensible and ethically sound undertaking. Indeed the language of choice resonates with everyday notions of freedom, and citizenship in the capitalist world. The child consumer has been reconfigured to stand for individual autonomy rather than corporate exploitation. Corporations have thus successfully co-opted children's empowerment by equating 'choice' with the consumption of heavily sponsored products.

Currently, resistance to the commercialization of childhood and criticism of the corporate grip on children is developing. For example, the following groups have formed in the past few decades: Commercial Alert, Center for a New American Dream, Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, American Academy of Paediatrics Committee on Public Education, and Alliance for Childhood. Since consumer culture is so dominant in the West, resisting and rejecting those aspects that are less than desirable is challenging, particularly after being socialized and steeped in such culture from childhood. Thus, the process of 'branding identities' may partly explain why children, and even adults, suffer under the illusion of free agency and are unable to discriminate the degree of effect that consumerism imparts. Indeed, it will take concerted effort to muster a dissenting voice, one counter to the slow drip of implicit assumptions that keep the corporate market alive at a psychological level. Children are particularly vulnerable and generally unable to engage in self-reflection such that by the time they are adults, consumer ideology is, likely, established as an integral part of the self.

It is essential to continue research on the impact of consumerism, particularly the *ways* in which it operates, on children, given the increasing role it plays in their lives and the extent to which it seems to detract from physical and psychological health. While current literature

demonstrates some of the outcomes or harms of consumer culture, it also leaves many unanswered questions. We do not really understand what it is like for a child to have grown up in the most intense media campaign in human history (that which began in the 1990s), especially from their perspective. It is not clear what young people perceive the experiences of their childhoods to be, what it is like to have human relationships mediated by commodities. If relatively high consumer involvement leads to anxiety and depression, what is the mechanism by which this manifests? Is it that consumer culture leads to a perpetual dissatisfaction or feelings of futility about never 'having it all'? With respect to gendered consumption, are females more susceptible than males to adopt gendered consumer subjectivities? How is it that children learn to be 'good' consumers, to operate within consumer cultures and retain their identity, if at all? And what of the resisters, those who see through the charade that consumption is equated with happiness and are able to reject the consumerist lifestyle—how are their experiences different, if at all? How the dialectic is resolved, if at all, that our consumption connects us to economic and ecological injustices of other global citizens? These are the type of questions that empirical researchers have yet to address and which are paramount to our analysis in understanding what it is like to be surrounded by media, all the while attempting to forge one's own path.

CHAPTER THREE: CONFORMITY, CREATIVITY AND THE MECHANISMS OF PERSUASION

Consumer culture appears to be inhibiting the creative process in children's mode of expression, including their capacity, or lack thereof, for innovative play (Kline 1989; Linn 2004). During their formative years, children ideally should be allowed the freedom to develop creative skills that prepare them for a whole host of social and intra-psychic challenges (Leach 1994). However, those living in consumer cultures seem to experience their creative expression as constrained or confined within walls of technology and scripted formulas for what play should look like, and how it should be experienced (Kline 1995). The primary emphasis of consumerism is on media providing information to passive learners about how to think, behave and experience the world (Linn 2004). At the opposite end of conformity is the capacity to develop novel ideas or ways of solving problems, a reflection of the creative process at work. An important aspect of a highly original person is his or her willingness to behave in unusual, even socially undesirable ways, uninhibited by adult authority or peers (Sulloway 1996). In order to utilize creative potential, an individual must be relatively free from the obligation to conform to others' expectations; the need for approval and affiliation must be secondary to one's willingness to be different, to be a non-conformist (Sulloway 1996). Much of the research on conformity suggests that it is a relatively easy state to induce, especially under the auspices of an authority figure or group pressure (Zimbardo 2007). In this chapter, I will explore the literature on persuasion tactics and conformity, with the purpose of illuminating how such states are elicited, and suggest ways that conformity can be offset based upon what we know about creative processes. It remains to be seen whether or not children growing up in consumer cultures from early childhood are able to resist conforming to many of the norms of popular culture or whether, in large part, they capitulate to the dictates of consumerism, unable to foster creative self-expression. Outside of the two polar opposites, it is altogether likely that children's creative expression falls somewhere in the middle, and is representative of a rejection of some norms and adoption of others.

The trajectory or development of a child's morals, values and sense of self is brought about by a myriad of determining influences including family, peers, schooling, socioeconomic status, genetic make-up, psychological traits and culture. All of these factors merge in a synergism of

influence, the outcome of which is the formation of an identity. For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus solely on cultural influences, specifically, those of the media, in order to isolate factors that contribute to conformity to popular norms. Understanding the ways in which children adopt conforming behaviours and attitudes requires an investigation of the ways and means of persuasion and compliance gaining, particularly those salient in the media. The extent to which media can influence children, while difficult to measure in totality, appears to be substantial especially considering the use of neuro-marketing and other persuasion techniques that are now regularly employed (Lindstrom 2008). Children tend to adopt cultural norms, readily copying and imitating whatever they are exposed to (Pagel 2012). As a result they are vulnerable to the ways and means of marketing experts who hone their skills across a variety of media including print, television and the Internet. And, while "persuaders" have yet to succeed in replicating an Orwellian-style method of thought control, many of their tactics aim to achieve outcomes of compliance to popular norms, those that include the consumption of goods.

Most believe they are far from being influenced by the likes of powerful dictators and that it is unfair to lump all persuasion together as if it merits the same consideration. Yet, persuasion, even propaganda, in the modern capitalist democracy is not to be underestimated (Marlin 2002; Pratkanis and Aronson 2001). Marlin (2002) cites the actions of some corporations as equivalent to propagandist tactics. As an example, the marketing of McDonald's fast-food chain in the US and Canada fits under Marlin's definition of propaganda which he defines as "the organized attempt through communication to affect belief or action or inculcate attitudes in a large audience in ways that circumvent or suppress an individual's adequately informed, rational, reflective judgment" (22). He also refers to the branding scams (e.g., with this product you will achieve this lifestyle/image) as being a type of propaganda; this implicates many forms of advertising.

Understanding the mechanisms by which norms are transferred, maintained and accepted, and the ways in which they are rejected (non-conformity), are all the focus of this chapter. Of particular importance is the concept that persuasion is being used as a tool to ensure a high degree of compliance by the adoption of consumer values in children. A relatively few influential people are able to generate a groundswell of support for thousands of brands using a plethora of effective techniques that will be described and explored. In short, media has the opportunity to influence and persuade children as never before and it appears to be succeeding.

There is always a minority of children who, for whatever reasons, choose to deviate from popular norms and blaze their own trail as evidenced by their non-conformist behaviours. The capacity to express oneself creatively, in terms of definitions and what it means to be creative will also be explored in this chapter.

Persuasion

Persuasion can be defined, as "one or more persons who are engaged in the activity of creating, reinforcing, modifying, or extinguishing beliefs, attitudes, intentions, motivations and/or behaviours within the constraints of a given communication context" (Gass and Seiter 2007:33-34). Persuasion is not simply about changing one's own or another's mind, but can also involve reinforcing, strengthening or solidifying of beliefs where none existed. Further, persuasion can also involve attempts to extinguish or eliminate beliefs and attitudes.

Conformity and Norms

Conformity refers to the specific movement from one's own position to a contradictory position; an individual's personal position starts at a point that is contrary to that expressed by a comparison other or group (Cialdini and Trost 1998). Cialdini and Trost (1998) define social norms, those specific to social behaviour, as:

> standards that are understood by members of the group, and that guide and/or strain social behaviour without the force of laws. These norms emerge out of interaction with others; they may or may not be stated explicitly, and any sanctions for deviation from them come from social networks, not the legal system. (152)

Cialdini and colleagues (Cialdini and Trost 1998; Cialdini, Reno, and Kallgren 1990) categorized existing definitions of norms into two types. Norms that describe what actually is occurring, or what others are doing, are referred to as descriptive norms (Cialdini and Trost 1998). Individuals often assess the descriptive norms of the situation when they are uncertain of how to act (Cialdini et al. 1990). Descriptive norms are depicted throughout the media in images (billboards, magazines), enactments (movies, Internet, television) and verbal messages (radio). The second type of norms, injunctive norms, have a moral element and are rules or beliefs about what an individual should do in varying situations (Cialdini and Trost 1998). Injunctive norms do not necessarily depend on a specific group, and usually originate from social or cultural standards that are widely shared (Coleman 2007). These are the norms that individuals

commonly refer to when referencing behaviours that are deemed acceptable within a given culture. Like descriptive norms, injunctive norms are also displayed throughout the media in a myriad of ways. For example, gift giving on the occasion of a person's marriage is a type of injunctive norm. Generally speaking, norms can reinforce the status quo and sustain behaviours, attitudes and values deemed to be acceptable. For descriptive norms, the extent to which individuals evidence normative behaviour may vary: Many individuals may conform to normative behaviour, making the norm very evident, or few may conform, making the norm less clear. Similarly, for injunctive norms, what others believe an individual should do may be quite evident, meaning the injunctive norm is relatively easy to surmise. Alternately, what others believe should take place may be unclear such that the injunctive norm is obfuscated. Regardless, descriptive and injunctive norms are portrayed continuously in all forms of media influencing, guiding and pressuring children at varying levels of their development. In today's world of fast-paced technology, transmission of norms is relatively easy and efficient for both descriptive and injunctive norm elements.

Regardless of the method of transmission, individuals both influence and are influenced by norms and their environment in an iterative process (Cialdini and Trost 1998). The creation of subcultures, for example, can occur when enough people consistently deviate from the norms originating in a reciprocal-recursive environment (Cialdini and Trost 1998). Subculture deviations can eventually develop into a normative or desirable way of being if they are picked up by media, commodified and perceived to be "cool" and thereby, lucrative as well (e.g. hip-hop music and its concomitant lifestyle). Thus, there must be conducive conditions that would incline individuals to focus attention away from an existing norm and toward a new or different interpretation of the specific norm (Cialdini et al. 1990). As well, the need to conform is substantial and people often conform to norms for fear of punishment or social ostracism. At other times, people voluntarily go along with a norm at an unconscious level because they have been socialized to accept its appeal as inherently legitimate or it has become something they value (Coleman 2007). What is normative in a society, in a particular setting and specific to a person, will no doubt have demonstrable impact on action, but the impact will be differential depending on whether he or she is focused or more strongly influenced by the norms of the culture, the situation, or the self (Cialdini et al. 1990).

Non-Conformity

Non-conformity, in its simplest form, is defined as holding norms, values and behaviours different from the dominant culture. The process of non-conformity is however, best understood when the motivation behind behaviours and beliefs are made transparent. Hence, it is important to differentiate whether nonconformity is adopted as a way to rebel against external pressures (i.e., not truly chosen) or as a personal choice (i.e., genuine). According to Deci and Ryan (1985), behaviours that are experienced as deriving from free will or choice tend to be integrated with the self and are more likely to be maintained over time. For instance, individuals could show non-conformity as a true expression of the self, actively choose to disregard society's values and instead, follow what they believe to be true/right/proper. Their behaviour would not be a way to rebel against external forces so much as an extension of what they personally value and believe in. Non-conformity can also take on the face of defiance as a way to rebel against external pressures. These behaviours are said to be controlled because their regulation is not self-initiated but, rather initiated by sources located outside the self. Deci and Ryan (1985) explain:

> Behaviors that the organism would not do naturally will have to be extrinsically motivated, but these behaviors may be integrated into the realm of self-determination (i.e., they can be valued and done willingly), even though they will never become intrinsically motivated. (131)

For example, children may adopt non-conformist behaviours as a way to rebel against parents, authority figures or society in general, and to essentially defy the adoption of extrinsic norms. Thus, children may do the opposite of what is demanded simply because they feel controlled. In this case, the non-conformist behaviour while intentional is not truly chosen. It is a reactance against the loss of freedom or 'rights' and an attempt to regain a sense of autonomy as a means of compensation. This type of non-conformist behaviour is unlikely to persist over time because its regulation is predominantly characterized by rigidity and tension rather than by flexibility and cohesion. Individuals who adopt controlling regulated goals eventually lack the will necessary to carry out the behaviour in the face of competing demands. In sum, it appears that non-conformity, although reflecting an intentional action, is not always driven by the self nor autonomously regulated, and may therefore, be quite transient (Pelletier, Dion, and Levesque 2004).

Deviance and Non-Conformity

Deviance, a subset of non-conformity, has traditionally been defined as behaviour that violates norms or that is labelled and evaluated negatively. More recently, "positive deviance" has been conceptually accepted according to Heckert and Heckert (2002). They contend that deviance is relative and contextual, thus the construction of uniform definitions and notions is inherently fraught with difficulty. Heckert and Heckert (2002) offer a typology of deviance that suggests four types of outcomes: negatively evaluated under conformity (negative deviance); negatively evaluated over conformity (rate-busting); positively evaluated under conformity (deviance admiration); and positively evaluated over conformity (positive deviance). Negative deviance is any type of behaviour or condition that the majority regard as unacceptable and that evokes a negative response. Examples include the mentally ill or criminals—both groups under conform to established norms and are usually judged in a pejorative light, even if unfair. Rate-busting refers to over conformity behaviours and conditions that surpass norms and that are negatively evaluated. For example, gifted and overachieving students, those who over conform, are often subjected to a construction of "nerd," "dork" or "geek." They are assumed as rate-busters with respect to intelligence while simultaneously perceived to be devoid of social skills, clumsy and replete with other undesirable characteristics. Deviance admiration connotes the scenario whereby non-conformity is positively evaluated. More precisely, it refers to behaviours that the majority deem as unacceptable, yet invokes a positive response overall. Examples include criminals who have been elevated to the level of heroes such as: Jesse James, Butch Cassidy, Bonnie and Clyde. These historical figures are infused with mythological or symbolic characteristics that match the quintessential archetype—Robin Hood. Thus, under conformity may be positively evaluated. This designation may occur during the period of deviancy or at a future point of time. A final category, positive deviance, suggests over conformity (that which exceeds the normative standards) that is positively evaluated. For example, altruists like Mother Theresa have been posited as an example of a positive deviant. Positive deviancy does not typically threaten the dominant order unlike negative deviancy (Heckert and Heckert 2002).

Heckert and Heckert's typology of deviance is relevant in analyzing and assessing non-conformity to popular norms, those that support and reinforce consumer lifestyles. Restraint from shopping, for example, may be viewed as either negative deviancy or positive deviancy depending upon the values of the culture within which such actions are entertained. Refraining

from shopping can be regarded as "un-American" and bad for the economy. In less materialistic cultures than the US and Canada, minimal shopping behaviour may be highly desirable and positively viewed. Clearly, deviance is complex as our reactions to deviance must be assessed within a cultural or societal context before judgement can be made.

Cialdini's Six Weapons of Influence

Research reveals that there are six basic principles that govern the process by which one person might influence another. Social psychologist, Robert Cialdini (1993), coined them the "six weapons of influence:" reciprocation, scarcity, authority, social proof, liking and consistency. In the pages that follow each of these six principles is elaborated upon with the purpose of understanding how corporations are able to influence children and adults to accept and believe in the products and accompanying lifestyle they wish to sell.

Reciprocity

People feel obliged to give back to others the forms of behaviour that they receive. Human beings have moulded their cultures around the principle of reciprocity. Scientific research reveals that the gifts we give are more likely to be effective when they are viewed as meaningful, tailored to an individual and unexpected. Free product samples received by mail, or in person, at the mall, play on the notion of reciprocity in that they are perceived as a 'gift;' the receiver then feels a level of obligation to respond by giving back or buying the product presented.

Scarcity

People typically associate greater value with things that are rare, dwindling in availability, or difficult to acquire. Examples include the mad scrambles to purchase the most popular Christmas toy that happens to be out of stock. Advertisers use the scarcity principle regularly to infuse a given product with greater desirability.

Authority

We operate in a culture of expert endorsement, relying on the 'right' information to make sound decisions. Some research shows that we are swayed more by experts who seem impartial than those who benefit by convincing us. Regardless, real, perceived or faked, an authority figure tends to induce conformity. Advertisements regularly use the presence of an

authority figure(s) when talking about a product—everything from toothpaste endorsed by dentists to toys that will supposedly enhance a child's learning according to a knowing adult.

Social Validation

If we believe a choice is made in our best interests we will often look to the behaviour of others around us for validation. In circumstances that leave us feeling uncertain, social proof has the greatest persuasive power. Advertising heavily relies on social validation by continuously portraying desirable people using the saleable item. Advertisements for children's toys or cereals almost always depict a child happily enjoying the target product. Advertisers love to inform us when a product is the "fastest-growing" or "largest selling" so as to persuade us that it is worthy of buying.

Liking

Put simply, we prefer to say yes to and comply with the requests of those we like. There are three specific elements of liking: similarity, praise and cooperation. People tend to like others who are similar to them. Advertisements for children include actors who are quintessentially average in behaviour (though above average in appearance). People also tend to like and therefore, be more persuaded by those who pay them compliments and praise. Advertisers often relay how deserving their audiences are of having their product. Thirdly, we are more drawn to people who cooperate with us towards mutual goals. Advertisements often use a discourse of "we" and "us" to make us feel that they are on our side and understand our personal needs.

Consistency

We strongly favour consistency between what we publicly say and do. Once established, we then feel obligated to uphold our earlier commitments. The principle of consistency is applied regularly in the phenomenon of brand loyalty; once we commit to a brand, we feel a sense of obligation to stick with it, to prove our ability to be consistent.

Cialdini (1993) emphasizes that the six weapons of influence often work in conjunction with one another, synergistically, to produce a more potent persuasive effect. Influence and influence "peddlers" are a fact of life. Influence is part of the fabric of society and has been integral to human survival and social groups for thousands of years (Brillinger 2009). Unless

one understands persuasion techniques and recognizes the strategies being implemented we are doomed to be helplessly manipulated (Cialdini 1993). And while adults have the intellectual capacity to sometimes discern when they are being persuaded, children are far less able, if at all. Cialdini cautions:

> The blitz of modern daily life demands that we have faithful shortcuts, sound rules of thumb in order to handle it all. These are no longer luxuries; they are out-and-out necessities that figure to become increasingly vital as the pulse quickens. That is why we should want to retaliate whenever we see someone betraying one of our rules of thumb for profit...[that] we cannot allow without a fight. The stakes are far too high. (229)

Research on Conformity

Social conformity is a natural process on one level and represents the tendency of people to be influenced by one another. Conformity is more than mimicry, however, and generally involves social learning; it is the process by which people discern the rules of society (Coleman 2007). There are two types of social conformity: the alignment of people's thinking or behaviour with a broadly shared societal norm, and a group or interpersonal conformity based on following others' behaviour (Coleman 2007). One of the most compelling experiments on the effects of conformity was conducted by Solomon Asch in 1956. Asch gathered several college students into a room and told them that they would be participating in an experiment in visual judgment. Next, the students were asked to look at two large white cards; a single vertical line appeared on the first card and three vertical lines of different length appeared on the second card. Each student was asked to report out loud to the rest of the group which of the three lines on the second card was the same length as the line on the first card. According to Asch (1965), the experiment began in a mundane fashion but changed rapidly:

> One person near the end of the group disagrees with all the others in his selection of the matching line. He looks surprised, indeed incredulous about the disagreement. On the following trial he disagrees again, while the others remain unanimous in their choice. The dissenter becomes more and more worried and hesitant as the disagreement continues in succeeding trials; he may pause before announcing his answer and speak in a low voice, or he may smile in an embarrassed way. (320)

The dissenting student in the experiment did not know that all of the other students in the group were planted by Asch and told beforehand to give the wrong answers. Asch wanted to see what a person would do when he or she was giving correct answers that were contrary to the

answers of the near-unanimous group decision. The results of the study revealed that conformity was common. When under group pressure, 75 percent of the subjects gave the wrong answer in at least one of the trials (Gass and Seiter 2007). Put somewhat differently, in most cases a minority of one will capitulate in the presence of a unanimous majority. The desire to conform in order to receive acceptance and approval is so powerful that it can cause us to deny our own perceptions. Interestingly, those who participated in the experiment agreed, nearly without exception, that independence was preferable to conformity. Asch was confounded by his results, especially that the tendency to conform and call 'white' 'black' was so common. In a meta-analysis of Asch-type experiments done over succeeding decades, there was little conformity when the majority consisted of only one or two subjects and a dramatic increase when the majority numbered three. However, above a majority size of three, the results were the same (i.e., increasing amounts of conformity did not occur) (Bond and Smith 1996). Walker and Andrade (1996) repeated Asch's experiment on children between the ages of 3 and 17. Their results show that the younger the child, the greater the conformity and likewise, the older the child, the less the tendency to conform. Similar to Asch's experiment, Allen and Levine (1971) found that a single subject is likely to conform when he or she encounters four other people who disagree.; if only one of these four sides with the subject, the subject continues to dissent. So as long as the subject is not the lone dissenting voice, they are able to disagree.

How do we explain Asch's results? Campbell and Fairey (1989) propose that when an individual is making a decision in a group, he or she is motivated by two things: wanting to be right and wanting to be liked. According to these authors, conforming to a group can occur because the group has informational influence that appeals to our desire to be right; we then conform to the group because we think the group may be correct. The other type of influence that plays out of conformity to a group is normative. This means that even when we are sure a group is wrong, we choose to conform in order to gain rewards (liking) and avoid punishments (disapproval) that are associated with agreement and disagreement respectively. New research shows that when people are rejected socially it affects the same part of the brain as physical pain (Coleman 2007).

We tend to conform more to a group of people who are similar to us than to a group of people who are not (Bond and Smith 1996). Moreover, we tend to experience positive emotions following conformity when conforming to a group that we identify with socially. Likewise, we

experience negative emotions when conforming to a group that is less similar (Christensen et al. 2004). Overall, as far as conformity in group pressure experiments is concerned, women show somewhat higher levels of conformity than men (Bond and Smith 1996). Differences in gender, with respect to conformity, were also found in a study by Guarino and Fridrich (1994) who tested to see if subjects in a cafeteria-type line would select a dessert if the person in front of them did so. The study revealed that 77 percent of the women conformed to the dessert-selecting behaviour of the person ahead of them compared to only 43 percent of men.

People tend to view behaviour as correct to the degree that they see others doing it, though they differ in how they perceive the prevailing degree of conformity. Cialdini and his colleagues (1990) found that priming and salience of the norm increased compliance. They demonstrated this phenomenon experimentally by observing the likelihood of people littering based on the amount of litter visible in their environment; the greater the amount of litter, the more people conformed to the littering norm. Likewise, when subjects got messages about norms that were similar to anti-littering, littering decreased proportionately (Cialdini, Reno, and Kallgren 1990). Self-identification with a group also tends to increase conformity to the norms of that group (Terry and Hogg 1996). This is especially true if individuals regard themselves as members of an in-group (Tajfel and Turner 1979). In general, adults acquire norms that pull in two directions—loyalty to an in-group and treating people equally (even those in an 'out-group'). In summary, we have a plethora of different norms stored in the brain, but what we do in a given situation greatly depends on context.

Milgram's 'Obedience to Authority' Experiments

Milgram's now famous experiments on the effects of authority demonstrate, chillingly, how easily situational circumstances can lead human beings to inflict great suffering on innocent others. To summarize briefly, Milgram set up a scenario in which a subject (Teacher) was instructed to deliver continued, intense and dangerous levels of shock to an actor introduced as a 'Learner' if he failed to provide the right answer to a bogus question on memory and learning. Hence, the Teacher participant thought the Learner was also a participant. The Teacher was situated at a desk that contained a horizontal line of 30 switches ranging from 15 volts to 450 volts; each time the Learner made a 'mistake,' the Teacher was instructed by the experimenter to give him a shock. The intensity of the shock increased with each 'error' that the

Learner made. Conflict arose when the Learner began to indicate that he was experiencing discomfort. Learners were, in fact, confederates of the experimenter and never received a real shock. By 285 volts, the Learner expressed his discomfort with an agonized scream. Despite the fact that many of the Learner actors expressed extreme stress and protests, the majority of subjects continued on to administer the highest level of shock (450 volts).

Psychiatrists, graduate students and Yale faculty all predicted before the experiments began that virtually every subject would refuse to obey the experimenter; they believed that only a pathological one to two percent would proceed to 450 volts. The significance of the experiment can be seen on many levels, the most important of which, as Milgram noted, is the obedience to authority. "It is the extreme willingness of adults to go to almost any lengths on the command of authority that constitutes the chief finding of the study and the fact most urgently demanding explanation" (1975:5). Milgram was disturbed by what he saw as the "banality of evil," that ordinary people with no pathology could shock a victim out of a sense of obligation to uphold the demands of an authority figure and not from any peculiar aggressive tendencies. Moreover, even when the subjects were made aware of the destructive effects of their actions and were asked to carry out actions of an amoral nature, relatively few had the fortitude needed to resist. Many found themselves continuing in the experiment even though they disagreed with what they were doing. The subjects divested themselves of responsibility by attributing all initiative to the experimenter whom they believed was a legitimate authority. They upheld the role of authority even when there was no threat of material loss or punishment.

Milgram's experiment is a stunning example of authority as a weapon of influence, and may explain the acceptance of authority figures in the media, especially those who address children. Indeed, children receive messages across all channels of media from knowing adults and peers directing them to take specific action by purchasing a product, or adopting a particular physical appearance. Milgram warned back in 1975 that the effects of authority unchecked were quite threatening:

> In growing up, the normal individual has learned to check the expression of aggressive impulses. But the culture has failed almost entirely in inculcating internal controls on actions that have their origin in authority. For this reason, the latter constitutes a far greater danger to human survival. (147)

It is highly questionable as to whether or not today's children are psychologically equipped to disagree with and reject the authority figures they encounter in the media throughout their day.

Even in extreme circumstances, Milgram was able to demonstrate how easily control and compliance can be attained. And when the experiment was repeated by Burger in 2009 under somewhat milder conditions, the results were the same. It is likely that North American culture has not evolved to a level in which blind obedience to authority is no longer a danger.

Zimbardo's Prison Experiment: Conformity under Systemic Influence

Zimbardo's 1971 Stanford prison experiment also demonstrated that conformity to adopted roles, to the detriment of oneself and others, is extremely powerful. Before the experiment began all 24 participants were established to be physically and mentally healthy with no history of crime or violence. Each of the student volunteers was randomly assigned to play the role of prisoner or guard in a setting designed to convey a sense of the psychology of imprisonment. The experiment was established to ensue over a two-week period without break. Yet, it took just a few days for the guards to become abusive to the point of sadistically tormenting their prisoners; they invented a variety of psychological tactics to demonstrate their dominance over their powerless charges. Nakedness was a common punishment, as was placing prisoners' heads in nylon stocking caps, chaining their legs, repeatedly waking them throughout the night for hour-long counts and forcing them into humiliating "fun and games" activities. Dozens of people had come to the prison setting, seen some of the abuse or its effects, and made no protest. Everyone involved, either directly or indirectly, with the exception of one lone research assistant obeyed without question. Zimbardo was eventually forced to terminate the study after only six days because it was running out of control. It had been convincingly demonstrated that once again, situational variables can and do overpower many individuals, even when cruelty is being inflicted. Zimbardo (2007) partly attributes the behaviour of the subjects of his experiment to the need to belong, associate with others, and accept group norms. He adds "the need to belong can also be perverted into excessive conformity, compliance, and in-group versus out-group hostility" (230). Further to this, Zimbardo clearly states that the *system* in a given culture provides the institutional support, authority and resources that allow situations to unfold as they do.

> The person is an actor on the stage of life whose behavioral freedom is informed by his or her make-up—genetic, biological, physical and psychological. The situation is the behavioral contact that has the power, through its reward and normative functions, to give meaning and identity to the actor's roles and status. The system consists of the agents and agencies

> whose ideology, values and power creates situations and dictates the roles and expectations for approved behaviors of actors within its spheres of influence. (2007:445-446)

For children immersed in the system of consumer capitalism, situations at the most intimate level of media direct them to specific roles reinforced by the system. Theirs is not to question but to dutifully comply according to the dictates of the market. And as Zimbardo's experiment showed, under the right system or circumstances, we can be made to do and believe just about anything, even if contrary to our own well-being. One of the critical messages from the Stanford prison experiment is, therefore, to be sensitive about our vulnerability to subtle but powerful situational forces, and by such awareness, develop the ability to overcome those forces through deconstruction of the system in which they exist. This capacity is way beyond the means of many adults, and relatively impossible for the majority of children whose cognitive functioning is still maturing.

Research on Persuasion and Conformity with Children

Up until about the age of eight, children do not understand the persuasive nature of advertising and, instead, think that advertisements are there just to provide information (Oates et al. 2002). At least a couple of variables, family influence and getting older, seem to decrease children's vulnerability to advertising. First, some scholars maintain that if children are exposed to media education taught by adults, their ability to critically assess what they are viewing in the media increases, thus providing them with a better understanding of the nature and purpose of advertising (e.g., Buckingham 2003). Second, as children become older, they are less susceptible to the persuasive appeal of advertisements, but become more susceptible to peer pressure. However, while they may be less susceptible they are not immune. There are numerous studies that link drinking intentions to exposure of and liking of alcohol advertisements (Austin and Knaus 2000; Fleming et al., 2004; Chen et al., 2005; Hurtz et al., 2007). Further to this, longitudinal research suggests that over time, the effects of media exposure may elevate body image disturbance (Hausenblas et al., 2013). Furthermore, Hausenblas et al. (2013), after conducting a meta-analysis, revealed that exposure to an idealized thin or muscular image can result in eating disorder-related symptoms. This causal connection is more pronounced with individuals who are at high risk for developing an eating disorder.

Kwon and Lease (2009) sought to examine whether the relationship between friendship group norms and children's intended conformity to those norms is greater when they strongly identify with their friendship group. They found that children who have a high consensus on their friendship group membership reported feeling a greater sense of connection and belonging, as well as more positive emotions toward their friendship group. For children, it appears that when they strongly identify with a group, they are more likely to adopt the beliefs and behaviours that are accepted by the group; the converse is also true.

It is widely believed that young people engage in smoking and other risk behaviours (illegal drugs, alcohol) because of peer pressure (Gordon 1986). A frequently applied theoretical model of peer influence implies an *active*, explicit form of peer influence. Yet, so far, the findings of survey studies, operating within an active peer influence assumption, are inconsistent (Harakeh and Vollebergh 2012). An alternative explanation for the influence of peers can be found in a social cognitive/learning theory of Bandura which suggests that individuals observe and imitate other's behaviours so as to accrue positive rewards like belonging to a group or simply, being liked—hence, *passive* (imitation) peer pressure (Harakeh and Vollebergh 2012). It is important to note that individuals often imitate the behaviour of others spontaneously and unintentionally, and are not necessarily aware of engaging in conformist acts. Harakeh and Vollebergh (2012) found that young adults (aged 16 to 25) seem to engage in smoking because their social environment passively evokes such behaviour and less because they are actively pressured. Nonetheless, it appears that social conformity plays a significant role in the types of behaviours that individuals adopt. As another example, Teunissen et al. (2012) found that adolescents would conform to the drinking behaviour of both pro-alcohol and anti-alcohol norms of peers. However, they did not conform equally to all peers; as expected they conformed more with popular than unpopular peer norms. In general, as children mature, parental influence will usually decrease while conformity to peer groups increases. Preadolescents begin to use clothing to conform to peers as early as age eight; one of the most visible ways of "fitting in" is to physically resemble others who are deemed to be socially desirable (Meyer and Anderson 2000).

Social Consent in Consumer Societies

Non-conformity, even in democratic 'free' societies, implies a sort of threat to the habits of others. This is true in an obvious way when non-conformist behaviour directly challenges the morality or rationality of conformist behaviour (Hogan 2001). Each of us develops what might be called a "practical identity"—an internalized set of habits, routines, expectations, and so forth. It is this identity that allows us to navigate through daily activities with relative ease, to coordinate actions unreflectively with the actions of others. The scaffold of our lives is built upon this set of unreflective expectations and practices, which Bordieu (1984) called the 'habitus,' for which some degree of broad conformity is clearly necessary. When faced with non-conformism, the individual invariably perceives this as a threat to their practical identity. As well, social disapproval is aroused by non-conformity because the non-conformist is subjected to particular scrutiny to the extent that 'flaws' become salient (Hogan 2001). Survival needs (food, housing, and clothing), requires that we conform to and accept the relations of production that not only sustain, but at times, also stifle us. It is our dependence on others or the feeling of dependence that stops us from pursuing even the most elementary of rights. Thus, what can be seen in consumer capitalism is the tendency toward what Hogan (2001) refers to as imitative conformity, the inclination to adopt behaviours as an assurance for social acceptance and survival. Even when confusion and fear are consequences of prior conformity, we generally react to these feelings by conforming further still. In general, people disdain the thought of collective scrutiny, and thus, perhaps the object of collective rejection or hurt. Rather, we often turn to others to examine their wants on the assumption that those wants would also make us happy, all the while failing to do so. Yet, we know from studies on materialism that this is not the case despite being one of the fundamental principles and contradictions sustaining consumer capitalism (Kasser 2002).

Consumer capitalism fosters a fierce level of competitiveness amongst individuals who are ranked on a scale of privilege such that different status groups are often pitted against each other. Individuals often build their self-esteem and identity according to whether or not they hold a dominant position over someone else (Sidanius and Pratto 1999). People strive to increase their subjective well-being, in part, by contrasting themselves with those in a so-called lower hierarchical stratum. With the exception of those at the bottom, downward comparison contributes to an internal satisfaction, another motivating force that results in conformity

(Hogan 2001). People learn to adapt to the conditions in which they find themselves and then rely on the gratification those conditions present, however meagre. This gratification is tied to what is known as secondary gains, those which also become a means of reinforcing conformity. The individual who calls society to task on moral grounds of economic inequality for example, faces great scorn, for it is action according to moral principle that is the most threatening form of nonconformity. This can be accounted for by the fact that most people have a deep emotional need to think of themselves as behaving ethically. It is important, in other words, that individuals not conceive of themselves as bad or evil but as fundamentally good. It is this need that solidifies conformity, even in the face of obvious injustice (Hogan 2001). Thus, believing in a just world leads directly to consensual conformism and, at times, even to vicious forms of victim blaming. Ironically, it is not only oppressors and third parties who commit themselves to believing that the world is just—the oppressed do so as well. Victims learn to rely on the belief that the world is just because it helps them to survive their being victims. Hogan (2001) believes it is the limitations of people's moral reasoning that tends to render their ethical decisions consensual thus squelching dissent. An ideology that fosters consent, like consumerism, operates both by encouraging positive beliefs and setting the terms of debate to ensure contrary (or questioning) beliefs are less popular. Furthermore, those who fail to attain the 'American dream' are taught that they are to blame. Individuals who thus 'fail' often believe they are solely responsible, and continue to defend capitalism while knowing that it is inherently unfair for minorities, women, children, and other under-privileged groups.

Social Dominance Theory and Conformity

According to Sidanius and Pratto (1999), there is a human predisposition to structure and maintain social organization based on hierarchies. The hierarchy consists of dominant hegemonic groups at the top and a number of subordinate groups at the bottom. Further, all societies exhibit three hierarchical systems: a gender system, an age system and an arbitrary-set (based on factors such as ethnicity, religion or social class) (Sidanius and Pratto 1999). More specifically, in the gender hierarchy "males have disproportionate social and political power compared with females," while in the age hierarchy, "adults and middle-aged people have disproportionate social power over children and young adults" (Sidanius and Pratto 1999:33). The arbitrary-set system is:

> Filled with socially constructed and highly salient groups based on characteristics such as clan, ethnicity, state, nation, race, caste, social class, religious fact, regional grouping, or any other socially relevant group distinction that the human imagination is capable of constructing (Sidanius and Pratto 1999:33).

Social dominance theory is built on the premise that hierarchies are sustained by several psychological predispositions that humans generally possess: the tendency to exaggerate differences between social categories; the tendency to favour in-groups over out-groups; the tendency to be especially responsive to threats rather than to potential gains (Sidanius and Pratto 1999). Each of these tendencies contributes to peoples' predilections to outline social group boundaries, stereotype out-group members and hold prejudicial views against the generalized "other."

Much of what sustains group dominance can be explained by people's general tolerance of oppression and group discrimination. Hierarchies of domination and subordination are also bolstered through the process of establishing legitimacy by the spread of ideologies and by the inadvertent collaborative role of individuals in subordinate positions to support existing hierarchies. The cultural ideologies of any given society are usually so thoroughly embedded and widely recognized that it is relatively easy for ideology to be evoked at a person-to-person level and so influence a person's behaviour to enact such ideology. Sidanius and Pratto (1999) introduced what they call the "behavioral asymmetry hypothesis" which explains that out-group members actually favour in-group members. Put differently, the expressions by members of both dominant and subordinate groups not only result from their power differentials, but contribute to them. As Sidanius and Pratto note, "it is subordinates' high level of both passive and active cooperation with their own oppression that provides systems of group-based social hierarchy with their remarkable degrees of resiliency, robustness and stability" (44).

Social dominance theory offers considerable insight into understanding how powerful the process of conformity plays out in daily life. Children in particular, are born with a predilection of either dominance or subordination, or more probably an intricate combination of the two, adopting the characteristics of their in-group or out-group members. Breaking out of the mould of a consumer lifestyle poses a threat to one's hierarchical positioning and could result in a drop in status from the dominant in-group to subordinate out-group. Faced with rejection,

children are under enormous pressure to conform, to uphold values, beliefs and behaviours that reinforce the normative hegemony of their given culture.

Individuality: The Face of Conformity

The omnipresent and potent ideology of individualism permeates consumer culture and those who argue in its favour declare that children have never been afforded such opportunity for self-expression (McNeal 2007). Yet, as people are seeking the outward appearance of uniqueness or specialness at the core they hold conformist convictions. In other words, outer individuality obscures inner conformity (Niedzviecki 2004). Niedzviecki, a cultural critic, sees Americans clamouring after fabricated and instantaneous stardom. US culture places great value on the celebrity to the degree that performance of almost any kind is being used to get noticed. Niedzviecki comments that "many of us are starting to feel the pressure to 'realize' ourselves as a 'mythology'" (11). It is no longer enough to be well-educated with a responsible vocation. Now, the bar has been set for mega-wealth and fame. The hallmark of the new conformity, externalized performance and internal normalcy can be found in the myriad of reality TV shows. Losers are portrayed as those content to stick with the crowd, while winners are those who are willing to risk by reinventing themselves to stand out. Indeed, one of the hottest items to be sold on the Internet is the self; Internet dating for example, ranks in the top five uses of the web in the US (Niedzviecki 2004). Corporations are more than willing to fan the flames of specialness by offering opportunities to personalize everything from beer to license plates, to even portable technologies. The rise of conformist individuality is confirmed by the plethora of such goods and opportunities to convey uniqueness to the world. The pressure to constantly reinvent oneself, and come up with a good enough 'story,' can lead to a perpetual anxiety, fear and depression—the autonomous self is virtually lost. At one time, we were relatively content with our status in the middle; now we strive for something better and faster. The quest for opportunities to express our narrative place a tremendous pressure on identity construct as we strive to 'make it' in the media and truly be perceived as special. At the heart of the new conformity is a fantasy about successful self-reliance when in reality we are beholden to the system of buy and sell. Yet, the message of pop culture is always that of the triumph of the ordinary person who is able to buck the system and become the exception. Thus, it is no surprise that television features recurring characters whose lives are more exciting, triumphant and

different than the ordinary citizen. The message or pressure to turn one's life into a success story is found everywhere in the culture. Niedzviecki summarizes: "Once film was the only peddler of the fantasy of transcendent reinvention. But now there are also pop songs, TV shows, video games, celebrity magazines. This material all promotes a whole new relationship to the self: a philosophy of "'I'm Specialism'" (73).

The power and allure of pop culture is deep—the myth that anyone can attain stardom is perpetuated throughout. In the struggle to renew our claim to our own fantasies, people seem more and more to be disconnected from the self. The World Health Organization cites depression as the leading cause of disability in developed nations and predicts that by 2020 it will be the second leading cause of disability worldwide (Niedzviecki 2004). Local cultures are shrinking as pop culture and its products spread, as does the addictive promise of the new conformity. Increasingly, the culture is set up largely to ease the way for individual striving: "Intense individuality fenced in by intense regulation... breeds intense conformism in the form of pseudo-individuality" (135). It has become near impossible for the ordinary citizen to break free of pop culture because of the ensuing isolation. Yet, individuals are often separated from one another by failing to connect in a truly meaningful way despite being hooked on technology. There are free cyber-communities that almost anyone can join as long as they conform to the particular restrictions or mindset of the group. However they seem to serve no real purpose other than to provide individuals a place where they can be noticed, and where the narrative of their lives can be manufactured, seemingly infused with meaning.

Components of Creativity

Creativity can be defined as "a person's capacity to produce new or original ideas, insights, restructuring inventions or artistic objects, which are accepted by experts as being of scientific, aesthetic, social or technological value" (Russ 1993:2). Hence, creative ideas or products are not only novel, but also have a certain value or meaning either for the creator or the culture. Ironically, ideas and objects deemed to be original and creative often become commoditized in capitalist cultures, losing their novelty as they are adopted en masse. Essentially, creativity involves three basic features: novelty, unconventionality and validity (Vosburg and Kaufmann 1999). Based on Russ's (1993) writings, for a product to be judged as creative it must be: 1) unique, original and novel and, 2) good, useful and, aesthetically pleasing

according to the standard of the particular discipline from which it derives. In environments that are conducive, children have tremendous capacity to generate and express themselves creatively. Indeed, all individuals possess creative abilities to some degree; Guilford (Russ 1993) proposes that "creative acts can therefore be expected, no matter how frequent or how infrequent, of almost all individuals" (82). The cognitive abilities associated with creativity include divergent thinking which encompasses such concepts as free association, broad scanning ability and fluidity of thinking. Also included are transformation abilities, meaning the ability to shift sets, to think flexibly, to utilize different problem-solving approaches and to reorder information. Being sensitive to problems and problem-finding are other important cognitive capacities of the creative individual. Breadth of knowledge, insight and evaluative ability are also essential to the creative act. Thus, the major personality traits important in the creative process are: tolerance of ambiguity, openness to experience, possession of unconventional values, independence of judgment, curiosity, preference for challenge and complexity, self-confidence, propensity for risk-taking and intrinsic motivation (Russ 1993). Those environments that allow for, even encourage the expression of such traits are thought to be found in democratic societies. Yet, as Horkheimer and Adorno (1973) and Marcuse (1964) explicitly noted, the situation is far more complex.

There are two broad affective processes related to creative cognitive ability. The first is having access to affect-laden thoughts (Russ 1993). Primary process thinking and affective fantasy in daydreams, and in play, are examples of this kind of ability. The second, being open to affect states, means the ability to experience the affect is also critical to the creative process. It would appear that children and adults who have access to affect-laden thoughts and fantasy are more creative than individuals who are less able to access this material. Additionally, children who are able to express and experience affect in play are more creative than children who are less able. A growing body of research indicates that, in particular, positive affect is associated with improved creative problem solving across a broad range of settings (Isen 1999). For example, young adolescents showed increased verbal fluency when positioned in a positive-affect condition (Isen 1999). It appears that self-confidence is also important in helping a child to persist in a task, try alternative solutions, and tolerate repeated failures before a novel or good solution occurs. Curiosity and intrinsic motivation also play a role in keeping the individual on task. Affect of pleasure in the task would also be important here (Russ 1993). A possible

mediator of the influence of positive effect on creative problem-solving may involve the release of dopamine, one of the brain's neurotransmitters (Isen 1999).

Children's play is extremely important in the creative process because play is the arena in which children have the opportunity to express affect-laden thoughts and affect states (Russ 1993). Play helps the child with a number of vital processes: expand vocabulary and link objects with actions, develop object constancy, form event schemas and scripts, learn strategies for problem-solving, develop divergent thinking ability, and a flexibility and shifting between different types of thoughts (narrative and logical) (Russ 1993). Over time, the child who uses play will develop the habit of being open to affect and emotions and of actively working on problems. The type of play most important to the development of creativity is pretend play or that which involves pretending, the use of fantasy and make-believe, and the use of symbolism (Russ 1999).

In sum, most researchers agree that no single cognitive, affective or personality trait is sufficient to ensure creative process will emerge and that there is no fixed formula for predicting creativity. It is possible, even likely, that creativity can cause tension because it often leads to non-conformity. Indeed, in very general terms, creative behaviour is deviant and can easily upset activity that is guided by a routine—and most children's activity is routine, if not outright stereotyped (Runco 1999). Thus, most characteristics of creative children are perceived as "out-of-order," and as "non-conformist," trying to avoid social norms and discipline. This is true in the school system, for example, where creativity can be met with authority and the striving for social unanimity (Guncer and Oral 1993).

It appears that children's capacity for creativity in the US is in steady decline as evidenced by a massive study conducted by Kyung Hee Kim, an educational psychologist (Shellenbarger 2010). Her research team reviewed 300,000 scores from 1966 to 2008 derived from the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking, a standardized test that has reliably predicted creative capacity in children. Between 1990 and 2008, especially in the kindergarten through sixth-grade age group, test scores were observed to have fallen significantly. The researchers attributed part of this decline to the sharp rise in computer use and television watching as both activities require little to no creative response or action. Hee Kim (2010) also believes because schools are structured for rote learning and standardized tests the infrastructure necessary to foster creativity is largely absent (Shellenbarger 2010).

Agency-Structure Dichotomy

In order to understand the factors contributing to an individual's expression of creativity or capacity to act independently and freely, we must turn to the debate of agency versus structure. In chapter one, the discussion revolved around the ways in which culture, an element of structure, limits and influences agency. Structure encompasses many aspects of the components of culture (social class, religion, gender, ethnicity, etc.) meaning those usually tacit rules and resources which guide our behaviours, attitudes and values. Structure has a strong social component and can be said to encompass those "social arrangements, social relations and social practices which exert enormous power and constraint over our lives" (Musolf 2003:1). In contrast, agency refers to the ways in which individuals exert themselves in social interactions to shape the very systems within which they are situated (Musolf 2003). As Musolf describes, "agency emerges through the ability of humans to ascribe meaning to objects and events, to define the situation based on those meanings, and then to act" (3). The agency versus structure debate is essentially reduced to a question of cause and effect. Do cultures or social structures influence and shape an individual's actions (e.g. conforming to the norms) or does the individual act freely in a way that influences the social structure around him/her (e.g. rejecting customs)? Giddens developed a theory of structuration as a means of accounting for human action that accepts both structure and agency (Baber 1991). Giddens argues that agency is not the expression of individual actors, but is representative of actor's interaction with each other. Hence, we must remember that social structures, those that appear to impose on the individual, are "continually created and recreated in every encounter, as the active accomplishment of human subjects" (Baber 1991:223). Thus, Giddens tried to resolve the polarities that the agency versus structure debate inevitably renders. Rather than arguing on the side of voluntarism and its opposite, determinism, it makes more sense, according to Fuchs (2001), to treat agency on a continuum: "Agency, creativity and genius are not essential properties that some persons 'have' qua person. Rather, they are... more likely in some situations, on some occasions, and in some networks than others" (39). In summary, social structures operate in a multitude of ways influencing the expression of agency positively or negatively. Some subsets of culture are highly conciliatory with respect to agency while others consider it adversarial.

This dissertation largely deals with a structural analysis yet, structure cannot exist without agency. These two elements are allied with the "individual," who both informs and

participates in structural social systems with either the intent to conform or rebel, not necessarily in an opposing manner, but simply to exert one's intent in a direction different from that of the status quo. It would be too simplistic an argument to suggest that people are completely controlled, "mere robots, programmed to conform to a structured pattern" (Hays 1994:61). In fairness, though not delineated in this thesis, Adorno and others in the Frankfurt School turned to Freud as a means of understanding psychological motivation and action. They were not naive to the fact that culture was the primary force in sculpting the mind, and sought to address the 'problem' of agency through the application of psychoanalysis within social theory. It is clear that structures not only limit the latitude one may digress, they also provide the right environment from which creativity and freedom can flourish. At the same time, to diminish structural influence is to over-rate people's capacity for self-efficacy and individualism (Hays 1994). Hays (1994), like Fuchs (2001), believes that we must conceptualize both structure and agency on a continuum. After all, structures are the outcome and production of individual action and, agency is always shaped by social structure, often reflective of *collective* choices. The tendency is to conceive choices as individually driven and representative of individual freedom; yet, we must also remember that choices are always the outcome of social influence (Hays 1994). Thus, agency may be best conceptualized as the process in which an individual exercises social choices that are limited by structurally-bound alternatives.

Fromm (1981) suggests that Western cultures cultivate the *feeling* that each of us is the "center and active subject of his powers," that the full experience of attaining individuality is to reject *obvious* authoritarian constraints (8). He defines well-being as the capacity to be creative, independent and live in the world with a satisfaction of *being* rather than *having*. Fromm explains that obedience to the self, to one's own conviction, is life affirming; whereas obedience to a person or institution is a submission, an abdication of autonomy. To follow one's own convictions and judgment is to be true to oneself, to be an "I." This description is the essence of agency, the ability to be disobedient not for the sake of rebellion, but for the purpose of affirming the self. As Fromm (1981:21) puts it: "Freedom and the capacity for disobedience are inseparable; hence, any social, political, and religious system which proclaims freedom, yet stamps out disobedience, cannot speak the truth." Why then are we so fearful of and adverse to disobedience if it is in our best interest? Fromm (1981) believes this is largely understood by the desire for safety, strength, and perhaps most importantly, a sense of identity, even if illusory.

Thus, to have agency is to be disobedient with respect to the infrastructures that restrict creative, self-fulfilling development. Ultimately, agency refers to the rejection of beliefs, norms and customs that restrict the capacity to critically evaluate.

When talking about children, the question of agency versus structure becomes even more complex than when considering that of adults. As children mature, we expect that their agency is emboldened, more prominent and representative of their burgeoning mind and concomitant behaviours. Typically, we attribute the child's agency as peaking in adolescence. Yet, the agency of children more likely develops and gets expressed throughout the entirety of childhood. While a child's social life is fundamentally structured by family, school, church, community, etc., such systems also support a wide range of possible choices that have the capacity for creative expression and determinism. Thus, for children living in consumer cultures (and elsewhere) striving for free expression is critical to their development as autonomous human beings. And as Fromm (1981:10) stresses, to disobey and forge one's own niche, to reject aspects of consumer culture, may be all that stands between a creative life of integrity and becoming "one of the herd."

Neuro-Marketing and the Malleable Mind

Neuroscience has now established that the mind is malleable throughout one's lifetime, especially during the sensitive period of early childhood (Greenfield 2000; Kandel 2006; Restak 2006). Our beliefs, experiences, memories, even the very self are malleable, changeable and mouldable to the degree that warrants serious reflection on the reliability of both memory and belief (Brillinger 2009). Neuromarketing is one of the tools that has advanced considerably and is being used to influence people below the level of conscious awareness, thereby reducing their reactance to losses of freedom of mind (Taylor 2004). The mind is no longer separable from the activity of the brain; according to neuroscience, it is the "product of the brain" (Harris 2010:180). So advanced is the 'science' of neuro-marketing that corporations can now sway us to buy their products before any of us realize we have been subjected to a form of advertising (Lindstrom 2008). For example, there is now experimentation in using brain scans to see which parts of the brain are activated when exposed to specific advertisements. Advertisers have moved beyond surveys, focus groups and depth interviews and are now experimenting with uncovering unconscious motivations (Berger 2007). As for children, their burgeoning brains are

fodder for the corporate advances that manipulate and control how a child thinks, reacts and responds to various stimuli in the form of advertisements.

Conscious versus Subconscious Processing: 21st Century Marketing

Generally speaking, the subconscious is conceptualized as an automatic mental process that is spontaneous, uncontrollable and immediate, something that just *happens* (Restak 2006). Furthermore, the subconscious is understood to be that mode of thinking, desiring and becoming that is not immediately accessible to conscious deliberation, yet drives much of behaviour (Bargh and Chartrand 1999). We now understand that differentiating between subconscious and conscious thoughts and decision-making has become increasingly blurred—"conscious decisions" are laced with unconscious influences (Eagleman 2011). The neurologist Robert Burton (2008) believes that the distinction between conscious and subconscious thought has been grossly misunderstood. When failing to experience intentionality we are under the illusion that thoughts are simply *un*intentional, that they simply "occur to us" or are part of the subconscious.

Ultimately, we like to believe that most of our thinking is conscious (cognitive, analytic, reflective, systematic), and distinctly different from subconscious processes. People to lesser or greater extents can think and act consciously, and rationally (Indeed, the scientific method is built on this ability). However conscious deliberation is not always what it seems. Despite conventional beliefs, subconscious cognition determines much of goal setting, attitude formation and even decision-making (Coleman 2007).

Vision takes up approximately one third of the brain's resources so quite a lot of brain activity takes place in the observation of others (Ramachandran 2011). Mirror neurons refer to those that fire when an action is being performed and even when that same action is only being observed. For example, watching another person experience physical pain triggers "pain-related" regions of the brain. These mirror neurons can even be activated when we are reading about someone's actions. Mirror neurons not only help us imitate other people, but are also responsible for human empathy; they send signals to the limbic system, or emotional region, of our brains that then help us tune in to one another's feelings (Lindstrom 2008). And, as consumers, our mirror neurons may pave the way for adopting others' shopping experiences and ultimately, influencing our purchasing decisions. Indeed, just seeing a certain product over and

over makes it more desirable. Mirror neurons do not work alone; often they work in tandem with dopamine, the pleasure chemical produced by the brain, and one of the most addictive substances known to humans (Lindstrom 2008). So shopping can indeed make us feel happier, at least in the very short term, due in part to a flush of dopamine. Scientists have even isolated an area in the frontal cortex of the brain called "Brodmann area 10" that is activated when we see products that we think are 'cool;' this area of the brain is associated with self-perception and emotions activated by social behaviours. Lindstrom (2008:67) offers this warning "[Buyers] beware. Because the future of advertising isn't smoke and mirrors—it's mirror neurons. And they will prove even more powerful in driving our loyalty, our minds, our wallets and our buyology than even marketers themselves could have anticipated."

Lindstrom (2008) found, when conducting a rather massive series of experiments on neuro-marketing, that more activity in the reward and craving centers of the brain occurred when subjects viewed subliminal images associated with the product, rather than more overt images. For example, images paired with cigarettes such as a Ferrari vehicle or beautiful sunset triggered more cravings among smokers than the logos of the cigarette packs themselves. Subliminal advertising is powerful because people let their guard down, not believing they are under the influence of an advertisement. Lindstrom (2008) proposes that once people stop protecting themselves from the seductive power of an advertisement, the brain is no longer on high alert and therefore responds only at the subconscious level to the stimulus presented. Big tobacco's effort to pair "innocent images" with smoking at an unconscious level has been highly successful. The tobacco companies have succeeded in bypassing government regulations by creating stimuli powerful enough to replace traditional advertising. Hence, banning cigarette advertising did very little to deter smoking because the images associated with smoking were far more potent than the tobacco logos. As well, many corporations have abandoned logos as salient forms of advertising. The implications of Lindstrom's finding are that we can be persuaded to buy almost anything without having a clear understanding as to why. Additionally, it means that marketers have tremendous latitude in finding the most potent association with which to sell their products.

Brands

One aspect of Lindstrom's neuro-marketing research was to examine the effect of various brands on the brain with those subjects who identified as being religious. These subjects' brain scans were the same whether they were shown powerful brands images or religious icons (Lindstrom 2008). In other words, brand images are extremely salient.

Somatic Marker Hypothesis

The somatic marker hypothesis indicates "emotional factors influence our decisions whether or not we are aware of it" (Sternberg 2010:69). The brain develops shortcuts or "somatic markers" sown by past experiences of reward and punishment. These markers (anchored in the nervous system of the body) serve to connect an emotion with a specific response generated by the brain. For example, we may associate an advertised shampoo with a good feeling based on images in an advertisement for the product. Thus, when shopping for shampoo, the marker is activated—we feel good and decide on a purchase believing to have done so on a hunch. Somatic markers allow us to make quick decisions with little deliberation. Advertisers work to create somatic markers in the neurology of consumers to increase the odds that they will choose their product. It is estimated that over 50 percent of all purchasing decisions by shoppers are made at an unconscious level and not spontaneously, at the point of sale. Fear too can create some of the most powerful somatic markers as Lindstrom (2008) describes:

> Practically every brand category I can think of plays on fear. I predict that in the near future advertising will be based more and more on fear-driven somatic markers as advertisers attempt to scare us into believing that not buying their product will make us feel less safe, less happy, less free, and less in control of our lives. (138)

Conclusion

We are living in an age of propaganda in which the dexterous and subtle use of images, slogans and symbols play on our prejudices and emotions for the purpose of convincing us that we have voluntarily arrived at a position of cognition as if on our own initiative (Pratkanis and Aronson 2001). Increasingly, the goal of modern propaganda is not to inform and enlighten, but rather to move the people toward a particular point of view that benefits the corporation (Pratkanis and Aronson 2001). For example, neuroscientists have already studied how our brains

make decisions about how much money we are willing to pay for a product (Lindstrom 2008). It seems likely that neuroscience research will continue to provide information to corporations about how to work our unconscious impulses in their favour. The successful persuasion tactic of today is one that "directs and channels thoughts so that the target thinks in a manner agreeable to the communicator's point of view; the successful tactic disrupts any negative thoughts and promotes positive thoughts about the proposed course of action". (Pratkanis and Aronson 2001:31). With this kind of tactic, combined with the weapons of influence already well established in corporate culture, it will be very challenging for children to generate their creative potential and resist conforming to the dictates of consumer culture.

The constraints and parameters of consumer culture are such that many children appear to be living a pre-scripted life, one short on true creative expression. The media continuously preach at and reinforce children to accept popular norms and conform to the 'system' on all levels; it then becomes extremely challenging to break free of a conformist lifestyle, to forge an identity that is genuine or autonomous. Younger children are especially vulnerable where identity is less a choice and more an intuitive process until they reach an age where active decision-making can occur. Milgram, Zimbardo, Asch, and others discussed above have demonstrated that conformity is a powerful drive that many succumb to, particularly under the influence of authority or group pressure. Creativity on the other hand must be fostered, encouraged and allowed to flourish unfettered by the constraints of social norms. Creativity is the means through which the self finds integral expression beyond the mimicry of superficiality that so characterizes popular culture. It has become a relatively rare phenomenon in children whose lives are scheduled and orchestrated according to the whims of media technology. The pull to conform to the lifestyle or habits of a consumer is powerful and thus requires complex navigation to offset the negative outcomes that go hand-in-hand with such lifestyle. Understanding the intricacies of resisting the pull of conformity amongst children could potentially reveal how creative process is developed and nurtured in consumer societies and further, help to unveil variables that may mitigate degrees of conformity. It may be that children have little awareness of succumbing to the tenets of consumer culture and are unable to recognize the face of non-conformity. As Niedzviecki (2004) skilfully points out, the 'new' individuality resembles the 'old' conformity—it is thus easy to be duped into believing one's creative expression is genuine rather than hackneyed. Commodities set up the seeming paradox

of locating uniqueness in and through objects that are mass-produced so that self-expression is always under threat of conformity in consumer cultures. By the same token, the quest for authenticity may slide towards artificiality (Maguire and Stanway 2008).

Review

All six of the theorists critiqued in chapter one offer an interpretation of modern consumer culture and why it may be failing society at large. We have seen how under the cloak of democracy, *un*democratic processes have prevailed and placed ordinary citizens in a position of limited choice. Thus, inverted totalitarianism is testament to the ways in which corporations have gained the rights of a person and as such, dominated the political forum in both Canada and the US. The issues that plague consumer-dominated societies are complex to navigate for most adults—for children, a near impossibility. We have seen in chapter two how today's children are inundated with a hyper-consumer culture that seems to be dominating their lives and causing significant harm. The central message from the findings of the numerous studies reviewed in chapter two suggests that consumer culture is problematic for many children.

In chapter three, we examined the ways and means of enforcing conformity and the methods of persuasion that are commonly used by corporations through advertising. The central point of this chapter was to look at how adults can be easily persuaded to do all kinds of things under the right conditions, even behaviours that run counter to their morals. Children are easy fodder for those who apply influence techniques considering how impressionable children are with regard to societal norms. Chapter three also reviewed what it means to be creative, how children might resist the grain of conformity.

The paucity of literature on the experiences associated with consumer culture, as heard directly from those who are affected, was the driving force for the research that I undertook. I wished to explore, with young people—those who have faced the ubiquitous presence of consumer culture from birth—how they viewed their childhoods with respect to being a consumer. Young adults aged 18 or 19 were chosen as participants in the study because of the likelihood of their capacity to reflect about and articulate their consumer experiences.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

I chose qualitative research as the methodology for this study on consumer culture because it tends to emphasize the dynamic, holistic and individual aspects of human experience, and attempts to cover those aspects in their entirety, but within the context of those who are experiencing them. Also, since the purpose of qualitative research is not prediction and control, but rather description and understanding, this method of research was selected in order to gain close proximity to the experiences of those upon whom the research was focused. There is a considerable gap in the research as to how young people experience and understand the meaning of consumer culture *throughout* their lives, and since little is known about these phenomena, or how accurately present theories address them, further research was needed. My research process followed a model of an inductive data-driven format in which individual interviews were conducted. Each interview was analyzed to identify codes or recurring concepts. The codes were then organized into larger categories from which themes were identified (Corbin and Strauss 2008).

Specifically, the study incorporated an open-ended interview guide (Appendix 1) aimed at soliciting responses related to the experiences associated with consumerism. The interview questions were used as a guideline to elicit rich descriptions and served as a tool to encourage discussion. Critical theory was applied as an analytical mechanism with which to further understand and interpret the interview data. Critical theory is concerned with analysis of the constraints placed on individuals by race, class, gender and other constructs such as those social distinctions that act as barriers to personal and social emancipation. Put somewhat differently, critical theory supports an examination of the personal while considering the context of larger social, political, gendered and economic parameters (Creswell 2007).

The interview data were reduced to clusters of meaning, and then coded so that similar concepts across interviews could be connected and subsequently, analyzed. Once the analysis had been completed, a reanalysis of the data occurred; this time, each emergent theme was viewed in a contextual framework (critical theory framework) to shed light on the larger cultural factors that may have influenced or contributed to the type of data collected. Critical theory recognizes that privileged groups within a culture often have an interest in supporting the status quo to protect their advantages and therefore, seek to identify who dominates in specific

situations (Kincheloe and McLaren 2005). Hence, for a qualitative research study, critical theory invites inclusion of subjective experience as a valid process with which to understand social phenomena. Thus, the aim of the research was to extend beyond a micro-level and place the research findings within a macro context—political, sociological, and psychological—that has broad implications at a societal or cultural level.

It is important to note that the intent of this study was *not* to determine whether or not consumer culture is harmful—the literature suggests that it is. Rather, it was an exploration to uncover the means with which such harms manifests within the context of cultural values and beliefs. The purpose of the study was to determine how individuals who are 18- or 19-years-old have experienced (in relation to meaning and understanding) consumer culture, both in terms of the past, present, and what they perceive or hope for in the future. Hence, the interview guide included numerous questions related to the participants' childhood, teenage and nuclear family years, including what they hoped for in the future. Children who were born in the 1990's (i.e., the research participants) have been heavily targeted by corporations whose aim was to inculcate them into a consumer lifestyle. While many of the effects of this 'campaign' are evident in data concerning their physical and psychological health, there is a paucity of research that recorded young people's direct understanding of their circumstance. Hence, do young people believe they were targeted? Do they feel that being a consumer is a central role in their lives?

Research Question

Given the impact that consumer culture has on children, how is this impact perceived once they reach adulthood? The primary research question "How do young people understand and experience consumer culture over the course of their lifetime?" was approached using a composite qualitative research methodology primarily informed by a paradigm from the works of Corbin and Strauss (2008), Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Fontana and Frey (2005). The primary goal behind the research question was to understand the nature and intensity of consumer experiences. To this end in-depth interviews were used so that each participant could divest their thoughts and feelings. It is only when personal experiences of individuals are understood that one can comprehend their framework of knowing and interpreting reality.

Interviews

The interview guide (Appendix A) was designed as a tool to probe into and reveal the meanings that young people attribute to their experiences of consumer culture. It is important to note that an open-ended interview, in keeping within the spirit of qualitative research, is not meant to be a mechanical activity that strictly follows pre-determined questions; rather, the interview must contain a degree of flexibility and develop somewhat freely in order to capture the life world of the respondents (Fontana and Frey 2005). Thus, additional questions (those not identified by the interview script) were spontaneously introduced as the interview process unfolded to help facilitate the dialogue and encourage reflection from each of the participants. The fact that individuals were asked to recall events that took place early in their lives meant that the credibility of the results was heavily dependent upon the participants' ability to access childhood memories. It is possible that the participants had a different recall from how childhood events actually unfolded; however, the bulk of the interview questions were designed to illicit the *feelings* that the participants associated with such events. It appeared that the participants accessed past feelings with relative ease judged by the certainty with which they answered the questions.

Critical Theory

A central component of critical theory is to understand the nuances of domination for the purpose of emancipation. Research invested in assessing issues of power, particularly within a consumer culture context, should have the capacity to analyze forces of domination that do not necessarily fall along more common categories such as class, race, gender or religion. In this study, by interviewing young people about their childhoods, critical theory was applied in the analysis to better understand the ways in which children are oppressed (or not) in consumer cultures. The political theorist Antonio Gramsci, writing in the early twentieth century, understood that dominant power is not always exercised simply by physical force but is also revealed through social-psychological actions; cultural institutions such as the media and various corporations play a role in the explication of power (Salamini 1974). As a researcher, I sought to capture the experiences of the participants, and their wider political context, as a means of explicating power dynamics relevant to the results of the study.

In general, consumerism is a ubiquitous blanket that impacts *all* citizens within capitalist cultures regardless of ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc. So for the purposes of this study, the research questions were not construed along those constructs; rather, the larger capitalist system was taken into consideration, particularly the impact of those corporations that control the technological, financial and communication infrastructures. As Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) note when describing relationships among culture, power and domination:

> Popular culture, with its TV, movies, video games, computers, music, dance, and other productions, plays an increasingly important role in critical research on power and domination... Arguing that the development of mass media has changed the way that culture operates, cultural studies researchers maintain that cultural epistemologies in the first decade of the 21st century are different from those of only a few decades ago. (310–311)

Those who have the financial resources to influence mass media are the new gods in our electronically-wired era. Corporations assert tremendous power over information systems such that in many industrialized societies corporate pedagogy threatens the very democratic systems that were once established to protect its interests (Wolin 2008). Understanding how the media in consumer cultures impacts the psycho-social functioning of young people was a central feature of this study, one that could be understood within a critical frame of reference.

For critical theorists, there are a number of basic assumptions that inform their world view. To begin with, all thought is said to be fundamentally mediated by power relations that are embedded in the social or cultural fabric of a given society. Knowledge can never be understood outside of the domain of power, values and ideology. Culture, including values, beliefs and attitudes, informs language, which is then said to be reflective of conscious and unconscious processes. Thus, the discourse of any given culture will reveal how that culture is organized with respect to power relations both at the macro- and micro-level of human experience. It follows that many human societies are constructed by dominant and subordinate groups; dominant groups assert privilege over subordinate groups that often, inadvertently, comply with their own oppression or resist domination in various ways (Kincheloe and McLaren 2005). In this study it was important to determine whether or not the participants felt that, or understood that, they were being subordinated by capitalist culture and if so, in what ways.

Qualitative Research Design

Interviews

Typically, the semi-structured qualitative research interview involves an informal and interactive process, utilizing open-ended comments and questions. Although a series of questions may be developed in advance of the interviews these may be varied, altered or not used at all since each respondents' story unfolds through a process that cannot be anticipated (Fontana and Frey 2005). The researcher attempts to obtain unprejudiced descriptions of the "life world"—the world as it is encountered (Kvale 1996). The interview is considered one of the main methods of data collection in qualitative research as it provides a forum whereby the respondents' descriptions can be explored, illuminated and probed. I attempted to facilitate dialogue by employing questions that probed feelings states such as "How did you feel when that happened?" or "What was that like?" These types of questions help to translate human experience by revealing how it presents itself in life (Pollio, Henley, and Thompson 1997). The self cannot be understood as well if questions are centered on fact-finding through a "what"-type orientation in which the self is treated as a "static representational and represents itself," rather than as the "fundamental self" (Crociani-Windland 2009:69). Hence, I followed a descriptive rather than explanatory or analytic format during the process of interviewing, so as to capture as much of the participant's subjective experiences as possible.

Considering the sensitivity and depth of the research topic, the interviews were conducted in such a way as to encourage both spontaneous and reflective processing. For example, there were many occurrences in which spontaneous questioning, as an encouragement of free association, was employed in order to reveal the complexity of meanings being described. It was recognized that thoughts and feelings go beyond a purely rational process and are "underlain by a hierarchy of unsophisticated and undifferentiated body-mind states" that are important to the interpretation of any given dialogue (Alexandrov 2009:40). Indeed, a number of occurrences arose in the interviews that suggested unconscious processing was occurring.

According to Kvale (1996), if one subscribes to critical theory, the knowledge generated by the interviews is related to five features of construction: 1) *conversation*, which comprises aspects of the interview; 2) *narrative* in which people tell stories about their lives in open interviews; 3) *language* or that which constitutes reality in varying ways. In the interview,

language is both a tool of interviewing and the object of textual interpretation; 4) *context* shapes and forms knowledge such that knowledge obtained in one set of circumstances does not necessarily generalize. The knowledge derived from an interview is embedded in the context of the here-and-now; and 5) *interrelational* meaning that knowledge is found in the mutual interaction of person to person.

Interviewer (Researcher)

Interviewing is concerned with the power of assumptions and to what degree they control the interviewer's vision. It is incumbent upon the researcher to reveal biases and taken-for-granted notions that may result in an alternative way of looking at the data (Fontana and Frey 2005). In qualitative studies the researcher is an important component and should not be poised as a distant, objectified self, and assumed to be neutral. In fact, as Fontana and Frey (2005) note, the interview can be thought of as a "mutually accomplished story" that is the product of collaboration between the researcher and participants (716). It is important to note that I did not, at any time, state my biases, motives, desires up-front, during the interview process. At the same time, there is no denying that as a researcher, I was hardly, what Fontana and Frey (2005:696) refer to as, a "neutral tool." Fontana and Frey (2005) believe that as researchers, we need to acknowledge that immaculate perception, or an unbiased stance, is near impossible to achieve[3]. Consequently, it is incumbent upon any interviewer to become as fully aware as possible of their orientation. Specifically, I entered the research well aware of the harms that consumer culture can impart on children yet, I was not entirely clear about the *process* in which this unfolded. It was this unknown that drove my curiosity as I commenced data collection. For example, if children feel compelled to diet at the age of 10, what is it about consumer culture that drives such behaviour? How does living in a consumer-laden society lead to dysphoria in relation to the body? I felt it was important to try to imagine the role of the participants and attempt to see their circumstance from their viewpoint. Where appropriate, during the interviews, I did express feelings (e.g. when one of the participants revealed her suicide attempts), so as to minimize status differences and show a human side through the expression of empathy.

[3] The neurosciences, having now revealed the powerful subconscious influences on consciousness and reason, concur (Eagleman 2011; Restak 2006).

Misunderstandings between the respondent and the researcher are best reduced through the development of trust and with the researcher's capacity to respond genuinely with empathic reflection (Nicholls 2009). Indeed, of great importance is the researcher's establishment of a "moral" interview process fulfilled through the adoption of an empathic stance "to restore the sacredness of humans" above and beyond theoretical or methodological concerns (Fontana and Frey 2005:697). Specifically, as a researcher, I brought knowledge and skills that were developed over a 20-year period as a social worker and then, as a clinician in private practice, with a clientele that was largely comprised of children. My experiences afforded me the capacity to develop rapport with the respondents and delve at a level consistent with their reported experiences.

Sampling and Recruitment

Since this study focused on a particular issue, the respondents had to be able to speak on that subject. One of the most important aspects of the research is sampling. Students from the University of British Columbia Okanagan Campus (a small university in southern British Columbia) who met the criteria for the research were recruited for the study. The criterion was defined as individuals aged 18 or 19 (first or second year students) who have grown up from birth in either the US or Canada, both being representative consumer cultures. These individuals reflect a white, middle and lower-middle class stratum. Due to the fact that the sampling did not include a wide range of ethnicity and socio-economic class, the results must be understood within the context of the study itself; projections about other sample groups by comparing to the study is limited. Recruitment was carried out by getting permission from professors in various departments and conducting a brief presentation on the research at a number of their classes for first year students (Appendix B). A stipend of twenty dollars was offered to each participant.

Sample size

In qualitative research, sample size depends on the research questions, purpose of the study, usefulness of the sample group, credibility and what can be done with available time and resources. It is up to the researcher to make judgment calls about sample size as there are no hard and fast rules; again, the trade-off between breadth and depth applies (Patton 2002). Lincoln and Guba (1985) believe that the size of the sample is determined by the primary criterion of redundancy yet in this study, redundancy played a little role in the valuing and

estimation of the data. Repetition for example, may inform the researcher's analysis of a particular phenomenon by placing more importance on it. Furthermore, for the purposes of this study redundancy bore little relevance as each respondent's perspective was deemed relevant regardless of content. For this study, twenty subjects in total were recruited with equal numbers of males and females.

Informed Consent and Ethical Principles

To protect the rights of the respondents, I provided each of them with a letter explaining the study prior to any interviews. The letter was accompanied by a consent form approved by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board at the University of British Columbia. Also, before each interview commenced, I reiterated the methods used to ensure protection of confidentiality.

The participants' confidentiality was protected in a number of ways. First, their names were not used once data were collected; each was assigned an arbitrary number as an identifying marker. Second, all data were kept in a locked file cabinet. Third, the computer used to store the data was password accessible only. Fourth, once the results were written up names were replaced with numbers and pseudonyms to identify a particular interview or another name in the case of a written narrative.

Data Collection

Data were derived from several sources including: 1) in-depth semi-structured interviews with participants, audio-taped and transcribed; 2) contact summaries or field notes completed shortly after the interviews; and 3) written memos that upon further reflection informed the analysis. Credibility was met through the process of faithful transcription of the interviews.

Data Analyses

In essence, data analysis in qualitative studies involves: reading through the transcripts several times; coding, or identifying significant phrases or sentences, working to develop a list of non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements; formulating meanings and clustering them into themes common to all respondents' transcripts; integrating the results into an in-depth exhaustive description of the phenomenon including verbatim examples (Corbin and Strauss 2008). I used MAXQDA qualitative research software for all memos, codes and textual data

analysis from initial coding, conceptualization, and core categories to writing narratives (Corbin and Strauss 2008).

Transcription and Editing

All of the audio records for the interviews were transcribed by the researcher. I listened to the audio tapes, and checked the transcripts for accuracy. Post-interview reflections were kept in a folder with their respective transcript and any additional data that may have emerged in the process.

Coding

Coding is the first step in taking an analytic stance towards data in qualitative studies (Charmaz 2005). The coding process involves analyzing raw data and elevating it to a conceptual level (Corbin and Strauss 2008). Code names were derived either from statements made by the participants (e.g., "shopaholic") or in some cases, subjectively designated based on a careful review of the data, so as to best capture what had been relayed (e.g., "more is not better," "free of fad influence"). In an attempt to contextualize and deepen my understanding of each participant's unique perspectives, codes were assigned only after all data had been collected and reviewed. After initial codes (concepts) were identified, deeper analysis, aided by memo-writing, highlighted the relationships between concepts and eventually led to the development of categories. Finally, through the process of reviewing, and analyzing categories, themes began to emerge (e.g., 'Inside the Culture Industry'). Identifying themes is an important step because it guides the researcher as he or she systematically sifts through the data, reduces the data and eventually, combines the data (Corbin and Strauss 2005).

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis works in tandem with critical theory and was used to ensure that the wider cultural context was also critiqued in the final analysis of the data. In Fairclough's conceptualization of critical discourse analysis (2003), all forms of discourse (written, aural, visual, texts, photographs, brochures, television commercials, cereal boxes and so forth) are treated as significant active phenomena and not just representations of reality. Language is not a neutral, information-carrying mechanism but rather a site where social meanings are imposed, created and changed. Hence, the content of a given text is both a representation of various power

dynamics of the given culture in which it is situated and at the same time, produces such dynamics. Through critical analysis, the researcher is able to look beyond the taken-four-granted assumptions and meanings that manifest themselves in language. Critical discourse analysis aims to expose and critique the strategies that individuals use in everyday discourse as a means of revealing political, social, and economic structures:

> Its particular concern is with the radical changes that are taking place in contemporary social life: with how discourse figures within the process of change, and with shifts in the relationship between discourse and more broadly semiosis and other social elements within networks of practices. We cannot take the role of discourse and social practices for granted, it has to be established through analysis. (Fairclough 2003:205)

Thus, social relations, identities, cultural values and even consciousness itself, are all in part discursive. According to Fairclough (2003), discourse figures in three specific ways in social practices: as part of social activity or of producing social life; in representations dependent upon each social actor; and, in ways of being or in identities. This three-dimensional analytical framework specifically brings together micro- and macro-level factors in the production and interpretation of discourse. That which is discourse-driven is also knowledge-driven in that knowledge is generated and circulated as discourse. The process through which discourses become operationalized within societies can be revealed in the dialectics of discourse. It should be noted that discourses not only include representations of how things are and have been, but also are representations of how things might or could or should be which is how new identities or modes of being come to be produced (Fairclough 2003).

In this research study, the discourse of each interview constituted an important source of evidence of the social structures and processes specific to consumer cultures. As well, each interview revealed the political machinations, exertions of social control and possible ways of resistance and empowerment. It was therefore, important to deconstruct the social systems revealed in each of the interviews at a structural level, as well as evidence of agency of each participant.

Trustworthiness

An important task of the qualitative researcher is to establish the ‘trustworthiness’ of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that researchers may approach trustworthiness from four differing perspectives including: 1) “Truth value"—Do the findings reflect the truth(s) of

the participants?; 2) Applicability—Can the findings be applied in other settings?; 3) Consistency—Would the same findings appear if the study were repeated?; and 4) Neutrality—Are the findings determined by the participants rather than the biases of the researcher? These four perspectives reflect the respective concepts of validity, reliability and objectivity in traditional or positivist research (Lincoln and Guba 1985). The authors suggest that qualitative researchers revert to the use of the term "credibility" as a means of confirming whether the findings are trustworthy and believable. Furthermore, it is not appropriate to simplify the differences between qualitative and quantitative research by suggesting that one is subjective and the other, objective. "Objectivity" is only ever achieved through the eyes of an observer whose values, beliefs, and expectations pose an element of subjectivity. Indeed, within qualitative research, objectivity is deemed to be a "chimera: a mythological creature that never existed, save in the imaginations of those who believe that knowing can be separated from the knower" (Guba and Lincoln 2005:208).

Truth Value (Credibility)

The paradigm of critical theory, in contrast to positivist 'standards,' regards perceptions of reality as always being influenced by an individual's subjective experiencing and therefore, reliance upon an external test is not appropriate. The qualitative researcher may strive only to increase the accuracy of individual perceptions, either his or her own and those of the respondents. Thus, the qualitative researcher relies heavily on the credibility of respondents to establish the truth value of findings (Guba and Lincoln 2005). Researchers may strengthen credibility during the process of inquiry by rigorous documenting and ensuring that each participant was treated equally and fairly (Guba and Lincoln 2005).

Applicability (Generalizability)

In qualitative research the central question often asked is whether or not results in one situation can be used to speak to or help form judgments about other results. Hence, are the results generalizable? Lincoln and Guba (1985:124) used the term "fittingness" rather than generalizability as a means of defining the degree of "congruence" between the context of the research subjects and the context of a comparable population. In other words, do the results of the research reasonably fit with our understanding of the larger picture? One approach is to provide "thick" rich descriptive data that can then be judged as to its merit and applicability with

regard to comparable others of the general population (Firestone 2010). My study was conducted with this in mind, such that details about the experiences of each of the participants were fully revealed and expanded upon within the interviews. The comparative analysis that was undertaken here was internal, that is, within the sample. I asked the question: To what extent are the experiences of these students around consumerism similar or different? The findings, not unexpectedly, should reflect common cultural experiences for this group. Nonetheless, considering the homogeneity of the sample, it should be stated that the findings of this study may or may not generalize to a wider population. I leave it up to future research to decide the extent to which the findings are a good 'fit' with the wider population (one that is representative of the general Canadian or US population of 18- or 19-year olds).

Consistency

Consistency relates to the traditional concept of reliability—can the findings be replicated? The traditional assumption that reality is knowable and independent of time suggests that the 'truth' about a given phenomenon can be ascertained. On the contrary, in qualitative research context and time are important variables and are deemed to alter perception dramatically. A qualitative researcher must therefore, assume that the existence of an element of uniqueness in a particular study will not necessarily lend itself to replication (Lincoln and Guba 1985). The results of this study are therefore, unique and stand alone as significant in their contribution to enhancing knowledge about the subject. Arguably, it is not necessary to 'prove' that a replicated study would arrive at the same results or conclusions.

Neutrality (Confirmability)

Thirdly, neutrality is linked to the traditional concept of objectivity. To determine what is objective, researchers often look for inter-subjective agreement. That is, "what a number of individuals experience is objective and what a single individual experiences is subjective" (Lincoln and Guba 1985:300). Researchers also assign objectivity using their judgment as to whether an observation or assertion is factual and confirmable, in contrast to biased or opinionated conclusions. Qualitative researchers prefer *confirmability,* because the emphasis on what is observed appropriately emphasizes characteristics reflective of the data (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Throughout the interviews I attempted to address issues of neutrality by reflecting back to the participants what I had heard and seeking clarification accordingly.

Validity

According to Lincoln and Guba (2005), no one method, or collection of methods, can claim to be exclusively valid for any given study as there are a myriad of ways to approach any research question. They also argue that while the concept of validity traditionally rests upon whether or not the researcher's interpretations can be trusted to accurately convey human phenomenon, this is difficult to verify. Angen (2000) suggests the following framework as an alternative to more traditional modes of validity: Has the research question been carefully framed to account for the historical timeframe in which it is based? Is the research carried out respectfully? Are the arguments persuasive? Are the results capable of being disseminated widely? Further to this, Angen (2000:387) suggests that rather than framing validity within the dyad of truth or falsehood in qualitative analysis, it should speak more "on the moral and practical underpinnings" of the study than on methodology.

Ethical Validation

Ethical validation refers to the process by which all research agendas must be questioned as to their underlying moral assumption. The researcher's application of the methodology reflects either his or her political *and* ethical stance. As Angen (2000) notes researchers have argued that qualitative inquiry sustains an ethical level of acceptability when all voices are heard, when no voice is excluded or demeaned. Qualitative research can be seen as ethical when the consumer of research moves beyond their understanding of the topic and towards new interpretations. Furthermore, ethical research does not claim to be the final word or authority on a given topic rather, it should incite exploration in new and more fruitful directions. Thus if the research study inspires action and effectively leads to foment change, it has achieved ethical validation.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

In order to achieve a cross-sectional analysis of the data, each interview script was analyzed and coded. Ten categories arose from the codes and are subsumed under three main themes. The results section follows a top-down hierarchy of 'theme, category, code' format. The three themes derived from analysis are: Inside the Culture Industry, Identity, and Media. The themes are distinct but not rigidly so, tending to be somewhat porous, with codes and categories overlapping at times. Additionally, short narratives highlighting the experiences of three of the participants are also included in the results to fully allow for exploring the richness of the data. The purpose of the narratives is to give a composite picture of a participant's background, views and experiences as they relate to being a young person living in a consumer culture. As well, each narrative illustrates how a single individual interprets his or her circumstance as it relates to a specific code(s). For example, the "James" narrative demonstrates this participant's struggle to acquire and retain 'cool.' The "John" narrative is reflective of the struggle to establish values in a consumer culture and what that means to an individual who wishes to go against the norm. The "Ingrid" narrative was selected because it so clearly demonstrates the harm done when adhering to a media-conscious lifestyle with an emphasis on materialism. All of the names found throughout this section, and elsewhere in the dissertation, are pseudonyms.

First I will begin with an analysis of the theme entitled "Inside the Culture Industry" which focuses on the experience of being a consumer particularly, the acquisition or loss of commodities. Next, I will examine the theme entitled "Identity" which offers an analysis of identity formation in consumer cultures. This section also includes an examination of personal values and how they influence consuming behaviours, as well as how identity comes to be shaped by the value of money. Finally, I will provide an analysis of the third theme "Media" which entails a look at how self-regard, relationships with others and views of the global community are shaped by media.

Inside the Culture Industry (Theme)

Three categories, ownership, brands and capturing cool, delineate what it is like to be inside the culture industry, to experience mass consumerism. The participants' experiences about acquiring, craving, owning and losing goods are all relevant to this theme. As well, what

it means to desire brands, and to have cool persona, are central to understanding what it is like to be a young consumer in a commodity-driven culture.

Ownership (Category)

The first category emerging from the analysis is about how the process and engagement of consuming affects the individual. Each code is representative of the impressions, thoughts and feelings associated with the process of acquiring consumer products on a personal level.

Endless Desiring (Code)

A number of participants felt that their desire for objects, acquisition of those objects and eventual satiation was experienced as an endless cycle such that, "There's never been a time when I've been completely satisfied with everything I have" (Susan). The participants were not able to articulate why the need for more is never satiated, and instead, were resigned to the fact that this is simply how it is. Susan further stated: "Like it's unfortunate that we always feel that we need stuff, but that's [how] we've been raised I guess." Susan stressed that even small items, like pens, can become an object of desire whether there is a real need or not. As John stated: "Sometimes you see more stuff as you're shopping and just toss it in the cart but you wish you hadn't when you got home." Visually seeing others with objects of desire incited desiring of the same. For example, Jeff talked about how knowing that his younger brother had a television in his bedroom directly influenced him to wish for the same. Oscar described how he started to notice the presence of iPods more and more, until he was eventually able to acquire one. Tom was able to articulate how elusive the feeling of satisfaction can be in that it appears to endlessly cycle from desiring to satisfaction to craving more:

> I definitely feel satisfied. But it's...brief like it's not...long-lasting so at the same time, I guess...I never felt fully satisfied for a long, like forever, you know what I mean...You constantly want something else, but in the moment you do feel satisfied after you buy something that you needed. That's interesting to think about though because in that moment you have what you want but...that moment is fleeting so...really you don't.

Intense longing for items was accepted as the norm with little insight as to why:

> In the end I didn't even end up really wearing the clothes, so it was really just a waste of money and I shouldn't have bought it. I don't know if it was an advertisement that swayed me or just that moment thinking, 'oh I need this' and I don't really know why. I just know I needed to have it. (Pam)

Ted talked about how he would engage in shopping even though he felt he had everything that he needed; he said there were times when he could not justify another purchase, but could not resist looking at new stuff. George explained how meaningless, yet compelling, buying could be, as though he had to follow through on the purchasing process in spite of better judgment:

> I went into Value Village...I was with my friend. We were just like messing around I guess, he was buying a shirt and then I saw this giant leprechaun hat and I was like, that's awesome. So, I just took it off the shelf and went to purchase it and it was $14 and I've never seen something so expensive in Value Village, and it was just so meaningless ...but I'm already at the till so, I can't *not* buy it. So that was the worst, I think, that was the worst purchase I've ever made in my life.

The realization that the object of spontaneous desire brought little, even less, satisfaction than normal was described as a source of anger by more than one of the participants. The anger seemed to be tied to a feeling of having been deceived by someone in authority.

Seeing others with a desired object was said to be a constant reminder of not having, both from within the family, and out. More specifically, wanting to have what one's parents had surfaced quite frequently throughout the interviews. Participants named such items as dirt bikes, cars, boats and houses as those things that they had grown to enjoy in their parent's household and wished to continue having access.

Interestingly, desiring and craving new objects was not always described as a frustration. James talked about the fact that desiring was exciting and that it was fun to hunt down 'cool' objects while on a shopping spree. At the same time, he acknowledged that being satisfied in consumer culture is somewhat elusive: "You always want more stuff. I'm totally a consumer so I always want more and more. But like, I don't know, it's pretty tough to be satisfied." While noticing that desires are never replete, most of the participants did not feel that they had been taken in or manipulated by marketers to want more; rather, they felt in charge of their own desires however frustrating they may have been. Still, one of the male participants, Christopher, noted how external forces, such as the fashion industry, created pressure for young people to believe that without the latest fad they were deficient: "It makes you feel like you need to buy more stuff."

In general, upon reflection of their childhoods, the participants felt their desiring had been relatively intense. They recounted stories where they had desperately wanted certain objects for play, like a Tamagotchi, for example:

> When I was little I think I got pretty frustrated when friends had it and I didn't sort of thing. Looking back, like it was really probably like a $10, $15 thing and like it's not that big of a deal, but yeah, at the time, you're a child you're like they have it and I don't understand why I can't. (Alicia)

Similarly, Susan said, "When I was little Pokéman came out at the time, I didn't have the console I needed for it so I wanted it so badly I even dreamt about getting it."

Having the object of desire out of reach as children was described as a source of frustration (conflict) between some of the participants and their parents.

Shopaholic

Both male and female participants described the feeling of being, at times, almost lured to spend despite their better judgment, whether because they did not have the money, or they simply did not need the purchase. Pam talked about having a closet full of clothes, and yet, continuing to add to the collection seemingly endlessly. In particular, Nancy admitted to having a "shopping problem" and was distressed about how much of a problem it could become when she had increased financial responsibilities. She reported that she always had to buy, that she had a behaviour pattern with no closure: "I always have to buy something like if I see something I like, I always have to buy it, for a reasonable price, obviously." Lack of money was apparently no deterrent to spending as she described it—she merely set her sights on lower-priced items. "If I go to a grocery store I'll buy a magazine and stuff that I don't need, I'll still end up buying them." Others talked about how excess spending money was quickly dispensed on goods whether they were needed or not. Ingrid attributed her spending as a child to the commercials that she viewed when she was younger, thus, connecting a shopaholic lifestyle, or problem, with advertising itself. As she reflected on her past behaviour, she was confused as to why she was so driven to spend and what made the object(s) so desirable. Floyd described how the acquisition of goods always gave him something to look forward to. As he put it:

> There's always in the back of your mind you're getting something you want because obviously you purchased it and it's coming at some point. I think you're a little anxious because you want to make sure, for clothing, if it fits or whatever, if it's right. But in the back of your mind, you're a little excited.

Further, Floyd was positive about consumption and felt that he should give into his desires regardless of cost: "Don't let money be an object. If you want something that bad don't consider the price, just buy it." George talked about how impulsive he was when it came to acquiring

things and that he had learned this from his mother, or at the very least, had begun to mimic her. So without labelling it as such, a number of male participants (Christopher, Tom, George) also felt that they had a “shopping problem," in that they too shopped impulsively and purchased items that they came to regret.

High on Acquisition

Throughout the interviews, both male and female participants were able to describe the good feelings that resulted when acquiring something that they wanted including: excitement, "pretty awesome," happiness, “loving it,” ecstasy, good, having something special, “really really exciting,” feeling great, satisfaction, pride at being able to make a purchase with one's own money, feeling glamorous, confident, feeling more mature and independent (in the case of getting a car), feeling more respected by peers, and feeling accepted. With new technology, in particular, excitement was expressed as one of the prime reactions. In terms of cognition, the participants felt included if they acquired objects that others had. Joyce reiterated: "It makes me feel like I'm part of something." Furthermore, as the participants recalled the events leading up to and actually acquiring the object of desire their faces often beamed with excitement. There was no insight or understanding expressed as to why such extreme emotions were felt; rather, somewhat simple explanations were provided such as: "If I like something that I like, it makes me happy I guess” (Nancy). It is important to emphasize that the ‘high’ associated with acquisition was difficult for the participants themselves to understand or expand upon. Sam strived to express himself: "I felt good. I felt just happy I guess. I didn't feel proud or anything about what I did because I didn't accomplish anything. I was just happy to have it.” Receiving gifts of desired objects reinforced the participants’ feelings that they were receiving out of love, that the giver was expressing love: "I was ecstatic like and really like, I don't know. It was almost like I knew my parents really loved me, like it was just nice. It was a good feeling” (Tom).

Parents and friends were often described as responding positively to the participant’s acquisition of goods. Participants described that when they had to wait quite a while before getting the object of desire, the anticipation built and added to the excitement felt when they actually acquired it. Tessa recalled the great happiness she felt when she finally owned an iPhone. Male participants were also awe-struck when it came to descriptions about acquiring

things. And, with the bigger items like that of a car, the perception that an accomplishment had been achieved was particularly strong. Jeff stated: "It just feels like you fit in and everything like that." Having a car was also associated with "becoming closer to an adult."

Acquisition Stymied

In general, the participants reported a wide range of negative emotions associated with not acquiring the object(s) of desire or when acquisition was stymied. These emotions included: disappointment, feeling "pretty bad", "so bad", sadness, depression (even "extreme depression"), frustration, feelings of being punished, cheated, jealousy of others who have the desired object, feeling less than ("I could've been a better snowboarder"), impatient, isolated, anxious, annoyed, and feeling left out. Not having the object also provoked feelings of jealousy of others and disappointment with parents who were seen as sometimes responsible for not purchasing the desired object. For example, James' parents prevented him from purchasing a dirt bike even though he had the funds to cover the cost. He described how "constricted" he felt as a result. Ted talked about what it was like to not have something that was popular with his friends: "I was definitely jealous and not really mad at my parents, but just kind of disappointed." Sonja recalled a time when her parents refused to buy her a Barbie doll and what that felt like: "Even though I would ask my mom to get it for me, like when she said she said no, I would be sad."

It should be noted that the participants also described their ability to "get over" a particular object stating that it was, after all, just a pair of sunglasses or just a pair of jeans. For example, Oscar talked about consoling himself when he was unable to acquire a desired object by convincing himself he did not really need it: "At first I was pretty bummed out, but I soon realized afterwards that I didn't need it. It was kind of more of a wanting, not so much of a necessity." However, the participants did not always overcome the desiring per se, but rather were able to shift their focus to another and more easily attainable object.

Social Reinforcement of Acquisition

Social reinforcement from friends and family appeared to be highly salient when it came to buying. Many of the participants mentioned that it was when they were shopping with their friends that they most regretted making purchases. In fact, this theme came up frequently—the feeling of being pressured by friends to buy when an item was more expensive than the budget allowed for—or even in the case of an article of clothing that the participant truly disliked.

George summed it up: “My friends were really terrible influences on me. I know that from high school and not having a lot of money in my pocket yet, still buying a lot of things.” As well, it seemed that friends tended to influence buying that was motivated by fads. Alicia stated that when shopping by herself she could try on numerous articles of clothing and never buy; she added that when she is with her friends, inevitably, something gets purchased. In general, peers were extremely influential in decisions associated with buying for both male and female participants.

Mothers were described as important figures in the buying process in that many participants felt their approval had to be met in order to make or feel good about a purchase. Sonja reported: “When I'm with [my mother], before I buy something, I would ask her before I would actually buy it. Then she would tell me what she thinks of it I guess, and if she likes it or not.” In recalling purchases that were made where mothers did not approve, many of the female participants recollected feeling sad and disappointed. Bonding with mothers over shopping was mentioned several times among the female participants. As well, for the female participants, it was rare that a father’s approval was sought, except when it involved a purchase of a technological device. Other family members mentioned as being influential in buying decisions included sisters and boyfriends.

A number of the male participants reported that their mothers would buy their clothing, that they relied on their mothers to determine what looked good.

> She'd be like the sweater looks nice on you, you should buy it. I'd be like okay, good choice mom. It always went well like there were never really any issues with things I wanted that I couldn't have or her wanting me to buy something that I didn't want. (Ted)

Interestingly, Ted also described how his mother's "excessive" spending influenced him to not spend; this was the only example where social reinforcement was a means of influence to *not* purchase.

For female participants, Facebook was described as influencing a wide variety of purchases. Participants stated that seeing pictures of other people clothed in a particular way fomented desire to do the same: “If someone posted a picture of for example, like their nails like painted really nicely, I guess, it could affect me too and influence me into buying nail polish and then it would make me want...to buy more” (Sonja). According to the male participants, Facebook did not influence any of their purchases.

Seeing others dressed in a particular way or having desirable objects influenced the participants in such a way that it "makes me want to get [them]" (Nancy). Having the same possession as others for the female participants was described as providing a conversation piece, a mutual commonality or bonding that was perceived as highly desirable. The female participants stated that they felt encouraged by their friends to buy technology if they were lagging behind with older devices. Having the right technology was attributed as impressing others, even inciting jealousy, which was considered to be a desirable outcome. Only Tessa indicated that she relied solely on her parents to purchase things and negotiated with them in this regard: "I'll tell them that I want something and they'll tell me if they can get it for me or not. If they say that they can't get it for me right now, I'll wait." Susan, an only child, recalled appealing to her mother to purchase items but was often rebuked to buy with her "own money." As children, the participants remembered wanting what their friends had, as well as, recalling how they had influenced their friends to buy.

The male participants reported that their friends thought they were cool and were envious of them when they acquired something that was deemed to be socially desirable. They also reported that their friends were a "terrible influence" and partly responsible for their inability to save money. For example, John recalled buying Nike Shocks because his friend had assured him that they were a superior shoe. Big purchases like cars were highly reinforced by peers according to both male and female participants; both reported that they were regarded as being 'cooler' once they had acquired a car. On the other hand, Floyd felt that his shopping habits were free of influence from friends because he did his shopping online, when alone.

Fanatical About Fads

Predominantly, female participants talked about how badly they desired to keep up with fads, how important it was to them, and that it was a pressure to see new clothing or new fashion because they felt the need to stay current in this regard. Interestingly, Joyce cited a non-clothing example, the Pokémon phenomenon, and how badly she wanted to be part of it. She described it as:

> When I was really young, when the whole Pokémon thing just came out, everybody had the cards and I never got [them] because I just never did. But I always wanted them...It [made] me feel like I wasn't included in that whole fad, or important time in whatever situations.

The majority of the female participants were aware that they were being influenced by fads yet, they felt it was important to pay attention to the latest trends. Unquestionably, they felt that they would be perceived in a negative light wearing clothing that was out of style. Alicia summed it up as follows:

> The worst is when you really like something and it goes out of style but then you've got that confliction of 'Oh, I really like these,' but I feel so out of place wearing these in public and that's obviously a big problem because you sort of, like you don't want to get rid of it then, but you can't wear it out.

They also expressed strong negative feelings about the unpopularity of out-of-date clothing seen on people outside of what was considered to be the cool group:

> Interviewer: How would you describe the feelings associated with that pressure?
>
> Judy: Well I guess just what you would consider that popular stereotype in high school that I think people kind of emulated in high school. They wanted to be like that. They always had new clothes and things. But you see people that you didn't really want to be like and you'd see that they didn't have friends and that they would be wearing this one-piece jumpsuit or I don't know something really strange at the time and you would think I don't really want to look like that. I want to look like these people with all those friends. I guess it was like a social acceptance kind of thing.

As another example, Pam exclaimed: "Yeah, you see people wearing it, like celebrities or whoever, anything that looks really good. I don't know how they do it. They definitely make me want things that are 'faddy.'"

Brands

Brands were described as being extremely important to both male and female participants, though in slightly different ways. Male participants had the impression that because brands were less important to them in terms of clothing, (though important when buying sports clothing and equipment or technology), they were not under the influence of brand marketing. Female participants, on the other hand, readily admitted to coveting branded clothing, often lamenting at the price. Neither male nor female participants were able to articulate why brands captured their attention to the degree that they felt compelled to wear or own branded items.

Brand Acquisition: Male Participants

According to Floyd, brands associated with technology were very important to one's social status. "If you don't have an iPhone or BlackBerry I guess I feel like you get looked down

upon in this sense...People are condescending towards you if you don't have a brand new phone or whatever." He also felt left out, that those around him all seemed to have the 'right' phone. With respect to clothing, Floyd felt that buying and wearing brand names allowed him to wear articles that few others could acquire because of their high price. Hence, such articles were viewed as status symbols. Floyd was adamant that he would not wear certain logos or brands unless they were considered to be 'high-end.' When asked why he was seeking 'brand status,' he replied: "It's just the exclusivity of it and that 99 of the other 100 people probably won't even know about the brand...It makes you unique, original, it's not American Eagle and every other kid's wearing it." Similarly, Jeff, who also admitted to wearing brand name clothing, seemed to have no real purpose for doing so: "I just think it's normal to wear them." He described how important it was to have expensive equipment for hockey refereeing including $700 skates which he described as "totally unnecessary," but for the fact that he was after a certain look of competence and professionalism. He described branded clothing as important to have because, "they look nice... they're clean clothes...I think that's kind of the look I like." Jeff felt strongly that wearing clothes without the right brand meant that one could face negative judgment from others.

> Interviewer: How did it feel once you had the Adidas (shoes)?
>
> Jeff: Well it felt good. It felt like, it's like 'Oh cool shoes' and it was like, you know...I can't really explain the feeling, but you do feel like you fit in.
>
> Interviewer: Fitting in and...?
>
> Jeff: And in getting their approval...too.

James was able to articulate the importance of possessing brand name clothing and believed that owning such items was responsible for his level of confidence. He denied that brand names were nothing more than the sale of a logo and argued instead, that they were worth their money, that they were a superior product, and that this was the main motive in buying them. As he stated, "Brands live up to their name." Several other male participants admitted that brand clothing, sunglasses and so on, while important in high school, were less important now that they had entered university. One of these individuals, Christopher, claimed that he now buys whatever he feels will enhance a "cool" look, brand or not. There appeared to be a desire to be free of brand influence yet, at the same time, admitting that brands "make you feel that you look good" (Christopher).

George raised an interesting dilemma in that he professed to hating brands except when it came to his sport (skiing); it was then that he felt he had to have brand name clothing. "I really hate how I have to do that, but I don't know why I still feel like I need to do that." He struggled with the fact that brands pose a dilemma in that one feels obligated to conform in order to achieve a particular look, but at the same time, one sacrifices individuality. Ted also bought sport brands, but said he did so not because of the fact that it was a brand, but because he felt that the athletes who endorsed the products and clothing were credible. A second male participant, James, concurred with this sentiment claiming that he bought brand products, not because they were brands, but because they were functionally superior. John was particularly put off by the price of brand clothing. However, when it came to cars and computers, he felt brands were relevant and important to his choice-making. He cited an example about how owning an iPhone, when they were first made available, contributed to feelings of popularity with his friends. Hence, John felt that the branding of technology had as much to do with status as with functionality—status is achieved by being up-to-date. Sam expressed resentment towards the Apple Corporation believing that they had deliberately created undue social pressure to purchase an iPod, for example, such that MP3 players were no longer accepted as cool.

Brand Acquisition: Female Participants

The majority of female participants relayed that they paid great attention to brands, particularly clothing, and felt justified in choosing to purchase brand-name items. The participants listed several top brands that they consider to be acceptable and took pride in their ability to pick out clothes deemed to be cool. The attraction to branded clothing was considered to be a matter of good taste: "I have to love it to buy it and... brand names, they offer what I love" (Joyce). Alicia described herself as a "brand-name kind of person" in which she professed loyalty to the particular brands that she had bought over many years. And like some of the male participants, she denied that she was blindly taken in by the brand name, but rather, declared she was buying brand-name clothing because of its superior quality. Brands were associated with wearing what was "in" and were seen to guarantee the most current fashion trends. Branded clothing was deemed to enhance how one felt and looked: "I think that brand is considered like to be very in and then I think if I wore that brand I'd feel like 'oh I'm wearing like the latest

thing' kind of feeling" (Sonja). Participants recalled how in high school it was very important to them to have brand name clothing though they claimed not to know why this was important except that they were excited when they acquired branded items and were keen to "show them off." In particular, Ingrid said she felt better about herself after acquiring a brand-name purse because as she put it, she would be perceived as "well-off. You were better I guess." Judy talked about how she was so devoted to the brand-name 'Roxy' that she did not want to wear any other type of shirt. She related that she felt accepted, confident and happy as well as excited to be wearing a Roxy article of clothing and talked about how she would often unbutton her coat to show off the brand-name logo T-shirt underneath. In summary, the pressure to adorn with the latest fad, synonymous with brand clothing, was related as extremely powerful to the degree that clothing that was 'out of style,' even if well liked, was rejected and no longer worn. Ingrid captured this phenomenon with the phrase, "That's so five minutes ago."

Brand Free

Interestingly, some of the participants contradicted themselves at other points in their interview as to whether or not brands were important to them. For example, Floyd, one of the male participants who had exclaimed how proud he was of his ability to afford high-priced brand clothing, also stated that he was his own person, that he could turn his back on brands if the look did not appeal to him:

> I want to stay trendy like I said,, but at the end of the day, if you don't like what they're wearing, or how they're wearing it, or the style they're wearing I'm not going to just go buy it because they have it. I'm still going to wear something that I think looks good on me and that I'm comfortable wearing.

The capacity to reject brands that did not appeal was also expressed by Floyd: "[If] I was to find something that wasn't a brand name I would still buy that...over a brand name thing." And from Jeff, who had admitted earlier in his interview to liking the look of brand clothing: "You don't need the best clothes. You can still look the same in other clothes." Only one of the female participants, Ingrid, who had talked about how good she felt in brand-name accessories, later described: "I don't buy really brands. I buy what's efficient for its use, you know, what works is good for me." Both Sara and Susan were adamant that they did not shop with brand names in mind; rather they both felt that they chose clothing based on "whatever fits, whatever's cheap" (Sara). Finally, Tessa considered that she was free of brand influence, yet, in the same sentence

professed her loyalty to Apple products. Likewise, Pam considered herself above the brand phenomenon, but then recalled that she had bought a 'Roger Federer' tennis racket. It is possible that the buying and wearing of brand clothing for a number of participants was never explored prior to the interview and, therefore, was not something that was well understood. Indeed, when asked why he was attracted to brand-name clothing, Floyd exclaimed: "I've never really thought it through as to...why I'm buying brand names. You got me thinking."

Can Do Without/Materially Satisfied

There were a few individuals who felt that they had achieved some level of material contentment. However, only a minority of the participants related how unimportant it was to them to accumulate and display to others the things that they owned; they felt that they had achieved some level of material satisfaction, however fleeting. For example, Tom expressed that it was not a hardship to go without desired objects, particularly when his parents provided all his financial support:

> It was just kind of out of sight out of mind, like I just knew it was kind of beyond our means. So, it was like once I had like gotten over the concept, like it just won't happen for me, it was like I just kind of stopped thinking about it mostly I think. It wasn't like feeling really sad or like being upset over like I couldn't have it. It was just like that's kind of ridiculous to think like your parents should buy you [something]. So it was like, it was kind of just like yeah, whatever. It's not a big deal.

Two other participants related material satisfaction and how that felt:

> John: I'm not in need of anything.
>
> Interviewer: How does that feel?
>
> John: Pretty good. Like I stopped wanting like just random junk, items, stuff like that. I don't think I need anything else. I mean I have a good family, I'm up here, it's nice. I started my life, I'm set.

And:

> Interviewer: How did it feel to have all those possessions that you wanted?
>
> Sonja: I guess I was happy because I felt like 'oh, I finally don't have like something that I want to get anymore.' I finally like feel good with...what I have.

Capturing Cool

This category developed from codes relating to the participants' experiences and desires to achieve a "cool" status. Three codes were designated to this category: achieving cool through

acquisition of goods, adoption of a celebrity look, and what it means to be motivated by cool. This section also includes a narrative about one of the participants who felt he personified cool.

Cool Persona

Cool was generally described as a feeling of comfort and security, for having the things that "you want," those that define others as cool. By having the 'right stuff,' those items that embody a cool persona, the participants felt they could be "part of something," be cool with others who had achieved this status, and fit in with the 'right' group. Tom gave the example of Pokémon cards and how he became more popular with his peers once he acquired them. Cool was then also partly defined as a social phenomenon and was therefore, greatly dependent on the type of friends one had. Feeling cool derived from the possession of the right technology (iPods, Apple computers, smart phones or iPhones, the Apple brand in particular) was a common theme among female participants. Surprisingly, technology seemed to be more potent with regards to cool than even clothing. Thus, having the latest technology was deemed to increase one's popularity with peers and the potential for achieving a state of cool.

Alicia noted how a lot of the popular television shows aimed at young people *(*e.g., *One Tree Hill, 90210, Gossip Girl*) have characters that emulate what it means to be cool and popular. As a result, she believed that the popular teens in high school emulated the hairstyles, clothes, mannerisms and accompanying lifestyles of such characters. There was some lament expressed that keeping up with brands required constant vigilance such that attaining the state of cool required continuous and vigilant effort. Pam recalled how embarrassed she was about not having the right snowboarding pants, that they were definitely "not cool." Judy talked about wearing jeans that were both uncomfortable, exorbitant in price, and not to her taste, but because they were deemed cool, she had decided to buy them:

> There was this brand of jeans in middle school that everyone always had. They were like these jeans with a one-inch zipper. When I look back on it they were really awful. They also looked terrible on me because they look good on stick thin people, so I don't know why I bought them.

Judy also said she felt cool when wearing a jersey that designated her membership to an athletic team and attributed this to her feelings of confidence. In the opposite direction, one participant, Ingrid, recalled how she often deliberately dressed against the mainstream to stand out and as such, felt cool: "I had these really bright pink shorts, and I love fishnets on arms, and don't ask

me [if] it was from the *Wrestler*. They were bright and neon...I thought I was just great." Clearly, being cool was associated with feeling popular and being envied by others—both highly desirable states.

Desiring a Celebrity Look

There were certain celebrities whose lifestyles became the object of desire for a number of the female participants. When asked directly if they could describe a time when they admired and maybe even wanted to be like someone portrayed in the media, many of the female participants compared themselves to a particular television character, as this example demonstrates:

> One of my TV shows, 90210, there's one character named Ivy and I just love everything about her, like I actually can admit that I've gone to stores and like I would actually say like would she wear this or you know, like how would she look...I definitely compared myself to that one particular character many times...It makes me feel good that, like, if I'm able to accomplish the task of being like her. (Joyce)

Joyce also relayed that the desire to emulate this particular television character had a direct impact on the type of shopping that she did: "She looked really good on that one episode so I went to buy something that looks similar, or like maybe not the exact same thing, but like you know, like a similar style of shirt."

Other celebrities were also admired: "I've always kind of really been envious of a famous DJ or a singer, a band, whatever. I always thought that would be kind of cool" (Joyce). Admiring and wishing to emulate singers was reiterated by yet another participant, Sonja: "Someone like Selena Gomez, she's the same age as me and then I kind of admire her because she's, already so successful and...She's, a good role model for other girls because she's a singer/actor." Joyce reported that she felt good by trying to emulate a particular celebrity because of the fact that so many millions of people pay attention to this person's affairs. The female participants talked extensively about buying clothes with celebrity's styles in mind. For example, Sonja bought perfume specifically because it was a Britney Spears line. Nancy also exclaimed how celebrity worship influenced purchases: "I've seen those shoes in a lot of magazines and like every celebrity is wearing them, and they look good. That's why I've always wanted them and that's when I started wanting them."

Tessa lamented that she wanted to retain her uniqueness as much as she craved the look and lifestyle of Angelina Jolie. Others, Sara and Pam respectively, cited Kate Winslet and Kate Hudson as stars they wished to emulate. Ingrid felt a failure for not looking more "Latino," in particular, like Jennifer Lopez, including both her ethnicity and physique. A few female participants described the emotions associated with desiring the celebrity look: "Definitely kind of jealous 'cause [there's] a big difference between my lifestyle and their lifestyle so I get a tiny bit jealous about it" (Nancy) and; "Maybe envy, not really jealousy because I'm not upset about it, I just envy what she has [and] I don't" (Pam). Susan, on the other hand, exclaimed that she did not ever feel the desire for the celebrity lifestyle or look.

A majority of male participants admitted to being attracted to the celebrity look. For example, Floyd talked about wanting to be like Brad Pitt because "he never seems to be in the media for arguments or fights, or gestures, or anything like that. I guess he seems like a stand-up guy. He seems happy, his kids, he's making millions." And, George talked about wanting to be a particular baseball player and went so far as to buy a hat "because the Yankees have them," as well as, wishing to purchase Yankee jerseys. George also admired the type of suits that the Yankees wore at press conferences and tried to model that particular look. As another example, Oscar described that he had purchased "old-style Ray-Ban" sunglasses because a lot of "pop stars and rap stars" were wearing them and "they [had] become super popular." Wanting to be like a professional athlete, in general, was also mentioned by Sam: "To be a professional athlete like just having that and playing your sport as your job is pretty appealing to me. So, yeah I guess I'd like to be one of them." James expressed how he had wanted to emulate a character from the movie *Wall Street*, mainly because he was wealthy. Finally, Tom stated that he was attracted to a musician in a particular band and wished to emulate the band members because they had like-minded values. As he put it, "Like I've always wanted to live like them [Mumford and Sons]...They're cool and they have a good style. I think their importance of life and understanding of things seems to be pretty, pretty deep and cool."

Motivated By Cool

The participants talked about how the lure of new trends and fads is so powerful that most attempts to resist are futile, often resulting in capitulation. For example, Christopher described how he had been pressured by peers to replace his running shoes with what was

considered to be a more cool ‘skate’ shoe. Tom described the painful realization of not being dressed in a cool article of clothing, and how in "the next instant" he felt compelled to rectify the situation. He also talked about how the trend-setting cycle is continuous, that one is subjected to constant fashion change. He described the motivation for conforming to the fad as: "You do want to fit in. As much as I hate saying that, you totally do, and that influences you a lot.” Tessa expressed how she felt that "keeping up with trends is like part of your job practically.” Another female participant, Pam, talked about how self-conscious she was that her car was not as cool as those of her friends. Only Sara, out of the female participants, described her determination to break away from the cool trend-setting lifestyle; she talked about her ability to rebel against the "central crowd" in high school and find her niche in a group that was more interested in the arts than achieving cool:

> At first you definitely recognize that you're being alienated. So, I guess the same feelings of frustration and lack of approval from sort of the greater society, but after some time, spending [time] in that artistic group, it felt fine. We all recognized that this was sort of our place and we were happy, so it was like okay, we'll just stick with it.

The following narrative demonstrates James’ background, views and experiences as they relate to the pressure to adopt a cool persona. This story depicts the struggle to acquire and retain what it means to be ‘cool,’ and delineates what benefits, if any, there is in such pursuits.

James’ Story: Personifying Cool

James came from an upper-middle-class family that was generous to him throughout his growing up years, particularly when it came to paying for clothing. He began working when he was 15 and was able to save up enough money to purchase his own car by the time he entered his last year in high school. James stated that the car provided him considerable freedom to attend events and go places with his friends who were also pleased about him owning a car. James believed that he was the type of person who was totally in control about deciding on purchases, and says that he has always been the "businessman" in his family, in that he looked into "get rich quick schemes" throughout his growing up years. He, therefore, felt that he was very responsible with money, and as a result, freely spends money on those things that he desires. James stated that he "thinks about money a lot" and has grown used to having expensive objects: "I want a nice car, I want like toys, like dirt bikes and all this because I've grown up with it.” James also liked technological objects and mentioned that he had a $300 set of

headphones. He also reiterated that he would "love to be wealthy," and "loves earning money" and plans to become a lawyer to ensure that he is in a middle or upper class socioeconomic bracket. James admires a character from the movie *Wall Street* and imagines that it would be "so cool" to be him, work on Wall Street, and own one's own business. He so admired this character that he bought the ring tone for his phone, which was used in the movie. James said that he admires the *Wall Street* character mainly because he is wealthy.

James loved to shop for new clothes, that "it's fun" and enjoys keeping up with fads. He attributed his love for shopping and clothes to his mother who showered him with new items continuously throughout his childhood and growing up years. He considers shopping to be a "hobby" of sorts. James believed in brands and felt guaranteed of a good quality product as compared to a non-brand item. As he put it: "I think brands live up to their name." James described a time when his mother bought him a $500 pair of jeans and how wearing these jeans gave him a boost in confidence. It was also important to James to be physically fit or "jacked" and reiterated that he is influenced by other "jacked guys" portrayed in the media. James feels fully an individual, "well rounded," athletic and confident. He stated that he was one of only twenty-five high school students who were perceived to be in the "cool group," those who were the "popular group of kids" that everyone knew, and "would like to talk to and ask to hang out and like, get invited to parties." When asked why he thought he had achieved a 'cool' status, James replied that it was due to his confidence.

James says of himself that he is "totally a consumer" and always craves more consumable products; he does not in any way feel frustrated by this but finds that it is an exciting process. He wants to be the one "with the latest thing" because "it's kind of cool" and "fun." As a consumer, James stated that he has no values, that he is not motivated by any principles in terms of shopping. When asked about climate change, James thought it was a "natural problem" and that it is not a "huge deal right now." Instead, he stated that he is excited about the future and has no real worries in that regard.

Summary: Inside the Culture Industry

The participants were clear that desiring objects, as well as acquiring and owning them were all powerful forces that significantly shaped their lives. They talked about a perpetual longing, never feeling fully satisfied, and always craving more. Seven of the participants, Pam,

Nancy, Ingrid, Floyd, Christopher, Tom and George, felt they had a 'shopping problem' as their need to spend money seemed, at times, overpowering. Acquiring goods was associated with powerful emotions such as excitement and happiness; likewise, when the acquisition of goods was stymied, strong negative emotions prevailed. Interestingly, a minority of participants (Tom, John, Sonja) claimed to having experienced material satisfaction; they described how they had learned to be content in other ways such as appreciating their familial support and environmental surroundings.

Being a consumer was experienced as a social affair, especially as it involved mothers, and that most sought their approval around purchases they made. Technological goods in particular, were highly coveted and deemed critical to one's overall acceptance and social positioning. Further to this, paying attention to fads was deemed to be very important (more so for female than male participants) and intimately tied to self-esteem. When it came to brands, both male (Floyd, Jeff, James, Christopher, George, John) and female participants (Joyce, Alicia, Ingrid, Judy, Pam, Tessa) stated their desire to acquire branded objects although there was some confusion as to whether or not brands were really all that important. Nonetheless, brands were associated with establishing a 'cool' persona, as were technological goods, in particular. Sara and Susan claimed to be free of the 'brand effect,' not based upon any principle, but because brands were experienced as being pricier. A number of participants, Floyd, Jeff, Ingrid, Tessa and Pam were conflicted about brands, declaring that they were important, and then in other places of their interview, claiming to be above brand-desiring.

Cool was considered a state that was highly desirable, if not necessary, one that required vigilance or constant effort to maintain. This sentiment was shared by Alicia, Pam, Judy, Tessa, Christopher and Tom. Only Sara, out of all the participants, was able to articulate her rejection of cool as defined by the status quo and how she sought a different niche, one that brought fulfillment. A combined majority of males and females including Joyce, Sonja, Nancy, Tessa, Sara, Pam, Ingrid, Floyd, George, Oscar, Sam, James and Tom wished to emulate the look of the celebrity, in terms of personality and clothing style. Sentiments related to ownership, brands and capturing cool are all important in understanding how the participants perceived their identity and values as consumers.

Identity

Five categories were designated as important to understanding how identity is shaped and formed in consumer culture. The first, individuality, offers a description of how the participants feel they retain their individuality in a culture of mass production. The second, conformity, deals with the pressure to conform and what that means. The third, non-conformity, outlines the viewpoints expressed by those who felt they were relatively immune from the influences of consumerism. The fourth, values, addresses how values influence consuming behaviours and what it means to have values as a consumer. The fifth, money, provides a description of the participants' views on the value of money, including financial security, and how having/not having money influences self-regard.

Individuality

Determining how individuality is expressed and maintained in consumer cultures was a topic of great interest to the participants, and one which they readily discussed. The first code, "I'm My Own Person," addresses these concepts, while the second code, "In Control," has more to do with how the participants asserted themselves against the forces of advertising. The final code, "Individuality versus Conformity," has to do with what it means to be an individual in a culture that rewards conformity.

I'm My Own Person

The female participants suggested a number of ways or distinguishing characteristics that ensure individuals remain unique despite owning the same objects as millions of others: personality, sense of self, interests, a voice within, a style within, distinctive articles of clothing (e.g., glasses), character, and imagination. Specifically, Sonja felt that she was able to remain distinctly individual because she felt certain that her choice in clothing articles would be different from what others might choose. She noted that sometimes not having trendy clothing makes one "different from the others." Sara described how she maintains a sense of uniqueness: "As a writer, I put a lot on our imagination and our ability to think, and ways of thinking, and how we express ourselves...That's how we keep our independence and our individuality." Tessa expressed that perhaps, in our consumer culture, there is no individuality on the basis of what you own: "I guess there's no individuality. I mean as a person you're an individual but not by the things that you have ...it`s what character you are basically and not by what you possess."

The male participants felt that their possessions did not define them or reflect in any way their true selves. For example, "I don't feel [that] what I decide to buy like says who I am" (Oscar). They stated that it did not matter to them or their friends what clothing they wore. In general, the male participants felt free of media in the sense that they did not turn to media to "understand what I want, I'm like, or what I need" (Sam). Floyd felt that earning money and spending it however he desired was an expression of individuality, of acting on his own impulses, likes and dislikes. He also talked about how he went against the norm and wore clothes that were clearly not in style; he somehow found the gumption to wear them because "I have the ability to not care about irrelevant people in my life...I just don't care what they think." George defiantly stated that he paid no attention to cool, that he could not even define it, and ignored it as much as he could: "I don't really know who is cool and, or what is cool, and what isn't cool." His position was shared by Jeff: "I'm not really striving to be cool. I'm really who I am, and if people think what they think of me, that's fine with me." One's family background was identified as determining uniqueness and individuality with the male participants. In general, the male participants talked about how getting out of high school changed the pressure they felt to conform, to have to fit in. They also equated money and owning a car as a way of establishing independence from the family and by doing so, gaining a sense of individuality. Having one's parents educated about media motivation was helpful in establishing individuality for Christopher. He stated: "Both my parents, they raised me to not buy into media stuff, not believe everything you see... They're not easily persuaded, so that kind of got passed down to me."

In Control

This code captures the beliefs that many of the participants shared—that they are in control about what they decide to purchase because they are able to research, apply discipline and discern the veracity of advertisements. The underlying supposition about advertising was a rejection of the notion that advertisements are able to influence and sway potential buyers beyond their rational control. The participants believed that having the right knowledge was all one needed to determine whether or not an advertisement had validity. Indeed, Judy insisted that despite seeing advertisements about fashion for women, she was not affected by them because fashion was not important to her, and therefore, she concluded, advertisements must not be

affecting her. Susan felt that she was disciplined about money, and thus, in control of her spending:

> I feel like I'm a better person because I have been raised to be so aware of my money, that I don't go on shopping sprees, I don't go with daddy's credit card and go buy lots of stuff...I mean the fact that I've been raised to be very conscious of what I'm spending I feel will eventually make me to be a better person...I feel I have a better....handle [on] my money with purchases, that I don't have to deal with things that I have to have.

As another example of being in control, Tessa said: "According to me, advertisings just exaggerate stuff. Sometimes, like they don't necessarily bring out the exact truth of the product. Of course that's what ads are supposed to do, right? I have a clear understanding of that."

Interestingly, some male participants, Tom, Sam, Christopher, Jeff and John, saw themselves as in control because they "researched" the quality of a product, and its usefulness, before they shopped. They claimed to not shop impulsively, rather, carefully weighing out the pros and cons before making a purchase; they were also wary of false advertising. It should be noted, that the idea of researching a product thoroughly, before buying, was also important to some of the female participants (Judy, Tessa)—a process they claimed was a deterrent to impulse buying. Research was then seen as mitigating the sort of random shopping that people engage in, that is shopping without any particular item in mind. Further to this, once they began earning their own money, many of the male participants stated that they were particularly careful about what they spent it on and felt that they had a good grasp of money: "I think that now being a bit older and more educated and more mature, you just think of things in terms of if it's really necessary or not. Is it worth half that last pay check...So definitely [I] try and not do impulse buying" (Oscar).

Individuality versus Conformity

Some of the participants were clearly bothered about their individuality, or lack thereof. As an example, Ingrid described how she liked wearing "outrageous clothes" that were popular in the 1970s and 1980s. She also talked about getting piercings and tattoos as a means of establishing individuality: "I'd love to have different...tattoos all over my body, you know express...on my body what I am." Additionally, she also talked about dying her hair "different colors of the rainbow" as a means of ensuring her individual expression. On a simpler level, Alicia felt that her uniqueness could be achieved by amalgamating clothing ideas from several

people whose styles she wished to emulate. Ted insisted that his decision to have a “mullet" hairstyle was motivated by the desire to break free from conformity of the status quo. As he put it: "I purposely have a dumb haircut just because no one else has one. It's just funny...I'm aware that I don't care.” Ted also insisted that his group of friends would accept him just as he was and that how he looked was of little importance relative to how he behaved. The male participants seemed to feel that it was relatively easy to create one's own personal style and still be accepted. For example, Christopher felt that he was outside the norm when he and two friends decided to wear "short shorts" all summer because "it was hilarious," and clearly, against the norm. Interestingly, some of the participants defined or perceived individuality as it relates to what one is wearing or possessing. James explained: "Like hats, I'm not a hat person so hats like don't look good on me, but they might look good on another dude...so I guess, I don't know. Everyone stays pretty different.” In another example, Alicia perceived that her uniqueness as an individual was temporarily established because her laptop computer case was pink and no one in her immediate social circle had anything quite like it. She equated individuality through ownership of relatively rare items:

> You look around in the room and you see all the laptops and what stands out to you is that that girl has a pink laptop case...Laptop cases are becoming more popular, more and more people have them and that's beginning to take away from the individuality...As the year went on, I started seeing more and more people with laptop cases like that on their backs. So yeah, as certain products become more popular that contributes to taking away from the individuality.

In contrast, Susan did not seem to be particularly concerned about a loss of individuality. She defended conformity as a good thing, a type of unifying process in which everyone can communicate under the same language.: “I guess it kind of amasses us like if we all have the same thing, it all brings us together, and it all kind of lumps us together as the same group in a very vague sense.”

Conformity

Two codes were used to capture the essence of what it means to conform within consumer culture—both the perceived pressure to conform and the desire to fit in by the adoption of fads.

Pressure to Conform Within Consumer Cultures

The participants, in general, related how they are struggling with the concept of individuality and how to achieve a sense of self when the pressure to conform, both self-imposed and external in origin, is such a strong pull. The female participants spoke of how they seek to imitate clothing advertised in the media, and fashion trends of all kinds. For example, Ingrid talked about the pressure she was under not to wear pants that were flared at the bottom because of the fad for "skinny jeans." As well, many of the female participants also wished to embody the lifestyle, look and advantages of media characters: "Every step of my life I've wanted to be like someone from the media" (Tessa). Further to this, Pam lamented that despite trying to look different from other people she failed in her attempts. Perhaps the most dramatic change was Alicia's example of transitioning from homeschooling to attending high school. She found herself watching a particular television show and desiring to adopt the look of one of the characters; as a result, she changed her hair, started wearing makeup, and sported a new look with different eye glasses. Sonja found that she picked out her personal style by reading magazines: "I think when I read them I look at what they have because then it seems like magazines are telling you what's in style and what's the new trend, so maybe [I will] buy something similar to that." The struggle to be perceived as an individual by adorning a look that others do not appear to have was articulated by Pam:

> I try to wear things differently than other people do. It's hard, it's really hard because I do put a lot of effort into looking different than other people do, but in the end I don't think you end up looking different at all.

Judy also talked about this same issue, how she felt less of an individual, less original as she struggled to fit in and wear what everyone else had.

George really captured the issues of conformity for young people in consumer cultures. He talked about how he had tried not to pay attention to fashion magazines, but ultimately, ended up doing so. He struggled with finding his own opinion, that is whether the latest fad did indeed look good, or whether it was just that he was swayed by marketers to believe that it looked good. He felt that it was almost impossible to maintain an opinion that was not influenced by marketers. In the end, George often felt persuaded to buy advertised clothing in spite of his own sense of taste:

> I remember the summer going into...a clothing store and there were...all these manikins [that] were wearing sweaters and it was like it was summer and I

> was like, ‘why are you doing this’ and then, but I was like, ‘oh they look pretty good actually,’ so like, I bought one.

George also talked about the dilemma of not knowing his niche within the culture; he was drawn to sports and bought athletic clothing, yet, did not see himself as an athlete. Ultimately, he believed that the media would eventually persuade him to fit into at least one of the styles marketed. Ted, noticed that between his two sets of friends—east coast versus west coast—their Facebook pages and communication were essentially the same. He felt this was quite a revelation, that despite their desire to be individuals, young people were all sounding the same, adopting the same outlook:

> It's funny...it's basically the exact same, like even though I think now of my friends from home, they're not like my friends from here. Like I can't actually think of two people you know that are the same, but they totally are...It's all the same...even though they're like 3,000 km away. Like, it's all basically the same. I hate saying that about my friends... it seems like most people are kind of the same everywhere you go.

As well, Oscar talked about how he had given up wearing relatively new clothing because it was seen as out of style. John talked about how he had been influenced by advertisements to buy a certain style of clothing, to be up-to-date with athletic or outdoor gear, like snowboarding apparel. Even when it came to listening to music, Christopher confessed that he was never comfortable playing music of his choice around others, on the chance that it was not considered cool. He admitted to being influenced by other’s opinions of him: “I mean if someone says that looks good on you, like even if it's just a stranger...you’d feel more confident wearing it, so it makes you want it, right.” Christopher captured the feeling of *not* conforming as "almost like you stick out now, like because you know, you're not the one that fits in, so you feel almost like you're separated.” The feeling of insecurity about one’s preferences as a result of changing fads was reiterated by Sam:

> I just worry about if other people will think that it looks nice or that sort of thing, but often times, I don't know what I think. I find it hard to make decisions about even my preference and then yeah, when I hesitate, and a lot of people hesitate, you kind of think oh well so-and-so thinks this looks good, or will my friends think this is a cool shirt, stuff like that. So yeah, that makes me hesitate.

He further stated that he had never really felt a loss of individuality because he was dressing like other people: “It didn't occur to me that I was blending in and that I might lose some sense of

individuality if I were dressing like other people." Tom talked about how frustrating it was to feel the need to conform. He gave the example of Pokémon cards and how invested he was in that particular game, and how, eventually, the cards became "totally worthless."

Pro Fad

Most of the male participants argued that keeping up with fads was, for the most part, a positive process. For example, despite expressing how confusing it was to establish oneself beyond the confines of the latest fad, Tom defended this as enjoyable and therefore, justifiable:

> I don't think that fads are that bad. There's a reason why you enjoy it, so if you enjoy it, then who cares. Like it's kind of probably pretty annoying that like you [can't] have the same thing for that long. So, you'll be spending money again, but it comes down to that you enjoy it and you like to be a part of it, so it's good.

Adhering to fads was justified as a good thing because it involved change and as Floyd reiterated "a reason to buy more clothes, to work harder, to get something that's in style." Seeing others adorning themselves in the latest fashion trends leads one to think, according to George, that "it's just like everyone else is doing it and you're like 'oh well, that looks good,' like I should do that as well." Yet another male participant, Tom, explained that he felt fads provided a valuable opportunity: "I think it's just a way of expressing yourself, like it's self-expression."

The female participants, on the other hand, did not reiterate that keeping up with fads was enjoyable; rather, it was seen to be more pressure and necessity so as to minimize negative feedback in social situations. Alicia summed it up as follows:

> In terms of clothes when I was younger I would buy a lot more things that...would go out of style and I think that's kind of frustrating because you spend the money on it and...you want it to last a little longer...I still have things like that now, but I do a lot less of that...because...you invest the money and the next season it's out of style. You don't feel comfortable wearing that article out and then it's...sitting at the bottom of your drawer and it's sort of like, 'well that was a waste' and you could've bought something that wasn't so season-specific, or like, would've lasted you longer...I think definitely disappointment there, frustration. The worst is when you really like something and it goes out of style...and that's obviously a big problem because...you don't want to get rid of it then, but you can't wear it out.

Susan talked about fads in a positive light; in particular, she described using fads as a gauge to help her determine what clothing would look best for her, specifically: "To see what is...socially acceptable for what to wear."

Non-Conformity

The non-conformity category was important to identify, as a number of participants were adamant that they were not swayed by the trends or fads within the culture. Indeed, the whole idea of a consumer-oriented lifestyle was questioned, albeit by a minority of participants.

Free of Fad Influence

Those female participants (Sara, Susan) who identified themselves as coming from a "low-income family" stated that they were free of fad influence due to a lack of funds; they discussed their preference to buy clothes off-season so as to secure low, on-sale prices:

> When I shop for clothes I always go to the sale racks right away. I'd much rather buy something that used to be $50 and now is $10 than brag about buying something expensive...I'd rather buy winter clothes in summer or spring because I know they're on sale...I'm always like one year behind everything but I mean that's just how I've always shopped because then I can get more for my money. (Susan)

A number of female participants, including Sara, Tessa, Susan, Ingrid, Nancy and Judy, all expressed the desire to be their own person and reject those fads that did not appeal due to aesthetic reasons. Clearly, their desire to look good was expressed, but not at the expense of feeling pressured to adopt a fashion style they were not comfortable with. They talked about not wanting to dress just to impress others, but to do so according to what they sincerely liked. Sara, in particular, described the disconnect she felt with the images of young people in fashion magazines and how this impacted her willingness to adopt a fad: "You'd see images of kids doing these sort of fun activities and realizing that I...didn't enjoy those and that, for some reason, what I enjoyed wasn't being portrayed in these magazines." It was with some determination that Ingrid expressed her ability to wear something that she had chosen in the face of a negative reaction from others: "I don't really go with what society [likes]. I usually go for what I like."

Paying attention to fashion was a low priority for a number of the male participants. Some expressed that their selection of clothing was based on whether or not it appealed to them, and not on whether or not it was fashionable. As George defiantly exclaimed: "Everyone needs to be themselves or else like what's the point in even like living?...You want to find your own personal style and like everything you like has to be stuff that you actually like, so that's very important." George, Jeff and Ted all talked about how they deferred to their mothers to choose

and buy their clothing, relying on their judgment as to how they should look, as opposed to keeping in style (George clarified that this is less the case now that he is older). Male participants also expressed indifference with respect to fashion, of not caring: "I don't care about fashion. I don't have much fashions sense so. I guess fashion's the lowest priority of things on my list ...sports and stuff like that is a bigger concern to me" (John). Christopher emphasized that he was more interested in the practicality of clothing, whether it was functional, as opposed to aesthetically pleasing. As with the female participants who identified themselves from low income families, limited funds was also a factor for some of the male participants insofar as keeping up with the latest trends.

Questioning a Consuming-Oriented Lifestyle

A few male and female participants were opposed to buying and possessing 'things.' For example, Sara expressed her desire to fill her life with experiences rather than with objects, preferring travel over consuming. She also expressed an interest in acquiring a sailing license and how she felt that experience would be so much more valuable than that of a consumer. Jeff was adamant about not spending money and talked about how he would insist that his mother return items that she had bought for him that in his view were too expensive; put differently, he was passionate about minimizing spending for any reason. Sara was unique in her ability to articulate what she perceived to be the futility of consuming:

> We're sort of influenced to buy these...things like makeup and CDs and stuff when we really don't need them, but for some reason we're going to buy them... It seems odd to me. A lot of the things that people use you notice that they'll throw them out afterwards, or they'll play with them a couple of times and then just put it off to the side. So it really doesn't seem to be much other than sort of instant gratification of just buying.

She also articulated that she had little interest in acquiring commodities and instead, wanted her life to be full of meaningful experiences. On the topic of ownership, John concluded that it was, "stupid to have to have everything that everyone else has." As a final caveat, both John and Jeff, talked about how much they hated shopping though they did not specify a dislike to the process of consuming itself.

Values

This category reveals how the participants at times, contradicted themselves. For example, many of them declared that they had no values with respect to consuming and yet, at the same time, wished to declare their concern about the environment.

No Values Related to Consuming

The majority of participants did not hesitate to confess that they had weakly formed values when it came to buying products. They stated that they were motivated by likes and dislikes, convenience, price, and that which was valued, or highly rated. They also indicated that they had little interest in accumulating information that might impact the kinds of products consumed (e.g., animal testing). Alicia talked about how important it was to her to buy the genuine article with respect to brands as opposed to buying a "knockoff;" she considered this a type of value. Hence, it appeared that the absence of obvious values had to do with the desire of wanting an object and disregarding its manufacturing process (e.g., child labour practices). The following statements are examples of the type of responses elicited on the topic of values:

> Environmental issues have always been something that I've wanted to care about, but I can honestly say, it's never really been a concern to me. (Floyd)
>
> I know I should be more conscientious about what I do, but I mean I don't do it which is really bad because I feel like...a hypocrite. (Susan)
>
> If I bought some like terribly ‘un-environmental’...thing I probably wouldn't feel too good about myself. I still wouldn't care almost to a level where like it's never been like okay...I'm not going to buy this because of the environment. I've never gotten there. (George)
>
> I probably should care, but I really don't really look into [environmental issues]. (Jeff)
>
> I don't think [sustainable products] mean a lot to me or people my age, sadly. (Sam)
>
> Choosing to live a less ‘consumeristic’ [life]style...I think I would find [that]...it would be more difficult, and it would be less enjoyable. (Tom)
>
> I guess also, just like not making the effort to know, like I guess, overall, like I don't care. (Joyce)

Ted relayed that while he was living at home, his mother would not buy Kraft products because of their affiliation with Big Tobacco; he complied with this restriction for about two years until he moved out of the family home.

It should be noted that two of the participants, Tessa and Nancy, stated they were not sure if they were lacking in values or whether it was more a question of not knowing or having arrived at a decision as to their personal values.

Socially Conscious with a Caveat

For the majority of the participants, cost was a big motivator when it came down to making purchases; many indicated that if cost was no issue they would choose a product deemed to be environmentally friendly, but only under those conditions. For example, Christopher and Pam both stated that they would like to support the green movement, but that it would be too cost prohibitive:

> [If] you know there's a green product and it's $50, more say [the product is] $100, or say [it's] $200 product, and the green one is $50 more than I probably wouldn't buy it. (Christopher)

> The greener something is the more expensive it seems to be. Like things made in Canada versus things made in China is a big price difference. And right now, going to school, I don't have a lot of money so I don't have as much of a choice. But I think if I had a choice I would definitely buy the greener things. (Pam)

The fact that the participants were students, the majority of whom were on limited funds, was seen as a legitimate reason not to buy environmentally friendly products. Sam, like Pam, felt that as he got older, he would pay more attention to environmental issues because of the luxury of having more money.

Conscientious About the Environment

Approximately half of the participants stated that they were conscientious about the environment as consumers, although only Tessa and Ingrid were previously involved in any organizations related to environmental causes. None of the participants indicated that they were *currently* connected to organizations specific to the environment. The others talked about not buying products with unnecessary packaging, buying biodegradable soap, buying products that had been recycled, buying products that did not involve harm to anyone else (this participant could not clearly articulate what was meant by that), not buying products tested on animals, not buying anything produced by child labour and buying from companies that in some way do good by "giving back" (the example included buying from a shoe store that for every pair bought donates one pair of used shoes to charity). In summary, equal numbers of male and

female participants claimed that they were conscientious when it came to the environment. The following is a sample of a few declarations:

> I try to get stuff with the least amount of packaging as possible, or if I notice like the box has been made from recycled products, or the paper is from recycled stuff, or it's used from recycled materials, then...I would definitely try to lean towards that. (Oscar)

> I don't like products that are made in places where child labour is used. I think that's horrible. It's not like I go out of my way to look for things that are child labour-free, I guess that I'll feel a lot better about the product. Like I'll just think about it and I feel happier about the product if I know that in some way they were either thinking about the environment like cruelty of animals, or children... I love organic food and free range meat and stuff like that. I just like it better. I just like the idea better. (Tom)

> I bought this bag and it made me feel... very good about myself because it was like a vegan-made bag. It looked like leather, but it wasn't leather...I was doing some sort of good for the world by purchasing this bag that wasn't leather and it was made of plants. (Pam)

Consuming In the Context of Environmental Issues

This is the only category that is its own code. In spite of knowing about global warming/climate change and its potential damage to the planet, many of the participants did not feel it was incumbent upon them to make any changes with regard to consumption or even to care about the issues necessarily. The following excerpts capture their varying explanations and points of view:

> I just hope nothing happens to me...It's inevitably going to happen that some polar ice cap is going to melt, or there's going to be some hurricane or whatever that wipes out humanity, but I don't take it really too seriously...I just don't think it's going to happen in my lifetime, that it's going to be like that big of, that important of a deal. Like I need to stop right now or else tomorrow is going to hurt me. (George)

> I want a sustainable world for obviously my children, my children's children and like generations to come and everything, but I honestly really don't think about the environment because it's not really something that I can really deal with myself. Obviously I could go into professions that would do that, but it's obviously,... it is a big deal but...I don't really think it's a big deal to me but I know I should care about it. (Jeff)

> I heard that...we need to stop eating fish because they might be like, you know, we're running out of our fish supply, like our wild salmon. I just started eating more fish because I figure we're not going to have that long to eat fish anymore....it doesn't really matter. Like every million years, every billion, like

> a couple of million years, something terrible happens to the earth and you know everyone dies...and it's baked and the whole thing is covered in like volcanoes or whatever so, it kind of makes me just not really care because realistically like in the grand scheme of things of the earth, it doesn't, you know, we can't do anything to it. (Ted)

> I'm not like the type of person [who] is like a tree hugger sort of thing...I know like for like global warming I know like both sides of the story, like yes, it's happening, but it's happened in the past and...I recycle and stuff I mean it's awesome, everyone should, but at the same time I'm not,... not going to drive my car somewhere if I want to go somewhere due to greenhouse gas emissions. (James)

> I guess I haven't really experienced it yet to know what it's like so I don't really feel like it's going to happen. Like people are saying it's going to happen, but I haven't really experienced it yet. I know there's climate change now, but it's like not really intense change, so I haven't really experienced it really and it just doesn't really affect me. (Nancy)

> I'm definitely supportive of all the efforts that are being made like with different companies and stuff trying to move more toward things that are environmentally friendly, but it's not a huge thing in my life. It's not something that I'm really passionate about or anything...I'm not sure I want to make huge sacrifices for the cause either...I don't think I want to give up my car for the sake of reducing the emissions...I wouldn't want to give it up, so there's an extent to which I support the cause. (Judy)

Judy also argued that the very existence of climate change was questionable and that both sides need to be considered before any judgment is made about its veracity:

> I'm not convinced about climate change. From what I've heard there's two sides to the story. One side says that humans are causing climate change and the other side says it's part of the natural cycle of the earth. So I'm not convinced. It's not something that I feel concerned about.

Money

Participants discussed money in varying places throughout the interview, particularly with regard to questions about their financial security, both in the present and the future. As well, discussions ensued about whether money could guarantee happiness, how much value was placed on money and the participants' overall relationship to money. This section ends with a narrative about one male participant who indicated that his values had determined his educational and career choices.

More Is Not Better

One of the important realizations that surfaced on the topic of money was that having more stuff does not necessarily make one feel better, hence, the numerous stories of regret from the participants. Ingrid described the disappointment she felt as a child when she had desperately wanted a toy only to find that it gave her little to no fulfillment when she acquired it: "When I finally got it, I didn't really care for it." Many of the participants talked about having wasted money on particular purchases whether it was because they were quickly bored with the desired object or for whatever reason, never ended up using it. They also recognized the limitations of the desired object and how their expectations could not always be met:

> The commercials for hot wheels made it look sweet. I mean it was cool I guess, but like after like two or three days, it kind of just got put away. It took up the living room yeah for like Christmas day and the next day...There's not much else you can do until you buy more and more hot wheels. So that was kind of kind of a let-down I guess, but we did really want it for like three or four weeks leading up to it, me and my brother both. (Ted)

It appeared that while the participants were able to cite specific examples of when they had regretted buying something, they did not explicitly articulate the notion that 'more is not better.' Instead, they felt victimized by the flaws inherent in the items they had purchased or received. It should be noted that it was certainly not the majority of participants who expressed 'disappointment' as the prime emotion when acquiring a desired object.

Several of the male participants felt they could be content with very little, not a "huge amount," but simply enough to cover their needs. For example, Ted stated, "I have felt a lot of time that I do have all the stuff I need." Christopher also indicated that he had reached saturation points with commodities:

> There's always things that are like out of reach, that you realize [are] not really possible, like a brand-new Mercedes...As far as things like accessories and clothing...there's definitely been times when I've just been happy with what I have.

Relationship to Money

Most of the participants desired to be at least as well off as their parents and preferably, more financially secure. There appeared to be differences in the relationship to money relative to gender. For example, the male participants were far more interested in accumulating money than the female participants. Most of the participants talked about their ambitions to own a

house, cars and even luxury items like boats. Only Floyd confidently believed that he would be "quite wealthy" (in the millions) one day, and that by the time he reached thirty he would be making “seven figures.” James expressed hope that material success was in his future: "While I'd love to be wealthy obviously like everyone would love to be wealthy, but who knows." John stated that while he did not expect to be "ridiculously wealthy," he still wanted to have more "stuff" than the average person. He talked about how important money was and expressed his desire for wealth: "[Money] is not the most important thing, but it's one of them, for me at least, as bad as that sounds." A number of male participants were clear that money was not necessarily going to change their lives. For example, Oscar was able to articulate that, while more money might ease the pressures of life, it “wouldn't change the way I make my decisions or change my personality.” Two male participants had reservations about the ability of money to increase happiness. Ted believed that "I'd be happy with less money, but [a job] that I liked." Christopher reiterated that money was not of central importance in his life, at least not at the present time: "[Money] is not a huge deal to me compared to some people that I know who, you know, instead of having fun this summer, they worked two or three jobs. So for me it's not a big priority.”

In comparison, one of the female participants, Sara, talked about how money was important to her but within the context of providing basic amenities and even the opportunity to be altruistic:

> I definitely like money. I've learned that it is a valuable tool in living life to pay for whatever...It helps a lot and the more money you have it seems like the more security that you have and the more freedom you have to go traveling or to go to the movies, and even donate, or sort of help out other people.

Female participants held little belief that they would achieve a lifestyle beyond that of middle class. "I hope to be in middle-class like I'm not dying to be in upper-class, it would be nice, but I would be happy in middle class, being able to support myself and family" (Sara). When answering the question about whether or not money was important, Ingrid was uniquely different from the others as she replied: "I'm not really big on money as long as I'm happy I guess." She relayed how her parents were quite well-off and that she had grown up watching how the wealthy lived, noting that money did not contribute to any lasting happiness; she said she derived happiness from her relationships with friends:

> I guess it was just the people I met and they didn't care for money but they cared for life and they showed me a whole different view, or whole different life on how things were and I loved it...My fiancé was a major one, he didn't have money...he found happiness just in nature. He would take me into the woods and show me different things and talk about different animals. You know it was nice. It was a different change and I liked that.

A slight majority of the male participants (Floyd, John, James, Christopher, Sam, Tom) believed that they would be free of financial worries when they were older as compared to less than half of the female participants (Joyce, Nancy, Ingrid, Judy). It seemed that the male participants were only slightly less worried about achieving financial success than female participants.

The following narrative provides a picture of what it is like for young people participating in consumer cultures who wish to act in keeping with their values. In particular, John's story covers the struggle to establish values and what it means to challenge existing norms.

John's Story: A Career Path for the Environment

John came from an upper-middle-class family and was well provided for during his childhood with a variety of toys and other possessions. He remembers as a child wanting things and then being disappointed, or bored, even with those that were highly coveted. He remarked, when looking back in time, that many of the objects he acquired with his parents' money or his own were "an awful waste." When he was younger, it was very important to John to have branded clothing; he was very caught up in the skateboard culture between the ages of 10 and 14 and bought clothing specifically designed for this activity and other sports. John describes himself as being one of the "cool" kids in high school and was particularly self-conscious about this 'status.' He said: "I had the newest phones, all the clothing brands you needed... [I was] good at sports, [I] did well in school." Presently, John insisted that he no longer cares about clothing styles and says he has not changed his wardrobe in the last ten years. He was convinced that the media intensely targets his age group and that he no longer "buys into it." John believed this change was a result of advice from his parents to be wary of media; as well, he worked in retail for a number of years and became disillusioned by what he perceived to be excessive corporate profit. John viewed advertising as a scam and saw it as manipulative to the extent that it preys on people's weaknesses.

John stated that he now buys only what he really needs. He remarked feeling guilty about buying objects from China and tried to only buy those from North America so as to support local economies (while admitting this is difficult to do). John also professed to feeling guilty "a lot of times" when buying things made in the Third World because of the pollution generated from their industries. He felt that the globe is headed in an imminently dangerous direction: "I think there are going to be some major repercussions in the future. And people are going to wish they had listened back 10 years ago when they said, made all those reports, where our earth is going, heading." John proclaimed that he has chosen environmental engineering as a career path in order to participate in the production of "greener energies." While it is important to John to have a job with a good income, he made it clear that he also wants one that is "helping society as well as opposed to going into, like, oil and gas engineering where...you'll be a millionaire, but it all comes down to what your ethics are right now."

Summary: Identity

When considering individuality within the context of consumer cultures, many of the participants (Sara, Sonja, Tessa, Oscar, Sam, Floyd, George, Jeff, Christopher) maintained that despite commonality of ownership with thousands, even millions of others, they were distinctly unique. They also declared that character, as well as family background, and not possessions, determined one's identity. Yet, at the same time, a number of participants, Ingrid, Tessa, Alicia, Sonja, George and John, recalled a time when celebrities and television programs greatly influenced the formation of their identity. They recognized the struggle to be an authentic individual against the forces of wanting to fit in and achieve social acceptance. While a few male participants (Tom, Floyd, George), and one female participant (Susan), believed that adhering to fads was a positive, Alicia, in particular, relayed that she felt it was a negative. She regretted spending on clothing articles that could only be worn briefly because they were no longer in-style.

Both sexes described a time when they had adopted an 'extreme' fashion as a means of expressing their individuality and going against the norm: dying hair in the "colors of the rainbow" (Ingrid); wearing "short shorts" (Christopher); a "mullet" hairstyle (Ted). Additionally, Alicia felt her uniqueness was expressed in objects that she owned, and others did not.

A few participants, Sara, Jeff and John, reiterated that having material possessions was not necessarily a good thing, nor would they lead to greater happiness. Some expressed how they felt disillusioned after acquiring something that had once been deemed highly desirable. In particular, Oscar articulated that he was not motivated by money, and that having money would not change his personality. Sara and John in particular, stood out from all other participants in their capacity to understand the futility of buying while expecting happiness.

However, more males (e.g., Floyd, John, James), than females could easily imagine a life of relatively high material comfort; female participants felt that achieving middle class was likely the highest status they would acquire. Overall, the majority of both sexes had trouble envisioning a financially-secure future.

With regard to values as a consumer, the majority of participants (Floyd, Georg, Jeff, Sam, Tom, Ted, James, Joyce, Sonja, Alicia, Sara, Tessa, Susan, Nancy) were more concerned about their ability to acquire an object, rather than the ethics involved in its manufacturing. Furthermore, for Tessa, Susan, and Christopher, cost was *the* factor driving their purchasing decisions. Eight participants (George, Jeff, Ted, James, Floyd, Oscar, Nancy, Judy) expressed indifference or disbelief about the importance of climate change and the connection between consuming and damaging environmental events.

Clearly, the impact of media on identity, willingness to conform or not conform, and values was powerfully felt, and important to self-efficacy. Indeed, how the participants viewed the presence of media, and its relationship to the self, was a theme that kept recurring.

Media

Media plays a powerful role within consumer capitalist societies, impacting individuals on many levels including self-regard, relationships with others, and how one views the greater global community. Advertising is a major part of media and is, therefore, addressed as a category on its own in order to reveal the participants' views and understanding of the process of advertising.

The Self, Relationships and Media

All of the participants indicated that they watched media on a regular basis, often as a means of connecting to or bonding with friends and family. Media entertainment was integral to the social lives of the participants. As well, some of the participants indicated that they gained

vicarious pleasure from imagining themselves as the fictitious or 'real' characters (in the case of reality TV) depicted in media. For the majority of male and female participants, comparing oneself to figures portrayed in the media was reported as having a negative impact. This section also includes a code on media effects with regard to relationships with parents and peers. Advertising was given a separate code from media itself because of its critical importance in understanding the self.

Technological Goods

Technological goods were seen as tools that are an extension of the self, or as Alicia described, "it's always with you." Owning technological goods was also regarded as that which "completes" the self, when one has acquired all of the technology deemed necessary to function in the current culture. Each piece of technology was seen as "personalized," so as to be representative of the individual owner; hence, there was a perceived intimacy between the use of technology and the expression of the self, as well as self-image. The acquisition of technology, whether current or during childhood, was seen by the participants, like Jeff for example, as paramount to their individual social success, ability to entertain themselves and capacity to "keep up" with the culture generally. "I think it's important to everyone really. I think if you don't move along with technology you're kind of behind everyone else" (Jeff). Technology was seen as critical to academic performance and being able to connect to friends, as well as, the larger global community, through social networking sites like Facebook (which all of the participants were participating in on a regular basis). Old and dated technology was seen to represent a failure in being able to experience the opportunities that others, with newer technology, were more privileged with:

> I also had my old old phone for a really long time, so getting a new phone is something new and exciting. And obviously something like an iPhone, that can do so much, go on the Internet, play music...call people, text people, so yeah, it was an exciting day. (Joyce)

Further to this, the participants related that if their capacity to connect through technology was interrupted because of loss or malfunctioning, their relationships suffered. Indeed, technological goods were attributed as the glue that held friendships together—the unifying force:

> You can talk to other people who have the same phone for free and it kind of creates a bond between you and your other friends, or people who have that

> phone. With the iPhone you can talk to each other and see each other's faces while you're talking to each other. (Pam)
>
> I actually lost my cell phone like two weeks ago and I was pretty out of the loop for a while, like I just didn't go out as much, like especially when you don't, I don't have a home phone. I was basically unreachable unless you actually drove to my house and like knocked on the front door, which I guess you could do, but most people just don't answer the phone. I'd say it definitely helps having a cell phone and even where I like got a Blackberry as a new phone ...which kind of gets me even more, going out more, and stuff. It's like way easier just to invite people to go do stuff and come over. (Ted)

Individuals felt isolated and lost when their technology failed them or was inaccessible. Interestingly, technology was also seen as defining one's social class, particularly for the female participants; owning up-to-date technology presented a means of displaying one's 'privileged' socioeconomic status. This, in turn, was perceived as a way to feel good about oneself:

> I have an 'ex' who for his 18th birthday he got an iPhone and then I have a friend that for her 18th birthday she got an iPhone. And I got mine on my 18th birthday and when my 'ex' got his, because he's was a year older, so when he got his I was a little jealous at the time. Like it was almost 'Oh like I want that' and like he was from a wealthier background, like he's much better off and so I kind of looked at that...I would get sort of thoughts that he thought he was a little bit better than me. So when I got that iPhone that was like for me an almost like 'Ha! See, like I am as good as you'...[My iPhone] was newer by then, the new one had come out so I had something better than him. And that made me feel so much better about myself which is really kind of a weird thing how that is linked. (Alicia)

While it was initially exciting for the participants to acquire new technology, discovering that someone else was in possession of higher level technology tended to deflate their positive feelings:

> You're frustrated because you don't have the same opportunities as other people who have the updated technology and so if you don't keep yourself up-to-date you're almost missing out on something that everyone else has access to. So, that's definitely a frustrating thing. It's hard to keep up with and it's too expensive to have the new thing every single time, but yeah, it's a problem. (Alicia)
>
> I can think of like my cell phone a couple of years ago when everyone was getting iPhones and I just...had some clunky cell phone and it's kind of like, like you feel out of the loop a little bit, like everyone's doing something that you can't do. (George)

Technology itself was marvelled at for its speed and capacity, particularly, the smart phones; they reflected on how they had desired a cell phone when only a small elite in their age

bracket were able to acquire them. The participants also recalled how the capacity to play games was viewed as being cool. For example, a number of participants remembered how important it was to have Game Boy and Nintendo when they were younger. At the same time, there was also defiance expressed towards technology, the ability to live without it, to find other means of entertainment. As Tessa exclaimed, "I'm not like a person who's like without technology I cannot live kind of person, but with technology it makes life easier for me." And, Susan: "Everyone's so used to technology that it would be a culture shock not to have it, but I personally don't feel like life would be difficult. I don't feel it would definitely ruin life." Imagining life without technology was viewed as practically inconceivable and tantamount to a type of culture shock for the vast majority of participants (Joyce, Ingrid, Pam, Tessa, Sara, Alicia, Sonja, Floyd, George, James, Ted, Jeff, and John). Additionally, keeping current with technology was also described as a pressure:

> And the big problem with technology is that often times when they come out with new systems or whatever stuff stops working online and on the web—it won't run on older stuff. And so, you have a problem there because, like, you're frustrated because you can't access the same material, and you don't have the same opportunities as other people who have the updated technology. And so, if you don't keep yourself up-to-date you're almost missing out on something that everyone else has access to. (Alicia)

Alicia also concluded that technology divides people into social classes—the wealthy are far more advantaged by virtue of the fact that they can access up-to-date technology—which is gauged by the ability to communicate and express oneself:

> So I think [technology] disadvantages a lot of individuals who can't keep up financially with the changes in technology because I think everyone should have equal opportunity to use the same features on the web. And I remember when I was younger I would run into programs that wouldn't run because we had older computers...It creates [a] division almost between classes too because like the newer like technology obviously the wealthier individuals are able to purchase that and always keep updated and have access to that stuff and if you have a little bit less money and like especially the more impoverished people definitely can't have that technology.

Jeff thought it was important to keep up with technology as best as one could but did not think having the latest equipment was particularly important to their social positioning: "I think that it's overrated...I think like people might look at it like, 'his family's maybe a bit better off,' but I don't think it really affects anything." The majority of male participants regarded technology as

an essential, but also fun commodity, and as with the female participants, the path through which they could connect with others.

Screen Time Versus Down Time

Not all of the female participants were positive about the impact of technological goods on their lives. Specifically, Sara talked about how, as a child, she had been content with very little, often choosing to play outside with her friends until she became an adolescent and was introduced to technology-based toys, particularly video games.

> Interviewer: Can you describe a time when you were a child or adolescent when you really wanted to purchase something?
>
> Sara: I can't really think of anything in particular. I don't know. When I was a kid I didn't really want much. I was content with just sort of playing outside. I had we lived in a cul-de-sac, so I was really close to all of my friends and we would just go to the park that was there, or we'd play street hockey with some of the older kids' toys and that kind of stuff. But I never really wanted anything.
>
> Interviewer: That's unusual.
>
> Sara: It's sort of weird and how it also changed when I hit adolescence. That's when I started getting introduced to all these gadgets and stuff and that's when my parents were like okay the toys have changed basically but they're also a little bit more pricey and a little bit more out of reach I guess.
>
> Interviewer: So what do you mean by gadgets? Videogames?
>
> Sara: Yeah like the videogames, the MP3 players, and those sorts of little things. I guess that they were just starting to get popular.

As well, Ingrid described how once she got hooked on the computer she spent less time outside; MySpace and Facebook consumed a considerable amount of her time as well as browsing the Internet. Yet, surprisingly, the participants expressed little regret about how tied to technology their lives had become. Indeed, it was accepted with resignation as though there was nothing that could be done to alleviate this dependence. "We're putting so much into technology and I don't believe in real technology you know... It's bad enough that I have a cell phone. But I keep it because I have to" (Nancy). Participants detailed how constant their use of cell phones were and how texting was an ongoing activity throughout the day, even at the objection of family members. As Nancy described: "Maybe when I'm always constantly on my phone during dinner, or going out and stuff in the car ride, like constantly texting, it might have affected [my parents] a little bit." It is noteworthy, that none of the male participants felt that they had sacrificed

quality of life or outdoor experiences because of the use of technology. Furthermore, they stated that it was in no way seen as a negative influence, even when family members objected to the way it was monopolizing their lives.

Self-Worth Compromised by Media

Many of the female participants relayed that they negatively compared themselves to girls/women portrayed in the media. Specifically, they talked about 'perfect skin' as an example of feeling less than and wanting to look more like those depicted in advertisements, magazines or movies. As an example, Joyce said: "I like how their skin looks, so I want mine to look like that." Another example included the shape of one's face or eyes not meeting the standard of a typical model (hence, lacking beauty specific to the dominant culture). As a final example, having the right weight, relative to models that were below normal body size, was a big concern. Many of the female participants mentioned how messages from family and friends, those encouraging them to feel good about themselves, came into direct conflict with messages from the media:

> You tend to always feel a little less than you should I guess. You don't really value yourself as much when you're not like [a media model]...it's frustrating to know you're supposed to feel one way about yourself and then you see it in the media that you're technically supposed to be this way. (Sara)

Most of the participants indicated that they realized the ideal media image was unattainable. For example, Judy talked about how she used reason and logic to mitigate the impact of the celebrity life; she did this by focusing on the negative aspects of such lifestyles and the tendency to abuse drugs. Pam tried to downplay the role of media and its impact on how she felt about herself. She stated that she did not feel "mentally" altered by media yet, at the same time, admitted that how she thinks about her body has been impacted. Pam acknowledged feeling pressure from the portrayal of models in the media:

> I think you just feel like you should be one of the girls on America's next top model, or on the cover of the magazine, or say in those tabloid magazines to see these women that are all done up all the time. And you think...'why can't my hair look like that all the' time or 'why don't I look that nice or that put together all the time'?

In perhaps the most extreme example, Ingrid recalled being teased in elementary school for being too "big" and looking "manly." She revealed that her negative body image intensified as she got older and began to watch more television shows depicting models. As she put it, she

felt an "outcast" for not being the right size; she felt undesirable, unattractive and that she stuck out amongst her peers. She stated that this type of negative thinking still plagues her today: "I have more confidence than I did when I was a kid but I couldn't say I've reached that point where I could say I am still pretty. Isn't that sad?" Nancy seemed somewhat confused as to whether the media, in its portrayal of the female body, had a negative or motivating effect: "I guess media is always...saying how skinny people are pretty and like your body has to be a certain way. And sometimes it makes me want to like go on a diet or eat healthier, and workout, exercise and stuff."

A number of male participants, like the women participants, experienced negative self-image as a result of paying attention to media. George talked about how he had compared himself to one of the characters in the movie *Super Bad* and recognized what a "loser" he was because he felt he was similar to one of the protagonists in the movie who was portrayed in a negative light. He stated that he had held himself in too high esteem until he had seen the movie and that "it kind of knocked me back down to earth a little bit." Oscar noted that the media tried to portray perfect human beings that are next to impossible to attain, but difficult to disregard; these depictions, he noted, include images of those who are "honest, smart, thoughtful, healthy, physically fit, [and] strong." He was also aware of the link between eating disorders in young people and the media portrayal of 'body beautiful' as ultra thin. Indeed, Christopher described how he felt pressured to be in shape as a result of observing actors in the media who were "especially buffed." Oscar, also felt inadequate because of bad acne as a teen and remembered a particular television show in which an actor portrayed a kid who had acne, and how he was targeted in a negative way. Tom talked about having had acne in high school and how seeing actors with flawless skin on television made it more difficult. He stated: "So if you feel like you have an imperfection...[the media] might make you think about it." In a positive direction, Sam attributed the media as a motivator to staying in shape based on the portrayal of "perfect bodies," that made him "want to keep a healthy body."

Emulating Media

Alicia described how she had modeled her aspirations and goals according to what she saw her favourite characters doing on television. More specifically, she desired having a boyfriend, being able to drink alcohol and going to parties. While she never considered herself a

member of the "super popular crowd," she believed she had come close to living the ideal life as defined by media. She lamented that in the end she had not embodied a fulfilling existence, and recalled breaking up with her boyfriend, among other disappointments, as very difficult: "It's ironic because...that is sort of the one thing that I wanted out of life. [The lifestyle] was definitely created by media and realizing that's just not how it works was probably one of the hardest things to get over."

Male participants said they were caught up with the celebrity lives of athletes, and their brand of clothing and equipment. For example, Jeff talked about how he strived for the fitness level of television actors. James also wanted to emulate images of men's health and fitness: "I probably work out from seeing...toned or like 'jacked' guys and being like, Okay, I want to be like that." He also talked about how he worked to develop muscle mass and maintained a "skinny" body like those of male models. As well, James talked about wanting to emulate a character out of a movie or television series. For instance, in the show *How I Met Your Mother*, a character named Barney was idealized by James because "he makes tons of money and he's got great friends and he lives in...an awesome apartment with lots of awesome stuff in it... That kind of life seems very...good to me." The fact that the Barney character wears suits influenced James to want to do the same and has "changed my mind on suits for some reason. I was definitely influenced by it for sure."

Media Wary

Male participants described themselves as media wary in that they believed the media could manipulate; however, they felt they were above this level of influence. Ted observed the negative effects of media on his younger brother: "I see him being manipulated sometimes...No one really sees it in themselves." Christopher talked about how his middle school had provided students with information on some of the negative effects of advertising, and how this "really opened my eyes." As well, he claimed that his mother talked to him about the media targeting of young people including the practice of 'photo- shopping'. Ingrid recognized how girls are sexualized in the media: "[The media makes] girls put themselves out there more provocatively...I find it very disturbing when you see...13-year-olds, 14-year-olds, 15-year-olds in high school you know, trying to show their 'booty.'"

Media Effects on Relationships with Parents and Peers

Only Tom, felt that watching media misrepresented his parents, and parents in general: "I don't think the media portrays...[the] good interest that your parents have at heart. They mostly portray the opposite." George was adamant that watching media had not resulted in any perceptual change with regard to his parents. Joyce, who said she was raised in a single/one parent family, stated that she felt somewhat envious of the financial position of two-income families that were portrayed in the media. Alicia felt that watching media had a profound negative effect on how she viewed her parents and that this reinforced her own rebellious behaviour:

> Watching media, often times, parents are sort of portrayed as dumb or naïve or uninformed or whatever it may be, and I think I drew parallels between that and my own parents in some instances. And if you see that one kid on the TV show acting up and rebelling against their parents, then it's almost like 'oh it's okay' for me to do that too.

Other female participants, Sara and Susan, said that they had more positive regard towards their parent(s) in terms of appreciating who they were compared to those depicted in media.

Tom stated that watching media impacted how he viewed his peers. He described in particular, that watching the television show *Friends* led him to try to determine which role he played within his peer group:

> You're comparing yourself with different characters on TV even though they're not real. It's like you could learn something from them. Maybe it's their style of humour or the way they dress...I think you're looking for a role to play [within] your group of friends.

A couple of the female participants said watching media resulted in a type of bonding with their peers, "a good way to grow your relationships" (Tessa), as a result of having something in common to talk about. As well, Sonja stated that the television show *Pretty Little Liars* reinforced for her how important it was to treat her friends well. Finally, Nancy reiterated that watching the movie *Mean Girls* helped her determine which of her friends were "the mean ones or who at least, seemed to be the mean ones, and then who are, like, the nicer ones. You can kind of tell the cliques apart after seeing how they [are] portrayed."

Advertising

This category reveals how the participants' view and relate to advertising as a ubiquitous presence in consumer culture. As with the category on values, a number of inconsistencies about advertising effects emerged from the data.

The Lure of Advertising

Most of the participants agreed that advertisements persuaded them to buy, although a number of participants, both male and female, were convinced that they were immune from any significant influence. In some cases, the participants stated that they enjoyed advertisements, making a point of watching the ones that they deemed to be "fun." Tessa, for instance, felt that the only advertising that had any influence on her was about technology. Susan noted how advertisements are a significant part of her life and how strange it would feel if they disappeared. Yet, Susan also felt that "they influence my values by ending up telling me what to value." Advertisements were also seen as dictating to the individual their underlying choices: "I don't like advertisements just because they ask you to do something or try something, 'do this, do that,' when really I just want to do what I want to do" (Pam). Pam saw the pervasiveness of advertising as intrusive: "I think lots of the time I don't read them and I feel like I don't see them, but they're still there, and I think subconsciously, I know that they're there. They're everywhere." Pam also described how seeing an advertisement that really connected with her was highly reinforcing ("It was nice, it was cool"). Knowing that advertisers are solely interested in making money was acknowledged by Sara who recognized that advertisements could influence her to buy, even products that she did not need: "Every once in a while I feel like the advertisements have gotten to me, or I shouldn't technically be buying this, but I kind of want it so, I'll do it anyway and sort of give up something else in my life." Judy also concurred that she could be persuaded to buy quite easily: "They're getting what they want by getting me to buy something that I don't necessarily need or because I think it's a good deal. So I guess I feel dumb."

Floyd felt that advertisements could be informative and that "you might see something in a commercial that you end up going and buying, and if it weren't for [the ad] you wouldn't have bought it." He felt strongly that taking offense to an advertisement was to be narrow-minded:

> I am not religious at all so it might be one-sided saying this, but I honestly find if someone...takes...offense to an advertisement I feel like they are too strong

> in one belief and they need to realize that there's more than one view on life and not one way is a hundred percent correct. So I think it's fair game for them to advertise whatever.

Floyd was also sympathetic with corporate advertising because of the risk involved in getting their products sold. Pam agreed that advertisements provided a valuable and educative role about products that one would otherwise not know about.

Jeff believed that advertisements influenced beyond our cognitive awareness, at a level that cannot be felt or detected though, surprisingly, he also felt that advertisements were "genuine." He viewed corporations as doing good deeds by making money and stimulating the economy ("It's what makes the world go around"), and that it is rare that advertisers are "inappropriate." And while he stated that the media largely targets young people in his age group, he insisted that he did not feel any pressure as a result of this phenomenon. Ted volunteered that he pays attention to snowboarding sport advertisements and that he has been persuaded to buy from corporations that sponsor athletes he admires. At the same time, he acknowledged that advertisers know how to get young people to buy their products and that sponsoring an athlete may be one of those tactics: "I mean it's good for us the ads are so relevant, but it's probably bad because they really do know exactly how to make us buy their product." Christopher stated he was influenced by advertisements and that repeated exposure to such advertisements would definitely contribute to the possibility of him purchasing the advertised product. As well, he remembered viewing an advertisement about McDonald's as a child and how disappointed he was with the real product once he had acquired it. He said that as an adult he is still swayed by food advertisements: "If I see a Subway commercial or something, I'm hungry. I want to go out there and buy a Subway." Like other participants, he felt strongly that advertisements influenced, whether consciously or unconsciously, causing us to act in certain ways that benefits the advertiser. Christopher also mentioned that advertisements for videogames were particularly enticing and held a powerful sway over him. Finally, Tom relayed that, "Most of the time I believe [the advertisement] and have no issue with advertisement." He also expressed the opinion that advertisements "can't really lie" because the public will keep them honest. He felt that individual consumer research would ultimately mitigate the effects of false information advertising and protect the consumer from any intentional deceit.

Confused about Advertising

It appeared that some of the participants believed that they had some control around advertising and were even immune from its effect—advertisements were annoying at worst, and at best, informative. Susan felt that she was not influenced by advertisements because most of them were for products that she could not afford, those she called "big-ticket items." She seemed confused as to whether or not advertisements, for say movies, could influence her in any way. Further to this, Susan questioned whether advertisers could wrongfully portray information in order to sway people to buy their products: "They could get in trouble for that right?" She also felt that advertising was a fair system, that the "whole point of consumerism" is to manipulate people to buy whatever it is that a corporation is selling. She elaborated that the choice to buy or not is up to the consumer, that they have full control. Ingrid, also felt that advertisers would not lie, but then amended her answer by declaring that "maybe" they do. So, while advertisements may be an exaggeration of the truth, she believed that "what they're telling you is pretty much true." Ingrid distinguished between those advertisements that were "genuine" and disingenuous. Again, the theme as to whether an advertisement is truthful or not seemed to be a point of confusion. Having the "right" information from family and friends would, according to Alicia, greatly determine whether or not she would buy an item and not so much from what the advertisement claimed. As well, George seemed confused about advertising; first, he stated that one cannot really trust anything advertised on television, but then went on to say that he could trust because "they're not going to totally make [it] up." Overall, he felt the system of advertising in consumer societies was "pretty fair" and a viable means of selling products.

James admitted that he is more easily swayed by car advertisements because "I love cars," but concluded that because he does not have the money to purchase a car, the advertisements are, therefore, of no influence. James also felt that advertising was fair and that it was up to the individual to take responsibility as to whether or not they believed the advertisement, that is "if they're smart enough." Christopher, also agreed that it was up to the consumer to determine whether or not they are swayed by advertisements, and felt the onus was on the consumer to research a product before purchasing, as an antidote to false advertising. Again, there seemed to be some confusion in ascertaining the veracity of advertisements with regard to consumer responsibility.

Negative on Advertising

Some male participants found fault with advertisements. To begin with, Floyd thought that a large percentage of advertisers lie, but then reworded his comment to say "just false information, maybe not lying." John believed that advertisements were an "unacceptable waste of time," and that advertisements with respect to food were particularly deceiving. He eventually concluded by taking exception with advertising as a whole, indicating that "it's kind of manipulating a lot of people. I guess targeting age groups where a lot of people haven't had the ability to mature and get out of the advertising cycle." John also felt that the billions spent on advertising could be put to better use, towards countries that "have so little." Ted was so opposed to advertisements that he installed an "ad blocker" to screen out all advertisements from his computer. James zeroed in on men's health magazines and noted that half their content was made-up of advertisements, which he described as a negative. He also objected to the content of the advertisements in that they were not in the best interest of the consumer, and had more to do with selling the product than providing sound advice on how to become healthy. According to Christopher, advertisements override the consumer's better judgment: "It's saying, like, I can't decide for myself." He went on to say that he resented how advertisements are able to sway one into buying a particular product, that they have this degree of power over the consumer. George found advertisements "annoying" because of the subtle and overt pressure elicited from advertisements to spend money. He also talked about how advertisers use sexual content to sell their products and how they portray women as "stupid."

Few female participants objected to advertisements in any significant way. Sonja took exception with the skewed way in which advertisements are designed, that all people who use the advertised product will experience the same thing. Sara was less vocal, and noted that a lot of products advertised seem to be so unnecessary. She believed that a lot of these advertisements are based on becoming a certain type of person, or having a certain image, rather than "just being yourself." Only Ingrid believed that advertisers deliberately manipulate and that the majority of people taken in are young people. As for the male participants, again only one male participant, Oscar, felt that corporations were manipulative, though not necessarily in a pejorative sense: "I'm not saying it's manipulative in a positive and I'm not saying it's manipulative in a negative way...Whatever is best for a specific company...they'll just try to manipulate you to buy."

Self-Worth and Advertising

A number of female participants, Susan, Pam, Nancy and Ingrid, talked about how they compared themselves to models portrayed in advertisements. Some male participants, Oscar, Christopher and Sam, also claimed to do this. A few of the female participants felt that advertisements led to feeling incomplete as a person. Nancy had trouble articulating how this incompleteness manifested except to say that while other people in their lives would tell them that they were "whole and should appreciate themselves," this was opposite to the media messages. Sara reiterated that, "[Advertisements] all seem to say you're not complete without this kind of a product so it's sort of a downer." Susan relayed that the effects of the portrayal of women in media, while somewhat negative, did not overly impact her: "It's not like I feel like my day is ruined from seeing that." Pam felt that the portrayal of people advertised in the media leads to desiring that look and lifestyle: "Advertisements for the clothing companies like Crew and stuff do influence you to be the kind of people that they put on their ads." Pam also suggested that advertising detracts from individuality because advertisers are trying to convince all of us to buy the same products, their products: "I would rather not see any advertising at all and just pick for myself what I want." Conversely, Judy declared that she felt good about herself, specifically her normal-sized weight, when viewing advertisements depicting obese women for weight loss clinics.

The following narrative offers a more detailed look at what it means, at a personal level, to be impacted by media depictions of the 'ideal' body. Ingrid's story reveals the harm incurred when engaged as a consumer adhering to a media-driven lifestyle and cultural norms.

Ingrid's Story: Despair and Media

Ingrid stated that she grew up in a poor family that eventually became "rich." She remembers longing for particular objects and then quickly casting them aside, accumulating a "basement full of toys." By the time she was seven, Ingrid remembered wanting to be like particular actresses and models because of their body type. As she grew into adolescence, these desires increased such that she became obsessed with the actress Jennifer Lopez because of her Latino look, one that was shared by members of her family, particularly her sister. She described that when comparing herself to Jennifer Lopez she would feel "really bad, really bad."While growing up Ingrid was a plus-size body type and as such, was criticized by her parents and sister

for being too big. She was clear in laying blame for her negative self image with the media, however, because she believed that her sister, in particular, was influenced by media and had adopted media standards of beauty:

> [Watching media] made me feel gross... kind of out-cast for not being that [ideal] size. You know you'd feel a little depressed inside because you're not... that desirable. You don't feel like you're pretty or... You just feel like you're that ogre I guess you could say. You stick out."

Ingrid said that one of the outcomes of having body dysphoria was the decision to wear "baggy clothes" so that "no one could see my figure." She stated that she tried to please her family and friends by wearing clothing that was considered to be "in," even wearing "skinny jeans" to the point of developing a rash on her legs. She noted that other acquaintances were also struggling with acceptance of their physical appearance. In particular, Ingrid recalled an incident in which her friend's sister committed suicide apparently because she felt physically inadequate. Ingrid shared that she had also attempted suicide on multiple occasions for the same reasons, that she felt deeply depressed about her physical appearance. When asked if she felt the media held some responsibility she replied: "They hold a huge responsibility... If it wasn't for my sister getting into the media and then putting that on me, I wouldn't have even thought about [my physical appearance]. I never cared... I was more of a free spirit when I was a lot younger." Ingrid went on to say that she felt the media sexualized young girls and that it "has a lot of influence on children because they're like clay, you know you mould them...It's childhood [that] makes up the person and what you're doing is making them into really bad people."

Ingrid said that she eventually arrived at a point in which "I wear what I want [now]." She declared that she arrived at a decision to not follow the status quo: "I don't really go with what society [says], I usually go for what I like." She attributed her ability to express her individuality to an accepting group of friends, including a boyfriend. She described the feeling of individual expression as: "I was happy for once...wearing clothes...where people liked it and you felt good and so you were like 'Hooray.'" As a means of self-expression, Ingrid wished that she could have multiple piercings and tattoos, despite anticipated disapproval from her mother.

Ingrid stated that she is "annoyed" by advertisements, that many of them are false, but admitted that they still influence her to some degree. She said that she feels in control only "sometimes" when shopping and that "if I have spending money it's gone." Yet, Ingrid was clear that she was not ambitious about striving to be wealthy as an adult and felt that money was not

the answer to her happiness: "If you have [money] for the moment it doesn't make you happy for a long span of time."

Despite feeling compelled to shop, Ingrid was quick to point out that she adhered to a number of values when shopping including no animal testing, no child labour or "anything that was made that harms anything else." She was very positive about the green movement and had done some volunteer work with one such organization. Ingrid was clear that she accepted the global environmental crisis as real: "We've done a lot of damage to this earth. People are so ignorant...they just reject this global warming...They can reject it for now but then they are going to damn themselves when it happens. That's my worst fear."

Summary: Media

About half of the participants expressed how important technology was to their day-to-day functioning, how it had come to be an extension of the self (Alicia), or a completion of the self (Ted, Pam, Joyce). Furthermore, technology was described as a means of establishing one's good standing socially. For Alicia, in particular, technological goods were regarded as a way of determining and expressing socio-economic status. Sara, Ingrid and Nancy lamented about the way technology, as an activity, seemed to detract from time spent on non-screen endeavours. The participants talked about how texting and phoning was somewhat of an obsession, even in the face of family members' objections.

With respect to use of and exposure to media, many of the female participants, including Joyce, Sara, Pam, Ingrid and Nancy said that they were bothered by their physical appearance, comparing themselves to media figures. As well, some male participants, George, Oscar, Christopher and Tom, stated that their self-image had been compromised by media portrayal of men. These participants were of the mind that media-watching had led to negative self-worth. Alicia, Jeff and James also felt they were impacted by the behaviour and values of media figures (characters on television shows), but in a different way, as they strived to emulate them. Further to this, Joyce, Sara, Susan, Alicia, Sonja, Nancy and Tom looked to media as a kind of measuring stick with which to analyze and compare the quality of their relationships with family and friends.

Many of the participants including Tessa, Susan, Pam, Sara, Judy, Ted and Christopher, indicated that advertisements were effective in getting them to consider and perhaps, even

purchase, consumable goods. Susan, Ingrid, George, James and Christopher, in particular, were conflicted about advertising, specifically its helpfulness, authenticity, coerciveness, and ability to persuade. The pervasiveness and pressure felt from advertisements were viewed in a negative context by some participants (John, Ted, James, Christopher, George, Sonja, Sara, Ingrid). At the same time, the participants talked about advertisements as "genuine" and felt it was the rare occasion when advertisers falsified information about products. Indeed, Susan believed that the forces of the free market would keep advertisers honest. Christopher felt that consumers were responsible for their individual purchases and that this had little to do with corporate manipulation. A number of female participants, including Susan, Pam, Nancy, Ingrid, and Sara, and male participants, Oscar, Christopher and Sam, felt that their self-worth was compromised by exposure to advertising of various genres. Furthermore, advertising was seen as detracting from individuality in that consumers were treated all the same and ultimately, behaved in unison.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

This section of the dissertation provides a critical analysis of each of the themes outlined in the results chapter in successive order: Inside the Culture Industry, Identity, and Media. Theories outlined in chapter one and two, as well as empirical findings from chapter two are woven into the analysis to enrich our understanding of the results. As well, theory and empirical findings from chapter three related to conformity, creativity and mechanisms of persuasion are also integrated. Next, I discuss the results of the study specific to Schor's 2004 results and those of Kasser and Ryan (1993; 1996; 2001) to determine what, if any, commonalities can be ascertained. I also cover the implications of the results with respect to neuroscience, particularly the concept of the unconscious. A brief review of what can be done for children, how we can mitigate the harmful effects of consumer culture is also presented. Finally, I offer ideas for future research and detail how we might continue to enhance our knowledge on the topic.

The findings from this study suggest that consumer culture mediated by technology dictates, to a significant extent, consumer-oriented attitudes and behaviours of today's children and young people living in such cultures. As Barber (2007) noted, consumer culture is ubiquitous, omnipresent, addicting and, hence, "totalizing" in its capacity to infiltrate the lives of its citizens. Furthermore, consumption seems to be an aspect of culture that plays a significant role in the construction of contemporary identities. Specifically, consumer culture seems to act as a force that moulds and shapes identity and accompanying lifestyles in order to be aligned with the role of a consumer. Coveted commodities are in constant flux and at the whim of marketer's economic agendas. The identities of children are similarly subject to continuous change as fads come and go, thus de-stabilizing the self to the degree that conforming to such trends becomes a powerful means of appeasement. The participants in the study demonstrated, to a high degree, a 'conforming persona' with respect to a buy-and-consume modality, media use and a belief in consumerism as a viable lifestyle.

In contrast, some positive elements of understanding and resistance to consumerism were evident. A minority of participants considered they were different from the status quo, and believed that individuality was determined by the qualities we emulate, rather than strictly on appearances. A number of participants each *rejected* other aspects of consumerism such as 'more is better' (Ted, Christopher), being cool is desirable (George, Jeff, Christopher),

adherence to fads (Sara, Susan, Ingrid, Nancy, Judy, Tessa), and money leads to happiness (Ingrid). Two participants, Sara and John, stood out as nonconformists because of their overall capacity to question and adopt consumerism, and to seek fulfillment through other means. Considering the age of the participants, the data suggests hope for some who are able to mitigate the harms of consumer culture, perhaps not in its entirety, but enough to minimize some of the ill effects.

Inside the Culture Industry

One of the themes that strongly emerged from the data was the sheer power of the process of consumption, the way in which the participants described being influenced to buy and acquire material possessions. The participants talked about how they felt compelled to acquire things for which they had no need. Capitalism, in the modern era, has steadily shifted from serving society's real needs to fomenting false needs (Barber 2007). Ultimately, the market dictates in a top-down fashion. The participants often recognized, to a degree, that they were buying commodities for which there was no discernible need. Central to this is the notion of desiring and the sense that one can never feel satiated, or fulfilled to satisfaction. There is an accompanying emptiness and frustration that goes hand-in-hand with desiring. The participants' lack of insight about why we seem to engage in a continuous stream of purchasing is reflective of the fact that acquiring objects of desire seems to make logical sense. The let down afterwards, the feelings of a hollow fleeting contentment, were somewhat confusing. This confusion is tied to feelings of dissatisfaction, feelings that seem to defy all logic, as commodities are touted with the capacity to fulfill deep psychological and social needs. And when commodities fail to satisfy, the consumer often assumes the self to be somehow deficient. The desiring of consumer culture is part of what Barber (2007) meant by the "ethos of infantalization," the way in which individuals regress and fall victim to the market dictations as to what it is that they need. It is in this regard that the participants rationalized unjustifiable consumerism to normalize a 'shopaholic' lifestyle. Being impulsive about spending in the pursuit of more goods, and even feeling incomplete, is also part of the infantalist ethos that Barber (2007) referred to. When Nancy stated that "I always have to buy," she was expressing how the phenomenon of consuming had taken over many aspects of her life, that it was dominant. Bauman (2000) believes that the addiction to shop has associations with the freedom to *create* an identity. It is

insecurity that drives the modern citizen to cling to objects that are tangible, even if unfulfilling in the long term. Hence, the quest for the desired identity becomes a full-time occupation.

Adorno (1990) warned about the culture industry's capacity to erode critical thinking, and the social psychological process by which the wishes and desires of the ordinary citizen become tightly controlled. It appears that the participants' behaviours with regard to consumption are just that—rote responses wielded by those benefiting the most from consumer capitalism. Indeed, the culture industry discourages reflective cognition and critical analysis as Adorno (1990) noted, to ensure that mass-produced commodities remain enticing. It is important that we learn about the dehumanizing aspect of capitalism and begin to critically evaluate its impact on the self, society and broader environment. A natural extension of capitalism is what Marx (1992) referred to as 'commodity fetishism,' in which the social relationship to objects becomes more important than the use value of the object and, in consumer culture, this seems to be a primary condition. The participants showed such intense liking and longing for objects seemingly oblivious to their practical value, or lack thereof—for the sake of their symbolic value. Furthermore, it seems that material possessions come to be regarded as part of the extended self and, thus, have implications for self regard; objects are often used to compensate for perceived personal inadequacies and so temporarily boost self-efficacy. This may explain why the participants described deep disappointment when the acquisition of an object was somehow thwarted and, perhaps, the ensuing disappointment once the objected had been acquired.

Using an addiction metaphor, participants are described as being 'high' because of the intense emotions associated with acquiring the desired object, and the seeming endless appetite for material possessions. Again, I found a noted lack of insight. It appears that the feelings associated with acquiring are not analyzed; rather they are normalized and treated, at least initially, before the reward of the purchase dissipates and the craving begins again, as positive experience. There appears to be a strong sense of denial about the illusory gains associated with the acquisition of commodities. For example, equating gift giving with love is highly reinforced in consumer culture. Exchange of commodities is considered central to expressions of caring. Participants rationalized their need to have when acquiring objects of desire because the drive to possess is so salient (Fromm 1976). As well, the participants talked about how important it was to shift from one object to another in order to satisfy their desires. It is the momentum of

desiring that drives the consumer towards a state of heightened vigilance about choosing the 'right' commodities to feel fulfilled. In consumer culture, this is an endless process, one that drives the cycle of craving and acquiring objects. Each commodity can be replaced by something even 'better,' so that cravings operate in a cyclical fashion. Rather than questioning this process, it becomes easier to find fault with oneself ("I don't really need this") or the desired object ("It's not really necessary"). I would suggest that it seems, in this account, as though questioning the consumer system comes with too much risk, that there would be too much at stake because our lives are so inextricably connected to acquiring, consuming and (re)acquiring commodities—it would require rethinking one's values, beliefs, ambitions, identity and social relationships. And as Marcuse (1964) noted, 'one-dimensional man' is incapable of ever knowing his true needs because they are not his own; rather they are largely 'administered' from above. Rejecting aspects of consumer culture is likely representative of a complex conversion of many factors including self-esteem, identity, social status and even religious or spiritual orientation. Furthermore, participation in consumer culture means conforming to the status quo. Since humans favour in-groups over out-groups (Sidanius and Pratto 1999), shopping, as a norm, comes to represent far more than a recreational past-time. As Joyce described when buying objects that others had: "I feel like I'm part of something."

Consuming is a process that seems to tie and reinforce social connections, or relationships, as evidenced by the extent to which the participants received support from friends and family around consumption. Hence, it appears to be a highly social activity that unites individuals who might otherwise have little to converse about. Indeed, social conformity, or the process by which we are influenced by others, accounts for quite a large piece of consuming behaviours. Since consuming is both a societal norm (macro) and group norm (mezzo), the compulsion to participate (micro) is powerful. We only have to think back to the Asch experiment to recognize that the desire to fit in, even at the expense of one's integrity, overrides other behaviours. Commodities thus impart connectivity in terms of creating, maintaining and changing relations among people. John's dialogue about how he was influenced by his friends to buy Nike Shocks is reminiscent of the Elliot and Leonard study (2004:357) in which children described their desire to be part of a "symbolic brand community."

The heavy reliance on mother's opinions and approval suggest that within the family dynamics women are seen as having the expertise when it comes to buying. Mothers may wield

more influence than fathers in this regard because the management of the household and care for children is still predominantly left to the work of women. It seems that when their children grow into teenagers, mothers are still regarded as having the capability of choosing what is best to buy and wear. The process of shopping, acquiring and seeking mothers' approval was perceived as a type of bonding, especially by the female participants. It appears that mutual regard for commodities, and a shared interest in acquiring such commodities is a way of connecting with others in consumer cultures. Another important aspect of the reliance on mothers is the way in which commodities have become symbols of love and affection (Williams 2006). At the same time, corporations wish to be perceived as purveyors of love through the sale of their commodities (Ewen 1976). Industry, to a degree, replaced family authority as the one 'knowing/caring best.'

The whole notion of fads is a reflection of how corporations successfully market their goods in an ever-changing new style that works upon people's insecurities about their acceptance from others. Marketers steer the individual into recognizing and acknowledging the body and self as intrinsically flawed, inadequate, or at least, incomplete, and identifying alternative pre-packaged commodities, or practices for self-transformation. Maintaining (managing) the self with a correct array of commodities thus becomes an ongoing labour process for individuals (evaluating, acquiring and consuming) to compensate. Fads are associated with social success and acceptance, being at the forefront of a changing world. By not adhering to fads, one runs the risk of social rejection. As Judy explained, "I want to look like those people with all those friends." In this study, the participants showed great affinity with subcultures defined through fads and brands as Miles (1996) discovered in his study of teenagers. In both cases, the participants were quick to adopt the "in" fads, rather than going off in a direction truly unique.

The participants associated brands with an elevation of social success, social acceptance and status in general. The brand, highly visible, is a safeguard from becoming a social outcast, or even more minor incidences of rejection. Brand purchases are associated with positive attributes like confidence, just as they are advertised. Further to this, the purchaser seems to forge a bond between the brand label and their own sense of self. Barber (2007) stated that an individual's consuming persona is in fact *the* dominant self in consumer capitalism. The visibility of the brand becomes a measuring stick with which to judge and know others. Indeed,

brands are a visible way of demonstrating compliance, especially in cultures obsessed with appearances (Giddens 1991). The results from this study, similar to those found by Elliot and Leonard (2004), Frost (1999), and Pilcher (2011), all point to the fact that children, from younger to older, use branded fashion items as a way to judge others and establish their own identity 'markers.' As Dittmar (2004) found, one's physical presentation including fashion style, in large part determines how we are judged, and which attributes we are believed to possess. Adorno (1990) noted how conformity to fashion styles is a requirement for survival in the culture industry based on this very notion of judgment. The other important aspect of brands is the way in which they are incorporated with self-concepts, or as Chaplin and John (2005:119) described, "self-brand connections." In other words, the brand is attributed with characteristics that we wish to integrate with our perception of the self.

Female participants in my study were more adamant about the importance of brands than males possibly because appearance associated with femininity remains more prominent than images of the masculine male. This concurs with what Russell and Tyler (2005) found in their study namely, that young girls define their femininity primarily through their role as consumers, taking their cue from marketers as to the feminine ideal. As well, socialization is strengthened by group dynamics: conformity is socially reinforced, while deviation from the norm can lead to exclusion or banishment. The male participants, not surprisingly, were more apt to acknowledge the importance of brands when it came to sports and technology and less so with clothing, though it was not entirely absent. Brands have been introduced in consumer culture as necessary if one wishes to maintain a level of status deemed to be socially and psychologically desirable. It is also important to note that, because the participants have grown up with brand culture from birth, it likely feels quite natural to imbibe brands of all kinds. Since brands are less strongly associated with the quality of products they represent, but are instead affiliated with deep symbolic meaning and sentiments as well as emotional attachments, it is little wonder that their appeal to youth is so powerful (Barber 2007).

The defiance expressed from both male and female participants concerning brand influence seemed more like a reaction to feeling loss of individuality, than rebelliousness against external pressures, or the system of capitalism itself. The conflicted emotions they expressed about brands, wanting to be trendy, but at the same time, wanting to be true to the self, appear to be an important aspect of the branding phenomenon for some. Rejecting brands that do not

capture one's personal style is a form of non-conformity; specifically, Deci and Ryan (1985) refer to this as that which is not in agreement with the inner self.

Despite the forces of consuming so characteristic of their culture, four of the participants (Tom, John, Sara and Sonja) were able to articulate their dissatisfaction with the lifestyle, indicating that their level of well-being was not tied to consumption. It is not clear whether they were more about non-conforming, or whether it was simply about recognising the limited fulfillment of coveted objects. Sonja captured it best when she described the relief that 'not wanting' brought. All four participants seemed to recognize the futility of always wanting more, that it could never lead to high levels of contentment. It should be noted that none of these individuals stood out from the other participants in an obvious way other than their ability to critically evaluate their experiences.

Cool, like fads and brands, is associated with an elevated social status and acceptance that is highly desirable. Cool elevates one to a position envied by others; this is deemed to be an achievement in consumer children culture. Cool is not defined in terms of personality or character traits, but in terms of what one possesses (the correct array of commodities), according to the participants. The possessions that capture cool are not necessary for survival, rather they are all superfluous; again reflecting the notion of false needs that Barber (2007) described. Marketers have constructed cool to be that which personifies the quintessential consumer—someone who has it 'all.' In other words, cool is a function of superficial appearances. As with wearing the right brand, being 'cool' is associated with a feeling of confidence that can only be found in the objects one possesses and the confidence that supposedly brings. It seems therefore, that material goods are anthropomorphized and endowed with the emotions associated with success, intimately extending from the self.

Craving the lifestyle, look and characteristics of a celebrity suggests that the participants feel a deficit in their lives, and have become dissatisfied, all the while fantasizing about 'what could be.' This deficit could reference physical appearance, financial status, fame and success (however defined) in general, all of which reverberate with identity construction. Hence, we may attempt to imitate the personality and character of the celebrity as a means of aligning with their identity. As well, wishing for a celebrity life has become far more common than in the past and is an indicator of narcissistic trends in young people (Twenge and Campbell 2009). The

denigration of the (poorly commodified) self is a powerful tactic that marketers use to keep one forever desiring a makeover, and what better than to be rich, famous and beautiful.

Sara and John were the only participants who talked in depth about breaking away from consumer culture, rejecting a life tied to the ups and downs of acquiring commodities, rejecting the norms and finding their own niche. Sara said that she had an epiphany about the shallowness of consumer culture while still in high school. John contemplated the futility of materialism and the harm that consuming does to the planet in later high school and early days of university. It is in this sense, in the ability to exert in social interactions and shape one's immediate experiences, that Sara and John demonstrated individual agency. They defied the strata of the surrounding culture in an effort to express individuality, true to form, and, on some level, contrary to the status quo. In a more minor way, Jeff expressed dissatisfaction with the endless spending that consumerism demands.

Identity

Despite wishing to be cool, having the latest brand, and dressing according to the latest fad, the participants seemed to believe that for the most part, they were true to themselves. They vehemently defended their individuality, certain of their uniqueness and autonomy. Admission of capitulation to marketers through surrender of individuality is far too threatening to entertain at the conscious level. In working on their appearances, children must negotiate the competing demands of forging an identity to fit in and be accepted, but at the same time to stand out as an individual. Horkheimer and Adorno (1973), Marcuse (1964) and Barber (2007) all stated that consumer culture must convince the individual of their uniqueness in order to motivate consumption on a mass scale, that they are surrounded by diversity, rather than sameness. Pseudo-individuation is central to the workings of the culture industry; it must constantly provide new objects with which to persuade the consumer to believing in free choice, and a process that renders them unique (selecting a unique configuration of mass produced, whether niche or mass, commodities to express their unique individuality). Being in control is tied to notions of being true to oneself, being an individual, not being pulled and swayed by advertisements. Many of the participants were adamant that their decisions around consuming were methodically and carefully calculated, that they were in control and wilfully choosing. Interestingly, Adorno (1990) characterized the notion of 'informational' advertising as an

attempt to manipulate potential buyers by having them believe that they are in control of their decisions. The participants showed a naiveté by believing that they were immune from advertisements by doing the right research. Cialdini's (1993) research on the "six weapons of influence" clearly demonstrates that marketers use effective and relatively simple tools to persuade us to buy their products. Cialdinni (1993) cautioned that unless we understand and recognize persuasion tactics, it is highly likely that we will be manipulated by those applying the 'influence principles.'

For the most part, the participants felt that individuality is largely achieved or represented through appearance, rather than through attitudes and behaviours. Specifically, they felt that hairstyle, clothes, eye glasses and tattoos (to name a few) were all ways to distinguish the self. What was notably absent from the majority of participants' responses was the means by which personality and values contribute to one's uniqueness. Consistent with Giddens' (1991) theory, the participants seemed to experience identity as closely aligned to the body, likely because of the high degree of importance placed upon the physical in consumer cultures. According to Maguire and Stanway (2008), attention to appearances is inseparable from the process of identity production in modernity and begins to take on the characteristic of a "do-it-yourself project" (65). Implied in this task is the acceptance that the body, and hence the self, is flawed, inadequate or at least incomplete. Maintaining the body has become intimately tied to corporate agendas in which the latest corporeal fads and fashions dictate identity and physical construction (desirable body types to go with the wardrobe). Of significance is the fact that the participants seemed confused as to how their identity manifested, and which components of their life shaped identity. Indeed, one of the greatest challenges to identity formation within modernity is keeping pace with the rapidly changing images, sound bites and styles of self-expression (Ganetz 1995). The development of identity means doing the work required to 'pull the self together' by identifying areas for transformation and the necessary practices needed to transpire body maintenance as though a commodity form. Bauman (2000) suggests that confusion around identity occurs in consumer cultures because one is forever attempting to escape the feeling of insecurity that comes with a strong identification with objects; this leaves the self as fragile, vulnerable and in constant flux. It would appear that consumer culture requires a continuous reinventing of the self as the desired standard is never stationary (Bauman 2000). This may explain why the participants felt no qualms about keeping up with changing

fads; rather it was seen as a constant process of identity formation and temporary consolidation. Keeping up with fads was more enjoyable for the male, rather than the female, participants likely because girls, in particular, have difficulties related to self-esteem as a result of the media beauty myth that plagues them from a young age (Dittmar et al.2006; Dittmar and Howard 2004; Kilbourne 2004). Additionally, the participants, though not articulating it as such, clearly felt a pressure to establish an identity that was "current," to keep ahead of the fads, to stay cool. As Ganetz (1995) noted, children have never been under such scrutiny related to identity formation—shopping for the right look has become a full-time occupation.

Two participants, Sara and Tessa, both declared that imagination, self-expression, and character define individuality, not possessions. In this regard, both these women stood out from the other participants in their ability to articulate and understand that identity includes more than physicality. However, it is important to note that Tessa at various points during her interview admitted that she was strongly influenced by the media, that media characters helped define her identity. As Tessa described it, "Every step of my life I've wanted to be like someone from the media." Sara, on the other hand, consistently articulated her ability to exercise individual agency through creative expression and determinism. She stated that she was not interested so much in amassing commodities as she was on acquiring meaningful experiences through travel or sailing. Sara seemed to be true to her own convictions, having engaged in critical analysis of the dominant culture. It is also interesting that Sara perused the media in an attempt to find her niche and eventually, came to the conclusion that she was different, willingly choosing to be a non-conformist. As well, a number of male participants (George, Jeff and Christopher) articulated that, once they left high school, they felt less pressure to define their identity based on other's expectations, to uphold cool. It is possible that their capacity to reject beliefs, norms and customs that were restricting was gained through maturation of age, and a different environment (university versus high school). It is also noteworthy that a number of participants, including females, stated that they were not able to array themselves in the latest fashion due to limited funds. It would be interesting to explore this further with individuals who identify as being in a low socioeconomic position, to see if the pressure to adopt fads is internalized in a different way from their wealthier counterparts.

The participants justified conformity as a bonding process with others, as a means of sharing experiences, not as detraction from autonomy. Both descriptive norms (how to act) and

injunctive norms (rules or beliefs) present in media had an impact on the participants. For example, when George talked about desiring an athletic persona this was an example of a descriptive norm, related to what Pollack (1998) described as the 'boy code.' Christopher never felt confident to play music that was not considered cool, an example of an injunctive norm. Adorno (1990) observed that the 'real' world is attributed to the realm of movies, television and other forms of media. This was evident for Alicia who attempted to model her life after a character on a television show. At the same time, the participants were somewhat disturbed by the level of conformity surrounding them, keen to cite examples that demonstrated a break from the status quo. Interestingly, many of these examples had to do with the style of one's hair or clothing; putting such emphasis on outward appearance to appear unique or distinct in actuality, reflects conformist convictions (Niedzviecki 2004). In consumer cultures, conformity includes adopting a persona different from oneself and that which reflects the 'ideal' lifestyle as defined by marketers. Hence, there is a constant pressure to conform, to fit in and adopt the behaviours of the norm. This poses a dilemma for the individual who seeks to maintain autonomy. We force ourselves to identify with the 'other' so that conformity is seamlessly achieved, as though a normal process. Conformity provides a false sense of individualism, ironically offering protection from a fear of becoming invisible. As Adorno and Horkheimer (1973) noted, not to conform is to be rendered powerless on many levels including physical, emotional, even spiritual; breaking free comes at a heavy price. Interestingly, Susan's exclamation that conformity unifies and brings people together speaks to what Marcuse (1964) meant by social control in capitalist cultures. As capitalism dictates our needs and wants, it simultaneously wields power over the very minutia of our lives.

The fear of not fitting in was palpable for the participants; they appeared to have some recognition at a conscious level that diversity or dissonance, if executed in the wrong way, was risky. This may explain why fads were exonerated, justified and framed in a positive light as though they inherently magnify self-esteem. When Sonja talked about how she took her cues from magazines, she spoke about it in a positive light, not unlike the teen girls in Currie's 1999 study. Confusing the latest fad with self-expression is a ploy used by marketers over and over—it is that which keeps the culture industry alive. Adorno (1990) suggested as noted above that the identification with mass-produced products negates critical thinking and imagination. Individuals come to believe that with every new object there will be an exciting new experience,

rather than the banality inherent in the acquisition of such objects. Certainly, the participants were quick to say that new technology, new clothing styles, new sports equipment, et cetera, all elevated their sense of self. They did not seem to recognize the inherent falsity, the buying and selling of their very identities. Being free of fad influences seemed less a genuine desire to rebel from and reject the culture industry, and more about limited funds. For some of the participants, monetary constraints may have led them to rationalize that branded goods and fads were not that important. At the same time, the process of breaking from the constraints of consumer culture is fraught with risk, anxiety and opportunities for personal failure. There is also the risk that a longing to express *genuine* individuality is nothing more than the reinvention of the self based on a celebrity blueprint (Niedzviecki 2004). Indeed, the majority of the participants admitted to adopting some aspect of the look of a celebrity, and desiring to become someone even better. The vast majority of participants shared very little that seemed to be truly creative about their lives, somewhat consistent with the findings by Hee Kim (Shellenbarger 2010) that children's capacity for creativity is in decline. It should be noted that the area of creativity was not dealt with directly which may have been a contributing factor to its apparent absence.

The majority of the participants declared upfront that they had few values, or weakly formed values, related to the process of consumption such as refraining from purchasing products that had been animal tested, made by child labour, or were deemed harmful to the environment. Since values are exquisitely tied to identity, it is possible that a lack of values in the face of consuming is yet another sign of how citizens are swallowed whole when up against the tide of consumer culture. This 'lack-of-values predicament' had to be rationalized in some way, and often was, by pointing to a lack of monetary funds. Only a few participants wished to appear to be cognizant and concerned about the importance of the environment, to emote an identity of caring. When questioned more extensively on the topic of climate change and environmental devastation as a result of consuming, most of the participants demonstrated a high degree of narcissism. For example, Judy felt that because global warming did not impact her directly it was likely not a reality. Twenge and Campbell's (2009) research on the rise of narcissism, particularly among today's youth, may explain the data on values. Convictions that one is not bound to others, as well as feelings of entitlement, are both symptoms of narcissism. Many of the participants described their 'bottom line' as being motivated solely by money. They felt somewhat appeased by insisting that having access to greater funds would result in

demonstrable concern for the environment. Yet, when it came to talking about environmental issues, specifically, the participants provided all sorts of justifications to deny the existence of climate change. Furthermore, some of the participants blatantly stated that they had little concern about the issue—that they should care—but could not bring themselves to do so. Consumerism fosters a self-indulgence, and encouragement of materialistic and superficial lifestyles (Kasser et al. 2004), as evident in the participants' answers. As a caveat, most of the participants were new to the idea of articulating their values which may have significance for the ways in which they answered questions on this topic. They may also have been intimidated by the spectre of, or felt incapable of dramatic transformation in their consumptive habits.

Considering the criticality of issues such as global warming and unfair labour practices in the Developing World and China, it is particularly confounding that the participants held such little concern. They also denied that the global environmental crisis is real and has relevance for their lives, today. Again, these types of attitudes are fostered not out of ignorance about the facts, but likely because of a narcissistic desire to see the world as fitting with our personal agendas. It appears that relating to the 'Other' in the face of desiring is a difficult task, challenging the very core of one's identity, especially when identity has become an extension of the things we own. Billig (1999) regards the routines of consumer capitalism as practices that require a form of repression; as disconcerting thoughts about Developing World labour practices, for example, enter our consciousness we must find a way to distance ourselves from connecting them with our commodities, and thus, with our sense of self. Interestingly, many of the participants stated that if confronted with two items of the same price they would select the 'green-friendly' commodity. So, on some level, they articulated a sense of responsibility so as not to appear or to feel hypocritical. This is what Barber (2007) referred to as a conflicted "sense of liberty" in which one is torn between satisfying one's conscience, and living out the 'good' life. Indeed on some level, the participants were frightened about the impending doom of the planet, but somehow were not able to internalize their responsibility for this possibility. Not all of the participants showed evidence of narcissistic personality traits; three participants (Oscar, Tom and Pam) could identify with the global environmental crisis to the degree that they felt implicated. It is also significant to note that "green consumerism" has become quite popular—participating as a 'responsible' consumer and abiding by such values is no longer about taking a non-conformist stance. Ironically, buying eco-friendly products has appeased the average buyer

into believing that the global environmental crisis can be mitigated (Kahn 2010). It is not clear why some participants, and not others, accepted personal responsibility to the extent that John, for example, wished to devote his entire career to the 'green' movement.

Identity in consumer cultures is closely tied to monetary worth using a standard dictated by the market; much of self-esteem is evaluated on the basis of monetary and subsequent material success. As Marcuse (1964) recognized, the drive for money, possessions and property perpetuates conformity, and is binding to a way of life that restricts freedom. The participants were somewhat aware of the feelings that arise when acquiring objects that disappoint, but were unable to articulate why. There appeared to be almost an element of confusion as to why the coveted object could bear such little reward. Still, individual agency was demonstrated by Ted and Christopher when they declared they had as much as they needed, that they could be satisfied; this is contrary to the cultural propaganda that desiring can only be appeased through more consuming. The quest for and purchase of commodities is often times more rewarding than the object of desire itself.

The participants' desire for a middle class or upper middle class future was an aspiration that the majority shared, seemingly oblivious to all that it entails. Not surprisingly, the male participants were far more confident about their monetary future than the female participants, likely as a result of the fact that men have greater earning power than women. As well, there is a societal expectation that men, more than women, should provide the bulk of earnings for the family. Hence, the male participants were able to imagine achieving an upper middle-class status, whereas the female participants did not.

The participants seemed conflicted about 'more is not better;' somehow knowing this is true, but at the same time wanting to imagine their future with above-the-norm material wealth. This may in part reflect the sample characteristics, that they were all university students. At some level they felt it was right not to place too much emphasis on money, yet, at the same time, they craved all that financial 'success' brings. As with the results of Twenge and Campbell (2009) in which children cited "being rich" as one of their top ambitions, some of the participants shared in this regard, demonstrating an element of narcissism, or sense of entitlement. As well, having unrealistic goals about their salaries as working individuals was somewhat consistent with the Charles Schwab Inc. 2011 survey on US teens who expect to earn three times the national household average. Still, four participants (Tom, John, Sonja and Ingrid)

felt that they could build their lives and be satisfied without always hankering after material goods. Ingrid in particular stated that the need for money had little to do with her happiness, that it was relationships with others that gave her joy.

Media

The participants described their lives as intimately connected to media. The use of media and its influence did not appear to be well understood, likely because of its ubiquity, familiarity and taken-for-granted presence. Indeed, all of the participants had grown up with unprecedented media presence, thus limiting their capacity for deep reflection in this regard. As well, in their development as children, the participants were surrounded by an object world of technology and because of this may have experienced a loss of emotional intimacy (Turkle 2010). At some level, media has come to replace aspects of community and family. Never before has it been possible to get in touch with so many people over so much distance in such a rapid manner. The threshold between the public and private space has never been so low. This explains the fondness that the participants exuded as they talked about their media experiences, attributing technology with the power to connect. Yet, often perceived 'intimacy' of the type established through technology is paradoxically always at arm's length, illusory, never tangible enough to make for 'real' experiences (Turkle 2010). And as Horkheimer and Adorno (1973) noted the world mediated through technology begins to take on a 'real' experience; the outside world comes to be seen as a continuation of that presented on the movie screen, television screen or computer screen. This explains the intense identification the participants showed with media figures, whether real or not, including celebrities, actors, musicians, and sports stars, cartoon characters etc. Reality television feeds on this illusion and as a result, has become wildly popular—the audience begins to see themselves as an active part of the experience.

The participants were all very familiar with popular culture and adept at using media's tools (cell phones, computers, televisions), which the majority exalted. It appeared that technology was a somewhat seamless extension of the self, forming a basis of self-image. Owning and manipulating an "intelligent" object was regarded as evidence of a level of superiority. The participant's descriptions of what it felt like to either lose technology, or face deprivation through other means, revealed a sense of desperation and great loss accompanied by fear. For some of the participants, technology was also considered a marker of status, thus

making it extremely attractive to own the latest gadgets. Ownership of technological goods, like luxury items, has become a marker of success including financial and social. It is interesting that as students with limited funds, the participants felt that technology was indispensable and a top priority for purchase. Here again, branding has a role in that the corporate name with any given piece of technology is significant, and more than just for appearance sake; owning an Apple Iphone, for example, induces a sense of belonging in the "Apple community," to be a member of the fast track. Aptitude with technology was considered more than just an acquired skill; rather, it was seen as fundamental knowledge, and a lifeline with which to access or navigate. All of the participants understood this and while they wished to be perceived in control, their dependency could not be hidden. For example, some of the participants fondly remembered their sudden rise in popularity upon acquiring an iPhone or iPad and how powerful this reinforcement felt. At the same time, anxiety is part of the new connectivity yet, it is often the missing term in the communication revolution—falling 'behind' is representative of failure. In their obsession with technological media individuals repeat one-way communication with such frequency that unmediated relationships become foreign and worse, difficult to manage (Turkle 2010). The use of technology instils a feeling of omnipotence that undermines ordinary give-and-take patterns of relating. Ultimately, behind the compulsion to derive satisfaction from virtual experiences is a longing for fulfillment and acceptance that is not hinged on technology. This was recognized by some of the participants who lamented all they had lost since the arrival of technology. For example, Sara described that life before technology was meaningful, that she had been satisfied with playing outdoors with friends until she became fascinated with video games. Another participant, Ingrid, regretted the time she had spent on the computer, missing going to the beach with her family as a result.

Despite knowing that their lives will never mirror that of a celebrity many of the participants still longed for a chance to be like a celebrity. Why does the celebrity seemingly embody all that we desire? In consumer culture, we are forever faced with an inadequate self in need of more—more money, more things, and more physical beauty, all of which are embodied in the celebrity. The celebrity has become a branded commodity, a cultural product, epitomizing the 'successful' citizen-consumer, one who has achieved, even excelled, beyond the cultural ideal. And because celebrities are highly visible in the media, it is no surprise that many of the participants were seduced by the lifestyle. The culture industry keeps us entertained, with the

celebrity in the forefront, as a means of defusing the latent dissatisfaction from that part of the self that recognizes we have become objectified (Horkheimer and Adorno 1973). Consumer culture 'rewards' those who conform to whatever images are being marketed. The self is thus perpetually unstable, vigilant in its quest for a perfection that is not attainable and in constant need of a makeover. Boden (2006) also found in her study that children identify with the celebrity (both entertainment and sports celebrities) in the same way they would with a brand, becoming so enmeshed with celebrity worship as to reconfigure their identity. Like the participants in this study, Boden's participants (though much younger) were skilled at interpreting modes of fashion as a means of communication about their personality. And while the participants in this study showed a degree of awareness that media can have a negative effect on the self, this was downplayed and seen as that which could easily be mitigated.

Many of the participants felt that their self-regard had been compromised by media. The story of Ingrid speaks loudly to this phenomenon. Like the pressure to conform to a buy-and-consume modality, the 24/7 presence of media with its depiction of the 'perfectly' sculpted human being was felt as an enormous pressure by both male and female participants. This again related to Pollack's (1998) 'boy code,' and the beauty myth that haunts girls and women alike. There was hardly any mention of the ways in which girls are sexualized in the media with the exception of Ingrid when she remarked on the ways in which media influences girls to flaunt a sexual image. Furthermore, the desire to emulate media characters shows the extent to which identity formation is often dictated by marketers (Fromm 1947). Interestingly, while four of the women (Sara, Susan, Ingrid and Nancy) felt they were free of fad influence and dressed according to their own choosing, all of them admitted to having their self-worth compromised by media. Their pull in two directions demonstrates how confusing a process it is to establish autonomy in consumer culture. Another example includes Ingrid who believed that the pursuit of money would have little to do with her levels of happiness, yet remained deeply troubled about her physical appearance because of media influence. Clearly, rejecting consumer culture is a complex, nuanced road—it is more likely that varying aspects can be questioned and set asunder.

Advertising, the most powerful drive to media, also contributes to feelings of inadequacy, or as one participant noted, being "incomplete". The ubiquity and power of advertising as a means of getting people to do what marketers map out was only partially

understood by the participants. There was a desire to believe that we are in control, that advertisements have not gotten the better of us, and that at worst, they are simply an inconvenience of the modern world. The participants showed a certain degree of naïveté about the intent of advertisements and their ability to sidestep advertising influence. Furthermore, there was little awareness of neuro-marketing, and how corporations are able to manipulate at the unconscious level despite how prevalent such practices are (Lindstrom 2008). This became evident when analyzing answers to the interview question: "Can you describe a time when you felt persuaded by media to be a certain type of person, or to look a certain way?" The participants generally mimicked the attitude that marketers wish us to assume, namely that advertisements are informative truthful representatives of reality and leave one simply with more options as a consumer. Understanding that advertisements themselves have the power to dictate the type of person one should be, and to feel the need to transform the self, are important insights that few of the participants grasped. Resisting the culture industry is a monumental task, one that requires more than just knowing. It requires a vigilance and commitment to the autonomous self, to make and act on decisions as a free moral agent, that few seem capable of internalizing, let alone desire. And while some of the participants agreed that they were influenced by advertisements in some way, they in no way felt victimized or believed that they were being coerced. Any reference to media persuasion was given a far more innocent context and generally dismissed with little concern. None of the participants realized the extent to which advertisers went full bore in their targeting of children, particularly, at the time when they were born. It is interesting that several of the participants generally felt that the consumer was, in large part, responsible for any sway by advertisements. This may be due to the fact that they wished to be viewed as in control—outweighing the reality of the harms caused by advertising. As well, the fact that they had grown up under the largest advertising campaign in human history would make dissent that much more difficult. In other words, advertisements were familiar, part of the popular culture, and therefore, unassuming in a sense. While some participants felt that the media presented images to strive for, they were reticent to accept that they could be deceived. Part of the research question was to determine whether or not young people are aware they were manipulated as children, and it appears they are not, to any great degree. The critical analysis that this would require of them was lacking, just as Adorno cautioned would be the case.

For many of the participants, media was the backdrop that facilitated peer and family communication. A few participants were aware that media undermines adults in favour of forming a tight bond with children. As Alicia came to realize, watching media had led her to view her parents in a pejorative light, and was largely responsible for her 'rebellious' behaviour. However puerile the television programs were that they described, the participants saw benefit, and enjoyed the commonality they had with others who viewed the same programs. Thus, failure to participate in popular culture potentially leads to isolation and social abandonment. It leaves one bereft of the details about the 'stories' of popular culture, trivial as they may be. Keeping abreast of popular culture becomes almost a requirement, an acquiescence that appears to be self-motivated.

Application of the Results and Previous Research

The results from this study provide some insight as to why for example, Schor's 2004 study so strongly indicated that consumerism has a negative effect on physical and psychological health. Based on the participants' statements, it appears that relatively high consumer involvement is associated with a pervasive dissatisfaction, shallowness and negative comparison; this could explain why high consumer involvement leads to depression, anxiety and low self-esteem as Schor (2004) found. For example, chronic dissatisfaction can lead to anxious and depressive states, as can feelings of inadequacy. The denigration of the self is a constant theme in consumer culture, one that can undermine positive psychological states (Kilbourne 1999). Furthermore, the participants in this study were short on principles when it came to consuming which could also enhance negative self-image leading to anxiety and depression. Finally, consuming was so prominent in the lives of the participants that other more beneficial activities and behaviours may have had little opportunity to offset negative emotive states. This predicament seems to hold true for the children that Schor surveyed. It is important to note that in Schor's study there were no significant differences between males and females a general finding of this study as well, with the exception of fad pressure which was reported more acutely by females. It appears that fashion may still be more important to females than males due to sex-role orientation around standardized views of femininity.

When compared to studies by Kasser and Ryan (1993; 1996; 2001) this research also suggests that individuals high in extrinsic materialistic values, which many of the participants

demonstrated, may lead to a detraction of well-being. For example, the young woman profiled in this study who shared her suicide attempts stated that attentiveness with media and desire for a particular look greatly contributed to her negative self-image and feelings of worthlessness.

Implications of the Results

The results here suggest that children in consumer cultures face insurmountable odds about how to fulfill the self, establish an identity centered on contentment and express their creativity. Keeping in mind that the intent of the study was not to establish that consumer culture is harmful to children, I have presented a glimpse at the details as to *how* consumer culture imposes on children in the way that it does, why they may feel anxious or depressed or have unfulfilling relationships. We have seen for example, how branding and attending to fads is a pressure, how desiring the life of a celebrity can be disappointing, and the general lack of fulfillment in endless desiring or consuming. We also have a better understanding as to why children conform to cultural standards that detract from their well-being and believe in consumerism as a viable way of life. Finally, we have further evidence that young people, while acknowledging that consumerism is harmful, have little motivation to change their consumptive habits.

Of great importance in considering the effects of consumer culture with respect to children is "an emerging science, which integrates genetics, epigenetic, neuroscience and developmental science...that will *transform* our knowledge of early development." (Boivin 2012:ii, italics mine). It is the environments of childhood that are critically important with regards to brain development and outcomes later in life. As previously mentioned, it is also becoming clear that more of our daily activities, thoughts and assessments, beliefs and behaviours, throughout life, are directed by unconscious processes of the brain—largely structured by childhood experiences (Burton 2008; Eagleman 2011; Taylor 2008). The deeply embedded neural connections of childhood contribute to worldviews that are resistant to change (Shermer 2011). Marketers, having recognized the many opportunities (present and future) that childhood represents, are using various tactics to stimulate children's unconscious desires, fomenting cravings for whatever is being marketed (Lindstrom 2008). This then raises a moral dilemma as to whether or not advertising to children is ever, as often argued, just an engagement in the articulation of free will. Adults have some capacity to analyze their thoughts, feelings and

behaviours, to uncover unconscious motivations in a way that children cannot—their brains are simply under-developed. Thus, the unconscious clearly plays a significant role in all activities associated with consuming and needs to be carefully considered in future research, both in terms of methodology and analysis, particularly as it relates to decision-making, likes, dislikes and desiring. The present study was no exception. For example, it seemed evident that unconscious manoeuvrings contributed to some of the ambivalence that the participants expressed about advertising and their ability to resist persuasion. As well, the strong emotions associated with buying and 'not getting' are likely driven by experiences stored in unconscious memories. Furthermore, seeking a cool persona, celebrity emulation, adoption of fads and conforming to the status quo by attuning to media all imply elements of unconscious processes associated with social acceptance and the desire to be liked. Revealing an individual's unconscious motivations is an involved process, one that would require an in-depth analysis of attitudes and beliefs as an adult *and* childhood experiences.

What Can Be Done for Children?

Both Linn (2004) and Schor (2004) provided full chapters in each of their respective books (*Consuming Kids* and *Born to Buy*), listing possible measures that need to be implemented to protect children from the toxic effects of consumerism. The following is a brief, and by no means exhaustive, summary of those recommendations: ban advertising to children altogether (age 12 and under); full disclosure of advertising in children's marketing (product placement for example should be declared up front); disclosure of the names of researchers who assist corporations in state-of-the-art advertising techniques (neuro-marketing) with children; ban all advertising in schools; parents, teachers, community organizers should involve children in non-media activities and talk to children about advertising; involve children in national events such as TV Turn-Off Week and Buy Nothing Day to raise their awareness, as well as that of parents; limit television viewing in particular (it still holds as the number one venue for advertising to children); parents should organize local campaigns to stop commercial exploitation of children at a grass roots level. It seems that the primary action that needs to be implemented at a public policy level, one backed by governmental law, is a ban on advertising to children. This has been recognized and implemented in Sweden, Norway, Finland and the province of Quebec. In Greece, Belgium and New Zealand marketers face a number of various

restrictions including a ban on junk-food marketing, no advertisements for toys between 7 a.m. and 10 p.m., and a ban on advertising within five minutes of a children's program on television (Linn 2004). It is clear that without government intervention in the form of policies, regulatory bodies and laws to enforce certain measures, marketing to children will continue on its current acceleration path. Remarkably, since 2004—a watershed year in the recognition of harms sustained by children through consumerism—there have been no federal laws passed in the US or Canada that restrict corporations in their marketing campaigns. The commercialization of childhood has been largely absent from government's agenda.

While valuable, efforts to implement the above stated measures will simply not be enough to stave off the ill effects of consumerism. In order to fully understand the problem of consumer culture and the ways it has dominated the lives of children, we must consider the larger context of global capitalism. The "free market" and neoclassical economics are now ideologically preeminent, yet structurally (and theoretically) unsound and increasingly, destructive (Chernomas and Hudson 2007; Klein 2007; Lasn 2012; Smith 2010). The lack of regulation with respect to child consumerism is, arguably, a result of the same political forces driving the lack of regulation in global finance, global warming, and rising income inequality. For example global warming has risen to historically high levels despite significant evidence that a global systems failure will likely occur (Hansen 2009; McKibben 2010). Clearly, capitalism is, in many respects, a broken system. The child consumerism 'problem' is really just another symptom of a failing global economic system—unsolvable, unless underlying causes are addressed. Those with experience in social justice and environmental activism are alarmed by the acceleration of global warming, income inequality and how democracies have become increasingly influenced and controlled by corporate plutocrats and oligarchs (Freeland 2012). Some even believe, as does Chris Hedges, a Pulitzer Prize winning writer-activist, that despite all the effort on behalf of social justice, the 'battle' has been lost—all that is left as a measure of resistance is open revolt (Hedges 2010). Hawken (2007) argues that the only way to manage social change will be through the "intertwingling," of the millions of social justice and environmental groups, worldwide, as a unified force. Regardless, in the global context, children *in* consumerism might be considered a modern version of canaries *in* the coal mine. This makes any discussion about consumerism and children not only highly relevant, but extremely divisive.

CONCLUSION

A puppet is free as long as he loves his strings (Harris 2012:20).

Inverted Totalitarianism: Priming Children to Consume

The commodification process in consumer capitalism is more than just repressive in its promotion of an endless array of the same thing repackaged. It is more than just an affront to one's aesthetic sense and loss of individuality. Ultimately, Horkheimer and Adorno (1973) believe we have reached a point of voluntary participation in the culture industry fully aware of its insidious effects. They make it clear that each citizen is not a dupe per se, but somehow knowingly contributes to their unsatisfactory condition. But what of children, those who have known nothing but the realities of the culture industry from birth? We must remember that the authority of the family shifted to industry, from the parents to the advertisers who claimed to understand the needs of children better than even their own family (Ewen 1976). It seems unlikely that children, even grown-up children, perceive the mendacity, manipulation, and control that surround them. Certainly it is possible to develop critical thinking capacities and break free, but as we have heard from the participants, it is the rare individual who is able to separate himself from the culture, to retain a strong sense of autonomy. It seems as though the culture industry has gone beyond the imagining of Horkheimer and Adorno to the extent that it has targeted children. The developing brain has become its new territory. Jerry Mander (2012), activist and media critic, coined the term "privatization of consciousness," meaning that media has now infiltrated to the core of our thought processes, that there is nowhere to escape from the billion dollar campaign to capture our brain waves: "The combination of television and astronomical advertising spending has effectively reshaped the consciousness of the United States and the entire planet: our self-image, the way we aspire to live, our habits, our thoughts, our references, desires, memories" (p. 5). There is no need to hide the deceit when it cannot be detected. The ultimate success of the culture industry is to create citizens oblivious to its moulding capacities and instead, have them believe they have arrived on their own merit, as an expression of their 'creativity.' Wolin's theory about inverted totalitarianism seems to hold true—corporations are in large part ruling over the individual at an intimate level, not just inside their homes, but also penetrating their very being, their identity.

The reification of culture is generated through corporations, those who endlessly market culture as a commodity. The participants, while believing that corporations seem to "get" their age group, perceive it in the most benign way. They had little to no recognition that corporations are highly influential in the way they dress, the technology they use, their relationships, their family dynamics, their views of climate change and how they see themselves, right down to the very core of identity. No one regarded themselves as a pawn in the hands of corporate control, instead their naïveté prevailed. As we know from the Milgram (1975) and Zimbardo (2007) experiments, it is very difficult to resist instruction from authority figures, a position assumed by media in various forms. Democracy has in great part been eroded beyond recognition in consumer culture so that citizens have been replaced with respondents, objects of manipulation rather than autonomous free-thinking individuals (Wolin 2008). The participants in my study vehemently believed their individuality was wholly maintained despite the phenomenon of mass consumption, seemingly unaware that from birth they have been moulded, primed, and enticed into accepting a way of life that has been largely dictated by the culture industry.

Corporations have infiltrated into the most intimate of spaces within the family, day care, schools, and leisure time pounding out their message over and over, demanding conformity and compliance. Sadly, any possibility of genuine fulfillment slips away as individuals desperately seek to find happiness from a system that forever stokes, even manufacturers, discontent. The majority of participants in this study had an inkling of this, yet seemed to see no way out, somehow knowing that individuals who choose their own paths of self-realization are faced with a loss of security and anxiety as they systematically deviate from the status quo. It is not that the struggle between individuality and generality is new to the human condition. What is new is the inculcation of children from birth by a system so powerful that few can resist or even understand their predicament—what has become the *sine qua non* of modern existence. The plasticity of the brain in children is such that they are “exquisitely sensitive to [their] environment” (Greenfield 2000:57). We now know that much of our worldview or beliefs, as well as the limits on what thoughts we are capable of, are established during early and middle childhood, deeply embedded in the neural circuitry (Shermer 2011). The culture industry understands and utilizes the extensive knowledge now available on childhood development to inculcate children with its ideology. Neuroscientist Susan Greenfield warns that the delicate and critical dynamism and plasticity of the human brain in children presents both “wonderful

benefits and terrifying threats" in the construction of identity in the 21st century (Greenfield 2008:10).

Future Citizens

The outcomes of this study beg the question 'What kind of person is being raised within the confines of consumer cultures, to keep it operating en masse?' We know that consumer culture fosters and encourages a set of values based in self-interest, a strong desire for financial success, high levels of consumption and interpersonal styles based on competition (Kasser et al. 2007). Within consumer cultures it will take significant effort to foment attitudes of selflessness, a concern for the broader community, a value for close intimate relationships, and feelings of worth and autonomy (Kasser et al. 2007). As Kasser et al. note: "Universalism, benevolence, and self-direction oppose [American Corporate Capitalism's] aims of power and achievement" (8). People oriented toward materialistic values are less empathic and less cooperative, all of which interfere with quality relationships and positive self-image (Kasser et al. 2007). Self-esteem, which is closely tied to identity, is often undermined by aspects of consumer culture, since self-worth is so largely equated with financial success. Sense of self under consumer culture involves a belief that one is in constant character deficit, fulfilled solely through consumption. Indeed, the values of consumer culture oppose those for self-direction and self-acceptance. Further to this, consumer culture requires the individual to remain vigilant and competitive, to view others' success as a threat, prompting the desire for more; the fundamental tenant of consumer culture is that it is normal and good to act in one's own self-interest with little to no concern for others. Three of the beliefs central to consumerism—materialism, competition and self-interest—are antithetical to healthy families and sustaining societies in the long-term. It has already been widely established that good relationships are a key factor to psychological health; yet, consumer culture values oppose the emotional ingredients that make relationships successful including being helpful, honest, forgiving and loyal (Kasser et al., 2007). The corporation must remain vigilant in fostering the belief that happiness is attained through the satisfaction of material needs, if they are to continue reaping the level of profits and power to which they have become accustomed. And so children are raised within the culture industry knowing nothing else, striving to 'succeed' within its confines and suffering baneful psychological consequences.

Future Research

In terms of future research, from a critical perspective, it might be revealing to interview younger children and determine their awareness of the effects of consumer culture, particularly as it relates to global warming. It might also be helpful to specifically examine what it would take for children to resist conforming to a buy-and-consume modality by focusing only on resisters, those autonomous individuals who defy the culture industry. Also, understanding how consumer culture impacts children from varying socio-economic backgrounds and ethnicity may reveal more details as to the effects of consumerism across multiple cultures. Longitudinal research on a particular cohort of children may demonstrate the effects of consumer culture over a lifetime and allow us to pinpoint important milestones associated with conformity or non-conformity. Perhaps a follow-up with the present sample in a couple of years would be valuable based on the fact that many of the participants felt less pressure to consume in university than they did in high school. This effect may lessen even further for third and fourth year university students. For example, a series of interviews conducted at one-year, or two-year, intervals might provide a more detailed and expansive picture, documenting changes as individuals mature. The other possibility would be to work with a larger sample, employing a mixed methodology, employing both qualitative and quantitative questionnaires, which may then increase the generalizability to a wider population. Looking beyond the sample size, a recruitment method based on a random sample population, with representation from a wide range of socio-economic status, and ethnicity may provide more nuanced data. It might also be useful to have an interviewer who is not acting in the double role of researcher as well. It is possible that some of the participants were intimidated by my 'authority' and were less free with their responses as a result (though there was no detectable evidence of this occurring).

Yet another analytical approach might be to focus on the agency of the participants to determine what sort of familial patterns, personality traits, or traumas effect how individuals respond to consumer culture. Indeed, it needs to be emphasized that this study has focused almost exclusively on the structural forces that contribute to conformity. Personal agency must also be explored in determining for example, whether an individual may be prone to conformity or non-conformity and by identifying characteristics that contribute to resiliency.

In order to continue enhancing our study of the issues it might also be worthwhile to observe the behaviours reported first-hand, as in ethnographic research. Watching shopping

behaviour for example and then discussing it at the time, with the participants, might afford greater insights. There are limitations to self-report methodologies in that people wish to appear competent and are always defensive to some degree. Hence, an ethnographic approach, with direct observation, which does not so much rely on self-report may provide more accurate data. Nonetheless, focus groups, including those of children, parents and teachers talking about consumerism, may provide enriched data, shedding light on areas less comprehensible such as confusion about the impact of advertising. Future research could thus be guided by these two methodological formats, ethnography and focus groups, as a means of heightening our understanding of the issues and approaching the subject matter from a number of differing angles.

Finally, it may be important to critically explore the relational dimension of consumerism. It is now widely recognized that the experiences of childhood are socially and culturally contingent. We need to know more about how social relations are constructed, reproduced and maintained in consumer cultures. Children are intimately connected to families and it is largely under the influence of adults that they adopt their view of the world and are socialized to behave. Consuming in itself is a highly social behaviour that involves interaction with others; no aspect of consuming is executed in isolation. As the data showed, our tastes and preferences are largely influenced by others in our quest for social acceptance. How then might consumer culture impact children's relationships with peers, siblings and parents? We saw in this study the participants describing their relationship with mothers as critical to their 'successes' as a consumer. It might be worthwhile to explore specifically how a 'non-conforming' child develops under the guidance of materialistic parents for example, or how parents work to mitigate the effects of consumer culture on their children. The example with Ted and his decision to avoid Kraft products because his mother objected to Kraft's affiliation with the Philip Morris Corporation demonstrates how parents can be influential in this regard.

There is, however, a danger that continued research will simply leave us mired in evidence-building tasks, ultimately coming full circle to what we have known since Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse first identified the problem more than 60 years ago. It would appear that we have since run out of time. Global capitalism, which provides the infrastructure for consumerism to spread, is a "suicide machine" in no one's best interest, not even the top one percent (Wright 2004). Ultimately, there will come a time, if we continue to consume at the

current rate, when no one will benefit including the corporations that so righteously fought for unfettered market privileges.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me about a time when you really wanted something? How did you feel when you got it? How did your friends react to this? Your parents?
2. Can you describe a time when you wanted something and could not purchase it for whatever reason? How did it feel? How did it affect what you did with your friends?
3. Can you tell me about a time when you decided to start watching a particular TV show or movie? Did this decision involve family or friends? If so, how?
4. How do you feel about watching advertisements? Do they influence you in any way? Do you feel in control about what you decide to purchase? How do you decide whether to believe an advertisement?
5. Can you describe a time when you were a child or adolescent when you really wanted to purchase something? How is it different from today?
6. Do you worry about having enough money to buy things when you're older? How do you decide how much money you'll need? What does it mean to you to have enough money for purchases?
7. Can you describe a time when you decided you wanted to purchase technology? How did it feel to not have this? What changed in your life once you made this purchase?
8. Can you describe a time when you had to wait quite a while before you acquired something? How did it make you feel to have to wait? How did waiting affect your relationships with parents? Friends?
9. Can you describe a time when you admired and maybe even wanted to be like someone portrayed in the media? How did this make you feel? How did this influence purchases that you made?
10. Can you describe a time when watching media changed how you felt about yourself?
11. Can you describe a time when watching media changed how you felt towards your parents? Peers? How did this happen? How did it make you feel?
12. Can you tell me about a time when you regretted purchasing something?
13. How does it make you feel when experiencing changing fads? Do you feel pressured by this?
14. Can you describe a time when purchasing something made you feel more popular with your peers?
15. Can you describe a time when you felt persuaded by media to be a certain type of person or to look a certain way?
16. What does it feel like when you purchase the same things as those around you? How do you maintain your individuality?
17. Has using Facebook influenced the kinds of purchases that you make? Does it make you want to have things?
18. Can you tell me how it felt when you didn't have something that others did?
19. Can you give me an example in your life when how you felt about yourself changed because of something you acquired or purchased?

20. What does it feel like to have purchased something and realize that it is no longer in style? How does having something 'out of style' make you feel about yourself?
21. As a consumer, what beliefs do you hold about yourself that effect what you buy or what you shop for?
22. Can you give me an example of when you hesitated before buying something? What sorts of influences made you second-guess your decision?
23. Can you tell me about a time when you felt the media understood or captured what you needed? How did that make you feel?
24. Can you tell me about a time when you felt you had captured what it is to be 'cool'? How did that feel? Why was that important to you?
25. Can you tell me about a time when you felt you had everything you needed in terms of possessions?
26. Can you tell me about a time when having a lot of money was important to you?
27. Can you describe a time when purchasing something with a particular brand name was critical?
28. How would you describe the values that you ascribe to as a consumer? Do you shop with particular values in mind?
29. In general, does advertising as a whole clash with your values or beliefs? In what way or why doesn't it?
30. Can you tell me about a time when you went shopping with your parents? How did you negotiate what to buy? How does it feel when your parents object to something you want to purchase?
31. How do your parents feel about the goods that you purchase? How does shopping and acquiring things affect your relationship with your parents?
32. How do your parents feel about the time you spend with media? Does this ever create conflict for you? How do you try to resolve this?
33. How have you been influenced by purchases and the purchasing habits of your parents?
34. Do you aspire to your parents' level of success financially, socially?
35. Can you describe a situation when you decided to purchase something because your peers had it? How did it feel once you acquired it?
36. What is it like to shop with a friend? Are you influenced by your friends?
37. Can you describe a time when you felt pressured by your peers to purchase something? How did this feel?
38. As a consumer, what do you think about 'green' issues? Are you involved in any organizations in your community? Do these issues impact your consumption habits?
39. How do you feel about our future as consumers in North America?
40. Have you been influenced by the purchases that others make at your school? Are there certain people in particular that have influenced you? What does it feel like to pay attention in this way?
41. As a global citizen, what are your thoughts, fears, hope for the future considering climate change/global warming?

Appendix B: Recruitment Script

I am a fourth year Ph.D. candidate in the Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies program here at UBCO. I will be conducting a qualitative research project on what it is like to be a consumer, to experience growing up in a consumer culture. I am looking for individuals who are 18 or 19 years old and interested in talking about their experiences as a consumer. As well, selected participants must have lived in either Canada or the US from birth. The interview time should only take about one and a half hours of your time. The interview location will be in one of the campus buildings and take place between the hours of 9:00 am and 5:00 pm on a week day. By participating you will be given the opportunity to express your thoughts and feelings on the subject of consumerism as it has personally affected you. As well, each participant will receive a stipend of $20.00. If you are interested, please contact me at jahill9@shaw.ca or telephone 250-764-4257.