

Children and brands in consumer culture. The formation of private and social identities

Marketing
Master's thesis
Terhi Väistö
2009

Department of Marketing and Management
HELSINGIN KAUPPAKORKEAKOULU
HELSINKI SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS



HELSINKI SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS
Department of Marketing and Management

Terhi Väistö

CHILDREN AND BRANDS IN CONSUMER CULTURE
The formation of private and social identities

Master's thesis
09.11.2009

Objectives of the study

The main objective of the study was to find out how children use brands in the construction of identities. The study focused on the ways children construct their private identity in social settings, as well as social identities through formation of in- and out-groups. The theoretical framework of the research was Consumer culture theory.

Methodology

The research was interpretative and qualitative in nature. Focus group of children aged 8-9 were used in order to gain understanding the role brands and consumption play in the lives of children. The focus groups were held in an elementary school in Espoo, Finland.

Key findings of the study

Brands play a relevant role in the construction of children's identities. Brands were most important when it came to social construction of identity and formation of in- and out-groups. Private identity construction seemed to be happening through other symbols than brands. The children understood that people convey messages of themselves and of the groups they belong to through consumption symbols such as brands.

Keywords

Consumer culture, brands, children, identity construction, social identity theory

Tutkimuksen tavoitteet

Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli ymmärtää miten brandit ovat mukana lasten identiteetin kehittämisessä. Tutkimus keskittyi siihen, miten lapset rakentavat yksityistä identiteettiään sosiaalisissa tilanteissa, ja miten sosiaalinen identiteetti rakentuu sisä- ja ulkoryhmien muodostamisen kautta. Tutkimuksessa käytetty teoreettinen viitekehys on kulutuskulttuurin teoria (CCT).

Metodologia

Tutkimus oli interpretaavinen ja kvalitatiivinen. Kulutuksen ja brandien roolia 8-9 –vuotiaiden lasten elämässä tutkittiin ryhmäkeskustelujen avulla. Keskustelut järjestettiin ala-asteella Espoossa.

Tutkimuksen tulokset

Brandeilla oli näkyvä rooli lasten identiteettien kehittämisessä. Ne nousivat esille erityisesti sosiaalisen identiteetin rakentumisessa ja sisä- ja ulkoryhmien muodostumisessa. Yksilöllinen identiteetti rakentui muiden tekijöiden kuin brandien avulla. Lapset ymmärsivät, että ihmiset kertovat itsestään ja ryhmistä joiden jäseninä he ovat kulutussymbolien kuten brandien avulla.

Avainsanat

Kulutuskulttuuri, brandit, lapset, identiteetin rakentaminen, sosiaalinen identiteettiteoria

1. Introduction.....	6
1.1 Background of study.....	6
1.2 Research Gap	7
1.3 Research Objectives and Questions	7
1.3.1 Research Objectives	7
1.3.2 Research Questions	8
1.4 Definitions.....	8
1.5 Previous Research on children and brands.....	9
1.6 Theoretical framework – CCT.....	11
1.7 Structure of the study.....	12
1.8 Limitations of the study.....	13
2. Consumption in postmodern culture.....	14
2.1 Consumer culture	14
2.2. Symbolism in the marketplace.....	15
2.3 Symbolic consumption	16
2.4 The disputed child consumer and consumer culture	17
3. Private identity and consumption	19
3.1 Constructing personal identity through consumption	19
3.2 Possessions as part of ourselves	20
3.3. Private consumption symbolism of children	21
3.4 Brand relationships	22
3.5 Children’s relationships with brands.....	24
4. Social identity and consumption	27
4.1 Social identity theory.....	27
4.1.1 Self-categorization theory	28
4.1.2 Discrimination and stereotyping	29
4.1.3 Management strategies.....	29
4.2 Social self and consumption	29
4.3 Groups and consumption	30
4.4 Consumer socialization.....	31
4.4.1 Reference groups and children’s consumption	33
4.4.2 Children and New media	37

4.5 Children’s consumption symbolism in social situations	39
5. Methodology	43
5.1 Methodological choices	43
5.2 Ethical issues when studying children	43
5.3 Data collection method	43
5.4 Data analysis Method	44
6. Empirical findings and analysis.....	47
6.1 Private symbolism	47
6.1.1 Identity construction	48
6.1.2 Cherished possessions	48
6.2 Our symbols	51
6.2.1 Parents.....	51
6.2.2 Symbols in forming groups	58
6.2.3 Online bonding	60
6.2.3.1 Shopping online	62
6.2.3.2 Superstars or not – symbols online at Stardoll.com	65
6.2.3.3 Friends in the virtual worlds	67
6.3 Their symbols	68
6.3.1 Older children wearing brands	68
6.3.2 The brands of younger children.....	73
6.3.3 No symbols for me, please	75
7. Discussion and analysis.....	77
7.1 Individual behaviour.....	77
7.2 In-group influence	78
7.3 Out-group influence	81
8. Conclusions.....	83
8.1 Theoretical and managerial Implications	83
8.1.1 Theoretical implications	83
8.1.2 Managerial implications	83
8.2 Suggestions for further research.....	84
References.....	85

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of study

Our Western world today is filled with brands and they can be found any way we turn. Therefore it is not surprising that also the world of children today is a world of brands. They encounter them more than any other generation before and it has been found that they are able to recognize brands as early as at the age of two.

Further, the consumer culture we live in is a culture of symbols. Products are not only used for their utility reasons, but people purchase products also for their symbolic qualities. It has been suspected that no consumption happens without the symbolic being part of it (Wattanasuwan, 2005). Some of the possessions we own may become important for our sense of self, in a way, they become part of our extended selves. Consumption and brands can also help the forming of in- and out-groups.

This study focuses on private and social brand symbolism in the lives of children. There has been extensive research on brand symbolism. The main work relevant for this study comes from Elliott (1994, 1997), Wattanasuwan (2005) and Belk (1988). In the area of brand relationships, the article by Fournier (1996) has been most influential. When it comes to social aspects of brands, the theory is based on the social identity model that focuses on the differences between and similarities inside groups. (Tajfel, 1982.)

Children and brand symbolism has been studied from the 1980s on. The scholarly interest in children as social actors has risen at the same time as recent growth in children's market (Cook, 2004). The field has been widely influenced by the work of Belk, who used Piaget's (1960) cognitive developmental model as a base for his studies. This viewpoint that sees consumer symbolism as a development of cognitive skills, is still dominant although it has been lately criticized (Nairn et al., 2008). The cognitive developmental model is not the only possible way to study children and brand symbolism. Recently, studies that are not based on the cognitive developmental model or that are not experimental in nature have been gaining popularity (see Roper and Shah, 2007; Nairn et al., 2008; Rodhain, 2006; Ji, 2002), but none have yet been done in Finland. Finnish studies have focused on the brands in the lives of older children or youth starting at age 13 (Autio, 2006).

1.2 Research Gap

According to Cook (2004), children's consumer culture is a relatively neglected area of social research and thinking. There is a need for further study of qualitative methods on children and brands. The cognitive developmental model does not give a whole picture of children and brand symbolism and is therefore not sufficient. Nairn et al. (2008) call out for more study on children and brands that focus on the children as social beings. The writers state that there is "an urgent need for further research on children's use of brand symbolism. Also the use of new media, for example children's own websites and networking sites such as MySpace are seen as a challenging area for further research." (Nairn et al., 2008). To be precise, they state that more research using Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) needs to be done in order to understand the complicated social factors that are involved. Also Martens et al. (2004) see it surprising that so little empirical research on the symbolic meanings that children create around the goods and services they consume has been done. Children are often treated as homogeneous social group that is impressionable rather than diverse in terms of age, abilities, sense of self/agency and knowledge of and experience with material and consumer culture. There has also been a tendency of studies on children and brand symbolism to focus on less-privileged children (Rodhain, 2006; Roper and Shah, 2007).

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

1.3.1 Research Objectives

The objective of this research is to gain understanding of the role of brands in the lives of children by using CCT as a theoretical background. The research is divided into two parts, concentrating first on the individual and, secondly, social construction of identity through brand symbolism and brand relationships. The construction of identities does not happen in isolation but in interaction with different socialization agents such as parents, peers and media. When it comes to social construction of identity, the aim of the study is to gain knowledge on how children use brands in their social lives in forming groups and distincting themselves from other groups. The social construction of identity focuses on the forming of in- and out-groups based on brands. On the other hand, in the discussion of personal identity it is researched whether brands have a role in the most important possessions of children. The objective is not to gain generalizable or definite information, but to understand the phenomenon in question better.

1.3.2 Research Questions

Research questions focus on the brand symbolism and relationships in the lives of children.

The main research question: What kind of a role do brands play in construction of children's private and social identities?

The first research question is further opened in the next three research questions.

- i. How do brands help in the construction of children's private identity?
- ii. How do children construct their identities through in-groups and brands?
- iii. How do children construct their identities with the help of out-groups and brands?

1.4 Definitions

Children in this study are conceptualized as aged eight to nine who attend the second grade of Finnish elementary school. Children are able to understand brands on a symbolic level already at an early age. According to Roper and Shah (2007) children aged 7 and 8 think about brands on a utilitarian level but children of 9 and 10 can already understand the deeper symbolic meanings that brands also carry. According to Roper and Shah (2007) previous research has found that brand symbolism is understood already by children of younger age. In this study some of the children have already turned 9 and some are still 8. Social development can be nevertheless thought to be on a same level with all of the children.

More accurately, children in the study are seen as active constructors of their identity and social environment. Although children may not do this consciously, they use brands actively as symbols in their life and are not only passive respondents of advertising. However, it is not suggested that brands have an involuntary effect on children's lives. (Roper and Shah, 2007.) Study of brands among children has shown that brands can cause negative impact in children's social lives. For example it has been found that among less-privileged children brands can be a cause of formation of in- and out- groups or even bullying. (Roper and Shah, 2007) However, children today are aware of the impact of media and advertising and are more able than ever to critically evaluate the sincerity and truthfulness of advertising messages. Also the viewpoint of the study is that of the child, which also emphasizes the role of the child as an active member of his surroundings.

When talking about brands and children the concept of **brand** needs to be somewhat reconceptualised and expanded. Children often see celebrities as brands and they sometimes mimic the behaviour of their favourite stars. (Roper and Shah, 2007). Because celebrities were found as brands in this study, also they are included in the definition. Further, in this research **brand symbolism** can be thought to encompass the social usage of brands as symbols and the way that people construct their identity through brand symbolism.

Stardoll.com is an online environment where mostly preteen girls can create their avatars and chat with other users. The site is commercial in nature that is children can purchase clothes and make-up by using stardollars that can be purchased by credit card or mobile phone credit.

Bratz are popular dolls among pre-teen girls.

The **Wii** is a home video game console released by Nintendo.

PlayStation is another popular game console produced by Sony Computer Entertainment. Sony has released several different versions of the console.

1.5 Previous Research on children and brands

In this section the basic features of cognitive developmental and experimental research are stated in short. Additionally, there is an introduction of the CCT based research. The research on children and brands has been clearly divided into two categories, the cognitive developmental model and the consumer culture theory. The dominant cognitive developmental model, has been based on the early studies of children's development by Piaget (1960). There is also plenty of research that is experimental in nature. Another research stream that is slowly gaining popularity is the one based on consumer culture theory, focusing on researching the relationships between children and brands and the symbolic meanings that children assign to brands from a qualitative perspective.

Some of the earliest works on children and brand symbolism that have been based on the cognitive phases of children's development, have been done by Belk (1982) and Belk et al. (1984). According to the Piagetian theory the child's mental and interactive capacities evolve in a linear fashion through a set of predetermined stages. This is also the basis of Belk's (1982) study that focused on the children's recognition of brand symbolism for example when it comes to using brands as status symbols. According to Belk (1982), making inferences about others based on their choice of consumption objects is one of the strongest and a culturally universal

phenomenon. The findings of Belk's studies indicate that consumption symbolism recognition develops during grade school. This ability is minimal among preschoolers and almost fully developed by sixth grade.

Achenreiner & John (2003) have studied consumption symbolism of children more recently and by comparative research focused on the differences between age groups. In their study, children from second and sixth grade and tenth grade were shown advertisements for jeans and athletic shoes, with a brand name on them that was either a preferred or a nonpreferred brand. Impressions of owners of a preferred, known brand and nonpreferred brand did not vary among 8-year olds, either for jeans or athletic shoes. Children of this age seem to use simpler perceptual recognition cues than older children (12- and 16-year olds). These findings are consistent with those of Belk et al. (1984)

Experimental research of children and brands has been a growing interest among marketing scholars. Research has been done on for example children's recognition of brands, brand attitudes, brand name recognition, various socialization agents, consumption and brand symbolism. (Pecheux and Debraix, 1999; Moore-Shay and Lutz, 2000; Phelps & Hoy, 1996; Grube and Wallack, 1994). Also these studies have normally focused on comparing children to adults or making differences between age groups.

There has been criticism on the fact that the studies seem to be focusing on the cognitive developmental model alone that forgets the other agents in consumption symbolism that in addition to cognitive development affect it. Belk (1982), states there is a need for more research in order to understand the various socializing forces that have a role in the development of consumption symbolism. According to Nairn et al. (2008) there is a need for research based on other theories than cognitive development theory alone. They state that the "understanding of how contemporary children relate to brands is unlikely to be substantially enhanced by a sole reliance on the cognitive development model or an experimental methodology. The social roles that brands play in children's lives cannot be studied by relying on the cognitive developmental model.

Nairn et al. (2008) give three reasons for the need to broaden the research framework used. First, the Piagetian model concentrates only on age and other factors such as gender, ethnicity and social class that are most likely to influence brand symbolism are forgotten. Second, the developmental model that focuses on the cognitive perspective pays only little attention to social and dynamics of interpretation. Third, children are conceptualized as being isolated from

broader social and cultural influences. Therefore the writers propose consumer culture theory as an alternative way of framing research into children's relationships with brands. Research based on the consumer culture theory as an alternative framework is presented in the literature review.

1.6 Theoretical framework – CCT

The theoretical framework of the research is Consumer Culture Theory (CCT). According to Arnould and Thompson (2005), CCT has helped to develop important knowledge about consumption and marketplace behaviour. In order to better understand the social meanings of brands, the social identity theory is included in this research in the part of social identity and brands.

CCT cannot be considered as a unified theory nor does it aspire to be one, but it is a family of theoretical perspectives that are concerned with consumer actions, marketplace and cultural meanings. The field has not been characterized by one clear definition and therefore the writers offer the term consumer culture theory that focuses on the core theoretical interests and questions of the research tradition.(Arnould and Thompson 2005)

An integral part of CCT are the studies on consumption of market-made commodities and marketing symbolism. The most widely studied phenomena in CCT have been consumption and possession practices, especially their hedonic, aesthetic and ritualistic dimensions. (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) According to Dittmar (2008:6) consumer culture theory studies the profound role of symbolic, experiential and socio-cultural dimensions of consumption. These meanings and functions of consumer goods are not limited to the purchase of products but spans the whole consumption cycle that includes acquisition, consumption and possession. Dittmar's definition on CCT describes this research well as it aims at a better understanding of the symbolic and socio-cultural meanings that are seen in children's consumption.

CCT focuses on dimensions of consumption that are not accessible through experiments and surveys such as product symbolism and product and brand meanings. Nevertheless, this does not mean fidelity to only qualitative methods, quantitative and analytic techniques can be used when necessary. (Arnould and Thompson, 2005.)

Arnould and Thompson (2005) identify four different types of research areas of sociocultural processes and structures. These include consumer identity projects, marketplace cultures,

sociohistoric pattern of consumption and mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretative strategies.

1.7 Structure of the study

This thesis is structured as follows. The theory chapters begin with general consumption theories and are followed by literature on the topic of children. The empirical chapters are divided based on the individual or social meanings of brands to children.

The second chapter discusses consumer culture and symbolic consumption. Our culture is characterized by consumption and symbols that inhabit the marketplace. These symbols are used in our everyday lives to construct our identity. Additionally, in contemporary consumer society children are increasingly targeted. The concept of child consumer is disputed but unquestionably existent.

The third chapter focuses on the private aspects of consumption. The search for self-identity is a key factor in the postmodern consumption. We aim at constructing our identity through consumption symbols. Additionally, some possessions can become so important to us that we regard them as part of ourselves. This chapter also discusses brand relationships that in previous literature have been found personal relationships between one person and a brand. Finally, brand relationships have been found to form as soon as during childhood. This literature is also discussed.

The fourth chapter reviews the literature on social symbolism of consumption. Here, social identity theory that focuses on forming of in- and out- groups is reviewed. The literature on children and social consumption focuses on consumer socialization and consumption symbolism in childhood.

In the fourth chapter, the methodology is presented. The study is interpretative and qualitative in nature. The chapter on methodology discusses the ethical issues that arise when studying children. Finally, it reviews the data collection and analysis methods.

In the fifth chapter there is extensive analysis of the findings of the study. The first chapter focuses on the private symbolism of the children studied, their identity construction and cherished possessions they have. The second chapter is dedicated to social symbolism, symbols and consumption by in-groups followed by symbolism of out-groups. In-groups involve parents, and groups formed in class or online. Out-groups include older and younger children that

children wish to identify themselves with or distinguish themselves from. Brand relationships were found to form with the help of socialization agents such as parent or out-groups such as older children. Therefore the relationships are discussed under these subheadings.

The sixth chapter reviews the results and offers discussion. The discussion is again divided to individual, in-group and out-group categories that include brand symbolism and relationships. The construction of private identity seems to be happening through different symbols than brands. The most important things for the children were not branded or the brands were irrelevant. When it came to in-group formation, children liked the same brands as their friends did. Children were forming groups around particular hobbies or constellations of brands. The forming of out-groups happened mainly based on gender and age. The main out-groups were younger children, older children and older siblings. Brands were a relevant symbol in recognizing these groups.

Finally, the last chapter is dedicated to theoretical and managerial implications and suggestions for further research. The thesis has continued the research on children and brand symbolism and brand relationships from the children's point of view. Managerially the research offers ideas for marketers on how children use brands in social settings and how marketing of branded products could be developed. The research offers topics for further research. These are for example children's use of commercial internet sites or the gender differences that occur.

1.8 Limitations of the study

The study was conducted in one school in Espoo Finland, during a week in May 2009. The limited scope and the theoretical underpinnings of the study make it in no way generalizable. However, generalizability in cultural studies is not the aim, but the idea is to try to understand the phenomenon in a certain place at a certain time as well as it is possible. Alasuutari (1995:145) states that the notion of generalizability implies that instead of trying to thoroughly explain a unique event or phenomenon, the results of the study should apply to other cases as well. Here, it is not the case. Alasuutari (1995:156) states that the word generalization is in fact a wrong word to be used in this connection and should be reserved for surveys only. The researcher needs to demonstrate that the analysis relates to things beyond the material at hand.

2. CONSUMPTION IN POSTMODERN CULTURE

2.1 Consumer culture

Our Western culture is characterized by consumption. The use of the term consumer culture emphasizes that the world of goods and their principles of structuration are central to the understanding of contemporary society (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). According to Lee (1993) economy and culture have been historically considered distinct from each other. Nevertheless, the material and historical conditions in a given time affect the formation of human cultures and cultural activity. Therefore Lee concludes that consumption is the social activity that unites economy and culture. (Lee, 1993:5.) The significance of consumer culture is hard to overestimate. The central role for consumption in everyday life, overwhelming consumer choice and mushrooming credit facilities have been produced by the economic, socio-cultural and psychological transformations since the 1950s (Dittmar, 2008).

According to Featherstone (1992:84), when the term “consumer culture” is used, it is emphasized that goods are central to the contemporary society. First, the material goods are symbolized and used as communicators, not only as utilities. Consumption cannot be understood as the consumption of use-values but primarily as the consumption of signs. Second, on the economy of cultural goods, market principles operate within the sphere of lifestyles, cultural goods and commodities. Consumer culture incorporates the system of “commercially produced images, texts and objects that groups use – through the construction of overlapping and even conflicting practices, identities and meanings – to make collective sense of their environments and to orient their member’s experiences and lives” (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). The process of consumption in postmodern consumer culture combines both the real and the imagenary. One can consume objects, symbols and images, which are increasingly recognized to be one and the same. Consumption is not the end, but it is a social act, in which much is created and produced. (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995.)

Consumer culture naturally affects the way we live our lives. Participants in consumer culture make lifestyle a life project and display their individuality and sense of style in assemblage of goods, clothes, practices, experiences, appearance and body dispositions they design together into a lifestyle. Everyone has a possibility for self-improvement and self-expression. Different

classes have different ways of life and views of the nature of social relationships where consumption takes place. (Featherstone, 1991.)

Consume culture and the impact of consumption symbols produced by companies can be criticized. According to Holt (2002) consumer culture refers to the dominant mode of consumption that is structured by the actions of firms in their marketing activities. The cultural authority narrative states that marketers are portrayed as cultural engineers, they organize how people think and feel through branded commercial products. Consumer culture generates a limited set of identities accessed through commodities. These identities can be accessed only through the brands that companies produce. Meanings must be channeled through brands to have value. Consumers participate in a system of commodified meanings embedded in brands.

On the other hand, also Holt (2002) states that it can be thought that against marketing's cultural authority, individuals and groups invest in commodities their particularized meanings and use them in idiosyncratic ways. They fight the symbolic meanings of marketers by reinscribing commodities with oppositional meanings through their consumption practices. (Holt, 2002.)

2.2. Symbolism in the marketplace

Goods are at the same time economic and symbolic objects, useful not only for their functional properties, but also as instruments of cultural taxonomy and classification. There is an understanding that no object has any inherent function of value independent of the symbolic gains and the separations between the real and the simulation and the material and the imaginary. (Firat and Venkatesh, 2005.) According to Lee (1993), the social meanings of commodities are in the first instance created by institutions such as advertising and marketing. Without these institutions, commodities would confront consumers as objects without cultural significance. Meanings are attached to the product in its marketing but also during its consumption.

Although advertisers aim to create particular meanings for their brands, meanings that consumers create may be varied and diverse. The consumers uses their own perception in making sense of the meanings of the advertisements of brands that he sees. (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998.) Once the commodity reaches the consumer, the object with imagined meaning transforms into an object of symbolism and lived experience. The meaning invested in the object during its production does not disappear, but the object is symbolically malleable and

thus able to assume different meanings and significations in different contexts of its use and the cultural competences of its users. (Lee, 1993.)

McCracken (1988) adds that the meaning of consumer goods is constantly in transit. Meaning is constantly flowing to and from its locations in the social world, aided by the efforts of designers, producers, advertisers and consumers. Meaning moves from the culturally constituted world through advertising and fashion systems to the consumer goods. From the consumer goods it moves through consumption rituals to the individual consumer. In consumer culture, individuals have an enormous freedom in the meaning they seek from goods. Self-definition is satisfied through the systematic appropriation of the meaningful properties of goods.

Resources that can be found everywhere in our society can be distinguished as being either lived experiences or mediated experiences. Lived experiences are those practical activities and face-to-face encounters that we face in our everyday lives. Mediated experiences on the other hand come from the mass-communication culture and the consumption of media products and they involve the ability to experience events that are spatially and temporally distant from the practical context of the everyday life. People vary on the degree of the importance of the lived and mediated experiences. Some consumers value only lived experience and have little contact with mediated formed and for others mediated experiences have become the essential way of construction of the self. (Thompson, 1995, p.216.)

Overall, the meaning that consumers construct from advertising is viscous and the signification that comes from mediated experience has usually less of an effect than the signification from actual behavioral experience (Elliott et al., 1993). Therefore the purchase and usage of a brand tends to be a stronger influence than mediated experience in the formation of a consumer's signification process. Both of these forms of experience have to be validated through social interaction, particularly when it comes to products and brands that have social-symbolic positioning. (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998.)

2.3 Symbolic consumption

The need to find meaningfulness in life is a fundamental of human existence. People need consumption in order to sustain the self and also to locate themselves in the society. All voluntary consumption seems to carry symbolic meanings, it happens either consciously or unconsciously. If people have a choice, they will consume things that hold particular symbolic meanings that are either idiosyncratic or commonly shared with others. (Wattanasuwan, 2005.)

Consumers do not make consumption choices based on products utilities but also because of their symbolic meaning. Products have two different symbolic meanings: they construct the social world (social-symbolism) and they construct self-identity (self-symbolism). (Elliott, 1997.)

Products have turned into commodities that can be help construct one's identity and confirm one's memberships of particular cultural communities and to signify social and cultural differences between groups (Lee, 1993). Consumer culture offers a set of symbolic resources individuals can draw on when defining their personal and social identities, using their symbolic dimensions to express, maintain and transform aspects of their selves (Bourdieu, 1984). These aspects can concern private and personal parts of identity such as beliefs, values or our personal history, whereas others refer to public and social parts of identity, such as social status or the groups and subcultures we belong to. (Dittmar, 2008:8.)

Product symbolism is especially important for young people, because they are often uncertain about themselves and their surroundings and therefore aim at gathering material possessions in order to establish their identity and gain prestige from their peers (Belk, 1988). Piacentini and Mailer (2004) found that for teenagers choices of clothes are closely bound to their self-concept and are used both as a means of self-expression and also as a way to judge people and situations that they face. Clothing has a function of role fulfillment and makes the wearer more self confident and capable.

2.4 The disputed child consumer and consumer culture

Toys, games, films, television, food and branded stuff that are marketed to children are among the most visible signs of global consumer culture. Childhood is a key moment in social formation of consumers and already is a major target market. (Langer, 2004.) Consumer culture is deliberately targeting children from a young age with messages about what is beautiful and who is cool and at the same time making materialistic and appearance norms and values a key focus of children's socialization experience. (Banerjee and Dittmar, 2008:175). Childhood has become increasingly commercialized and children are no longer seen as outsiders to contemporary consumer culture (Martens et al., 2004). When childhood is described with play, fun and toys, the children's market is naturalized and sacralized by the making toy makers a part of the landscape of childhood (Langer, 2004).

According to Cook (2007) the concept of child consumer arises from discourses that are produced by marketers, retailers, researchers and advertisers. Marketers have positioned the social meaning of their goods and brands between parents and children. Cook (2007) conceptualizes the child consumer as “a social construction – i.e. an assemblage of qualities, beliefs and conjectures concerning the “nature” and motivation of children regarding commercial goods and meanings”.

When studying market actors’ discourses in North America they describe children as free market actors (i.e. as consumers), which therefore serves to make marketing to them a morally acceptable practice. For example, according to a marketing consultant, “most adults don’t take them seriously, tweens feel connected to brands that make them feel important and empowered. So, rather than telling them what’s cool, savvy marketers should shift the power into tweens’ hands” (Angrisani, 2002). Discourses on commercialization and commercial marketing to children draw on wider arguments that see children as competent social subjects who have the right to participate in society and have an influence over their own lives. Childhood is embraced by a new kind of naturalness, it is replacing the earlier assumptions of development that strictly evolves through ages and in stages. (Tingstad, 2007.)

According to previous studies, the child’s ability to understand the value of goods, value of money and the intent of commercial messages is problematic (Cook, 2007). Nevertheless the child is characterized as an individual, an autonomous person, who exhibits pre-existent desire for things and who has the social right to act upon those desires by marketers. Marketers argue that the abundance of goods and brands available has made children savvy and discerning consumers. This view has been problematized by scholars, politicians and consumer advocate groups. According to many, marketing to children is unethical. There tends to be unease of cultural influences of local and global corporate enterprises, especially when it comes to children and young people. Central to the concerns is the role of consumption in shaping identities and social relations and the extent to which a person’s value is understood in terms of the commodities to which they have access. (Saltmarsh, 2009.)

Although it is questionable if children can be characterized as independent ‘consumers’, they are increasingly targeted by marketers and found to be a lucrative market. At the same time children are increasingly aware of brands and making consumer choices.

3. PRIVATE IDENTITY AND CONSUMPTION

3.1 Constructing personal identity through consumption

The search for self-identity is a key determinant of postmodern consumption. In the fragmented world of postmodern society individuals aim at constructing and maintaining their identity in order to keep it stable through rapidly changing environment.

The related terms 'self', 'self-concept' and 'self-identity' have been given complex and inconsistent meanings (Dittmar, 2008:8). Here the terms self and self-identity are defined in short. The self can be conceptualized not as a given product of social system nor a fixed entity that the individual adopts, but rather as something a person actively creates, partially through consumption (Dittmar, 1992). Thompson (1995:210) describes the self as a symbolic project, which the individual actively constructs out of available symbolic materials. These materials are woven into a coherent account of who one is, a narrative of self identity. Self-identity is defined as the subjective concept (or representation) that a person holds of him- or herself. It is seen as a subjective experience that involves individual, relational and group levels of self-representation. (Vignoles et al., 2006; Sedikides and Brewer, 2001) Aledin (2009:17) defines self as a sense of who we are and what we are. Thus, the self is something that the person creates and the self-concept is the way a person sees himself.

Material possessions systemically influence how we perceive the identity of other people and at the same time people use them to express who they are and to construct a sense of who they would like to be. People may move closer to the ideal self by consuming not only the product or the brand, but also the symbolic qualities associated with it. Consumer goods can be characterized as 'outer skin' of our identity, which we acquire to express the 'inner self'. (Dittmar, 2000:27.)

The symbolic meaning of goods and brands has an important role in the construction process. Products and brands are often used as symbolic resources for the construction and maintenance of identity (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998). Symbolic possessions can be divided into symbols of the historical continuity (e.g. photographs), expressions of artistic or intellectual interests (e.g. book collections) and signs of status or wealth (e.g. yacht) (Dittmar, 2008:33).

According to McCracken (1988) the consumer system supplies individuals with the cultural materials to realize who they are (a man or a woman, middle-aged or elderly, a citizen, a

professional). These cultural notions are concretized in goods and it is through their possession and use that the individual realizes the notions of his own life. However, the process of self-completion through meaning transfer from consumer goods can also go wrong. A person can seek for certain meanings in a good that do not exist there. Others can seek to appropriate meanings that they are not entitled to. Still others can attempt to constitute their lives only in terms of the meaning of goods.

More recently, Campbell (2004:32) criticizes the notion of product as the foundation of identity and concludes that our identity does not derive from the products we consume. In other words, he is suggesting that we are not what we buy (Wattanasuwan, 2005). Rather, he emphasizes that although what we buy says something about who we are, our identity is to be found in our reaction to products we consume, not in the products themselves. People's sense of self is constructed by their tastes. While monitoring our reaction to consumed products we are noting what we like and dislike and this way discover who we are. Therefore he suggests that rather than being purchased, identity is discovered. Through time people may change their tastes and preferences, but the manner in which they recognize their identity is stable. Thus the content of the identity is not as important as its discovery. (Campbell, 2004:32.)

Whether the emphasis lies on meanings in consumer goods or meanings in our reactions and understanding of these reactions, consumption is nevertheless a key determinant in constructing one's identity. Through symbolic consumption we show others and most importantly ourselves, who we are.

3.2 Possessions as part of ourselves

Dittmar and Campbell's ideas of who we are as something we recognize is new. Earlier Belk (1988) has argued that possessions can become so important to us that they become parts of ourselves, an extended self. We may attach things to ourselves knowingly or unknowingly and intentionally or unintentionally. Belk (1988) gives various evidence of how possessions form an important part of sense of self such as nature of self-perceptions and the diminished sense of self when possessions are lost. He states that it is a universal human belief that we make things part of ourselves by creating or altering them. Some possessions are more central to self than others and Belk (1988) visualizes them by creating layers around the core self. These layers differ over individuals, cultures, and time. Some possessions are more central to self than others. The most

central possessions to self differ over individuals, time and cultures that create shared symbolic meanings for different goods (Belk, 1988).

The fact that goods possess cultural meaning can be evident to the consumer, but sometimes they are hidden from the person and the surroundings. Certain kinds of information, especially status, are a matter of self-conscious concern and manipulation. Sometimes the meanings carried by consumer goods are only seen in exceptional circumstances. (McCracken, 1988) The importance of possessions to self can be easily demonstrated when things are lost or stolen. According to Dittmar (2000:31) being a victim of residential burglary has a strong impact on self, because it involves an intrusion into the home of victims and is directed at all their personal possessions. Belk (1988) interviewed burglary victims and found that after the feelings of rage and anger the most commonly felt feelings were of invasion and violations. There is also evidence of these same feelings among victims of natural disasters. The loss of self is more prominent when the possessions are lost involuntarily. It can be that in other situations people might have disposed of the same things mourned after loss voluntarily.

According to Belk (1988) a single brand or a product can not represent one's self concept, but only a complete ensemble of consumption objects can be able to represent all the aspects of the total self. According to Lee (1993) Belk's study illustrates the tendency of people to invest an amount to themselves to material objects in order to manage their sense of place, social position and identity. This can be seen from people's way of talking about lost objects or gift-giving.

3.3. Private consumption symbolism of children

Also children are actively constructing of their identities. Ross and Harradine (2004) found that children are concerned with expressing their individuality through their brand choices. Nevertheless, to children it is also important to conform to a group and wear brands that others can recognize. The writers suspect that although seeking individuality, children tend to do this in a safe way by wearing slightly different versions of widely accepted and mainstream brands. Girls are more likely to find more stereotypically female products, such as Barbie dolls and make up more central to their self-concepts at the same time as boys find more stereotypically male products, such as truck toys and sports shoes more central to their self concepts (Kates and Robinson, 2008).

Also children create their extended self through consumption objects. Children easily establish powerful relationships with objects that provide comfort and security and find them part of

themselves (Gunter and Furnham (1998:43). Hill (1992) examined the impact of possessions of homeless children on their ability to cope with a lack of basic consumer goods such as a stable home. Normally children develop a sense of competence by controlling their surroundings and through possessing things. When possessions are treated as part of our extended selves, their loss may create fear and instability. Evidence of this was found in the study. Children talked about the special possessions that they had brought with them to the shelter such as toys, but most of their attention was directed to the special objects that they were not able to bring to the shelter due to rules and restricted space, such as televisions, bikes and doll houses. The children believed that the cherished items were with friends or relatives and hoped that they would be safe until to be retrieved later. There was also strong fear of losing these objects for good.

However, brands are not consumed only because of their symbolic meanings. Brands have to fulfill their general, more mundane promises that are related to their performance in order to be valuable. As children age these issues become even more important. This can be due to parental influence and the issues raised when negotiating brand choices with them. (Ross & Harradine, 2004)

3.4 Brand relationships

As brand relationships are personal and form between one person and a brand, the literature on brand relationship is reviewed in this chapter. Nevertheless, it is not suggested that brand relationships would develop in isolation without the help of other people.

In order to understand brands as something a person may have a relationship that is somewhat similar to the interpersonal relationships with, it needs to be attributed with metaphors such as a character or a person. One needs to consider the way brands are animated, humanized or personalized in order to legitimize the brand as being a partner in a relationship. There is willingness on the side of the consumer to humanize brands, which can be seen by the consumers' acceptance of advertisers' attempts to humanize brands and their tendency to animate products of their own accord. (Heilbrunn, 1998.)

Aaker and Fournier (1995) suggest that in brand relationship theory the brand is treated as "an active, contributing partner in the dyadic relationship that exists between the person and the brand". The brand as a partner is something whose behaviors and actions generate trait differences that collectively summarize the consumer's perception of the brand's personality. It is proposed that at a broad level of abstraction, all marketing activities and brand management

decisions can be construed as behaviors enacted on the part of the brand. Further, these behaviors trigger attitudinal, cognitive and/or behavioral responses on the part of the consumer.

Consumers develop relationships with brands that they find important. Brand relationship theory was first introduced by Fournier (1998). She sees brand as an active relationships partner and introduces different types of relationships that consumers form with brands.

The importance is placed on several brand relationships, an interconnected web of brands that contribute to the enactment, exploration or resolution of centrally held identity issues. The relationships vary across people. They can vary in level and content of the identity activities that work behind the relationships, and also in the number of brand relationships, the durability of the relationships, the proportion for closely held relationships and the emotional quality of resulting commitments. (Fournier, 1998.)

In the study of Fournier (1998), fifteen meaningful relationships emerged. These can be divided under different categories. Under the rubric of friendship are compartmentalized or circumscribed friendships, childhood buddies, best friends and casual friends. Under marriage one finds the marriage of convenience, committed partnership and arranged marriage. Under dark side relationships are dependency, enmity, enslavement and secret affairs. And finally, under temporally oriented relationships are courtships and flings. The different brand relationship types have different meanings and benefits to the consumer. Brand relationships can affect personality development and on the other hand, personality affects the brand relationships. (Fournier, 1998.)

Later the loyalty of brand relationships has been studied. Fournier and Yao (1997) found that when it comes to loyal brand relationships, not all of them are similar when it comes to the strength or the character of the relationships. Brand relationships study has continued after the work of Fournier studying smaller segments of people (Olsen, 1999; Kates, 2000).

Finally, there has been criticism on regarding brand relationships in a similar way as relationships between people. Bengtsson (2003) states that it is less known if consumers want to have or believe they have relationships with companies and brands. There seems to be a lack of reciprocity in the relationships and he questions whether the term relationship is the best way to describe it.

3.5 Children's relationships with brands

Studying children's brand relationships is quite a new phenomenon. The literature is based on Fournier's (1998) theory on brand relationships. The first study was done by Ji (2002) and was based on interviewing children of one family. She found that children form brand relationships that can be compared to those of adults. Later she (Ji, 2008) developed her brand relationship theory into a conceptual framework. She developed the Children as Potential Relationship Partner (CPRP) that proposes that children's potential to form brand relationships depends on their motivation, opportunity and ability to do so. Robinson and Kates (2005), criticize Ji's relationship forms and introduce four different ways of children forming brand relationships. In this chapter the work of Ji is introduced, followed by the relationship forms of Robinson and Kates.

Ji (2002), found that children develop relationship with a wide range of brands and that these relationships might last long. Later (Ji, 2008) she argues that children develop relationships (i.e. attachments) to brands in a similar way that they do to people, pets and other inanimate objects. By using the typology of Fournier (1998) the author compares the relationships that are developed with brands to human relationships. Child-brand relationship is defined as "a voluntary or imposed bond between a child and a brand characterized by a unique history of interactions and is intended to serve developmental and social-emotional goals in the child's life" (Ji, 2008). Also Fournier (1998) in her categories of brand relationships distinguishes childhood friendships that are "infrequently engaged, affectively laden relation reminiscent of earlier times. Yields comfort and security of past self.

Children develop relationships with many different kinds of brands, they know their names and are able to store and retrieve information about their past interactions with these brands. Additionally, children develop brand relationships with eight types of bonds. First love is a relationship type that has a strong impact, which can be carried over to later experiences with other brands in the product category. True love is brand love nurtured over a long period of time through repeated usage. An arranged marriage is an involuntary union between a consumer and a brand imposed by preferences of a third party, for example the parents. Secret admirer is a relationship form in which a child has admiration towards a brand and wishes to own it, but does not have ability to obtain the product. Good friend describes a relationship in which the brand has desirable characteristics and provides personal pleasure (e.g. foods, drinks and restaurants). Fun buddy is a metaphor for a relationship that the child associates with fun, happiness and

being playful. Old buddies are brands that child maintains a memory of. It is a brand that was used before and when conditions permit, will be used again. Acquaintance is a relationship where a child knows the brand but does not have much knowledge or preference for it. One-night stands are relationships, in which the child uses the brand when their parents give it to them, but they have little knowledge of it and they do not care about the brand at all. Finally, enmity towards a brand can arise when a child hates a brand because of bad experiences with it or after hearing bad comments about it from others. (Ji, 2002.)

The brand relationships that children develop are imbedded in the social environment where children live and group. It is concluded that children's relationships with brands serve important functions in their lives and the relationships are "tools through which children grow up, gain competence, pursue the pleasure of life, and become connected with others" (Ji, 2002). The three prerequisites to forming brand relationships are motivation, opportunity and ability. First, motivation that drives children to form brand relationships comes from two different needs: the need to know oneself and the need to be intimate. Children may find brands from one product category more relevant than others. Second, children may sometimes miss the opportunity to interact with brands. Their usage of various brands increases as they grow older, and through regular activities (such as hobbies), children have the opportunity to use brands of various product categories. Also ability to form brand relationships strengthens as children become older. Ability comprises of cognitive, affective and behavioral skills. (Ji, 2008)

According to Robinson and Kates (2005), Ji's (2002) definition of brand relationship does not capture the critical interdependence and intimacy aspects of brand relationships that Fournier (1998) poses. They found four relationship types in their study in which they interviewed children and their parents. The relationships styles were uberbrand relationships, lifestyle relationships, fad relationships and phase relationships. These four brand relationship patterns vary on three key properties: duration, marketer involvement and interdependence on the brand (i.e. the way that the brand intertwines with children's life in the daily usage). (Robinson and Kates, 2005)

The first type of brand relationship, the uberbrand relationship is an enduring and highly passionate brand relationship grounded in tangible connections between the child and the brand. The strong commitment to the brand is demonstrated when the child collects multiple brand extensions thereby strengthening the relationship by increasing the diversity of brand interactions. Second, the lifestyle brand relationships collect different brands with similar

meanings to an activity or lifestyle of the child. Identity projects can be tangibilized through these brand-related activities. The third form of brand relationships, fad relationship is often intense but short-lived. These relationships are characterized by strong promotional efforts and they disappear as rapidly as they have arrived, usually within a few months. The short passionate commitment and the length of the brand commitment are dependent on constant support from the marketers and peers. Finally, phase relationships are defined by longer-term commitment and high passion for the brand. They are different from fad relationships because of the child's individual pull towards the brand that are due to the perceived characteristics of the brands. The relationship is therefore longer, because it does not rely solely on marketing support or encouragement of the peers. (Robinson and Kates, 2005.)

Both Ji (2002) and Robinson and Kates (2005) suggest several relationship forms that can be used to recognize different ties that children form with brands. Although neither of them can be considered exhaustive, they support each other giving different views on looking at children and their brand relationships. The writers agree that children's brand relationships exist already at an early stage in their lives and that the types of relationships are varied across brands and across product categories. However, when looking into the children's brand relationships it is important not to forget the original and more exhaustive ideas of brand relationships by Fournier (1998).

Although brand relationships may not be the best term to describe this sort of attachment to brands and it is perhaps not even possible to define these relationships, the categorization by Fournier is nevertheless functional in describing brands and consumers. Brand relationship categorizations are multiple, but the basic structures of the relationship types are nevertheless somewhat similar. All of the relationship categorizations take into consideration the length and strength of the relationship. Relationships can stem from either the consumer themselves or from other parties affecting their decision-making. Some relationships can provide pleasure and others can be considered forced and negative.

4. SOCIAL IDENTITY AND CONSUMPTION

4.1 Social identity theory

In order to understand how social groups use symbols in constructing their identity, it needs to be understood how groups identify themselves from others and how people forget their personal identity in favour of group identity in social situations. Social identity theory (SIT) has its origins in the work of Tajfel (1959, 1969) and Tajfel and Turner (1979). It is a theory of intergroup relations, group processes and the social self. (Hogg et al., 1995) Self-categorization theory that was developed later (Turner, 1985) is closely related to social identity theory and can be considered as part of the same theoretical enterprise of social identity theory (Hogg and McGarty, 1990).

Typically the concept of self focuses on the individual. People have a need for defining one selves and crating meanings also in social situations. In SIT the focus is on the social self which differentiates the individual as a person (personal identity) and the individual's knowledge that he is a member of a group (social identity) (Abrams and Hogg, 1990).

The self is comprised of different concepts about the self. The core concept of the self is a more enduring personal identity. The surrounding peripheral concepts are more fluid and allow the individual to adopt to various social situations and allow to take different social identities in different groups. (Korte, 2007.) Normally, the individual acts in terms of his own goals and desires rather than as a member of a group. Social situations can make social identity operative and override the personal identity. Social identity can be seen as a process of interaction that happens between the individual and the in-group and the individual and out-groups (Jenkins, 2004).

A social group is a set of individuals who view themselves as members of a certain social category or have a common social identification. When an individual becomes a member of a group he makes positive evaluations of that group. Through social comparison the people who are characterized similar are in the same group as self and are labeled the in-group. The others who differ are seen as the out-group. (Stets and Burke, 2000.)

SIT studies group membership and behavior and aims at understanding how individuals make sense of other people and themselves in social situations (Korte, 2007). People classify themselves and others into various social categories or groups. (Tajfel and Turner, 1985). According to SIT, the social category one feels one belongs to provides a definition of who one is by using the defining characteristics of the category. This self-definition is part of the self-concept. People have several of these category memberships that can vary in the importance to the overall self-concept. These memberships are represented in the person's mind as social identities that describe and prescribe the way a member should think, feel and behave. (Hogg et al., 1995) The group also means being at one with a group, being like others in the group and seeing things from the group's perspective (Stets and Burke, 2000).

4.1.1 Self-categorization theory

The self-categorization theory elaborates in detail the operation of the categorization process. Individuals can recognize their membership in groups when defining social boundaries between groups and categorize themselves as either belonging or not belonging to them. (Gundlach et al., 2006.) Categorization accentuates both perceived similarities between people, including self belonging to same category and perceived differences between people belonging to different categories.

In the process people are depersonalized: they are perceived as embodiments of a particular in-group prototype rather than as unique individuals. There is a contextual change from unique individual to a group member. Depersonalization is the basic process that underlies group phenomena and “transforms individuals into group members and individuality into group behavior”. (Hogg, et al., 1995.)

The social categories or groups that people place themselves are parts of society and exist only in relation to other contrasting categories. For example the category of “young” is meaningful only when it is compared to the category of “old”. These categories precede individuals, people are born into a society that has been already structured. (Stets and Burke, 2000.) Groups are not open to everyone. In the process of categorization, individuals evaluate the accessibility of a certain group and on the other hand are accessed by the group. A person's history, personality, status and opportunity constrain the groups that are available. (Korte, 2007.)

4.1.2 Discrimination and stereotyping

The stronger the similarities within the group are and the stronger the differences between the groups, the stronger the identity to the group is. When the social identity is strong, people tend to perceive themselves as less as individuals than members of the group. They stereotype themselves as a prototype of the group and at the same time stereotype and dehumanize others that are members of out-groups. (Korte, 2007.) The bias for one's group (favouritism) denigration of out-groups (discrimination) is implicit, pervasive and easily triggered. Stereotyping, prejudice and conflict are important consequences of social identity and self-categorization. (Tajfel, 1982.)

4.1.3 Management strategies

When comparing one's group to other groups there might develop a 'negative social identity' if there is a loss of comparison process and the dimensions of comparison are relevant to the in-group's identity. There exist identity management strategies for individuals and groups to cope with the negative social identity. Permeability refers to boundaries there are between two groups in the social comparison process. If the group is permeable a person can move from one group to the other. Stability means the perception of possible future changes in the in-groups status compared to the out-group. Legitimacy refers to the perceptions of the justification of the group's status. A legitimate status has been reached by fair means. People can cope with negative social identity by individual mobility, social creativity such as changing the comparison group or dimensions, and social competition. (Korte, 2007.)

4.2 Social self and consumption

Social self can be constructed through consumption. Acquiring personal possessions expresses not only our individual identity but also the sense of belonging to a group and therefore group identity. Common possessions such as a family's house or a public monument define both the group identity and the identity of its members. Possessions embody a repertoire of symbolic meanings through which we can bridge the self with others in the society. (Wattanasuwan, 2005.)

A person can possess a variety of actual selves that co-exist and come to be in different (social) situations. In the environment we live in every meaning that is attached to a situation or an object are determined by the symbol's interpretation. People learn to agree on the shared

meanings of some symbols and also to develop individual symbolic representations through the socialization process. These symbols are used in order to construct, maintain and express each of these multiple identities. (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998.)

For the consumer to sustain a specific brand meaning there has to be some level of understanding of its meaning among the people who use the brand. Therefore brand meanings develop in three environments that interchange with each other: marketing, the individual and the social environment. Each of these environments contribute to the way in which consumers identify and interact with a branded product. Thus, the marketing and social environment assist in the individual's meaning construction. (Ligas and Cotte, 1999.)

4.3 Groups and consumption

People belong to different kinds of groups. These groups provide a basis for social interaction and they help people to comprehend and make sense of the surrounding world. They fulfill socializing functions and provide information about the social order and mediate between the individual and society at large. A social group forms when two or more people share a common characteristic that is socially meaningful to them or to others. The social identity turns from "I" into "We" by extending the person's self to include other members of the groups to which he or she belongs. A reference group is a real or imaginary individual or a group of individuals to which a person refers when making judgments about his circumstances, evaluations, aspirations, attitudes and behavior. Comparison groups are groups to which the individual does not belong, but still use as a standard for self-evaluation. (Aledin, 2009:21.)

One of the most important ways of expressing group membership is through shared consumption symbols. There are levels of self that are concerned with our surroundings, we exist not only as individuals, but also as collectives. We define for example individual, family, community and group selves through various consumption objects. These symbols also define the group self. In the similar way that individuals incorporate different objects to their core selves, also groups with different core selves do this. At the same time that possessions distinguish an individual from others can also indicate group identity and express belonging to a group. (Belk, 1988.)

Also brands are shared in a social environment. Therefore their meanings emerge in the interpersonal communication. Brands can acquire deep meaning for consumers by their

involvement in the socialization process, and from then on they can evoke profound feelings of nostalgia and provide comfort from insecurity. (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998.)

A car of a certain brand may not signify the owner's social status unless others in the relevant social groups share the owners' belief that it does. This way material possessions serve as symbolic mediators between the self and others. (Wattanasuwan, 2005.) Socially shared meanings are not solid, but can change in time. Concretized meanings can emerge only after the mediated experiences of brands have been subject to discursive elaboration in a social context and intertwined with behavioral significations that are collected through lived experiences with the brand. Before this they can be rejected or forgotten. (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998.)

When it comes to symbolic interaction different brands can symbolize different meanings to different groups. The individual is not able to understand the implied group meaning until after an interaction. Therefore a person's individual meaning for a brand is not adequate for the use of that brand in social interaction. The group states how one acts and what kind of meaning will be placed on acts, events and objects. When a person's learns about a certain groups meaning, he or she can decide to either use, alter or deny the meaning. These meanings can be similar or different from the one that the person has previously assigned to the brand. The individual needs to determine, if the groups' meaning is appropriate to himself. Usually, when many individuals come in contact with people who possess same brands, there is a growing support for the implied symbolic meaning of possessing the brand. When a consumer purchases a branded product he not only aids himself in his personal life but also send a message to the particular social group with whom he identifies. (Ligas and Cotte, 1999.)

Brands or products as status symbols can change in time. Objects cease to serve as status symbols once they become shared too widely to denote exclusiveness. Aspiring groups of lower status adopt the symbols of those groups that are slightly more affluent than them, until higher-status groups discard these markers and adopt new ones to differentiate themselves. Some status symbols can be drawn not from the higher-status groups but from rebellious subcultures. (Dittmar, 2008.)

4.4 Consumer socialization

Through consumer socialization children learn what it means to be a part a certain group for example a member of a family or a peer group. Consumer socialization as an interest of study has received considerable interest by policy makers, marketers and consumer educators since the

mid 1970s. Social learning approach explains the socialization as a function of environmental influences when the person interacts with socialization agents in various social settings. (Gunter & Furnham, 1998:13) When it comes to the social influence of parents, peers and mass media on the consumer socialization processes, the studies have been more suggestive rather than explicit tests of theoretical propositions (Ward, 1974).

In order to understand consumer socialization, the term socialization needs to be defined. Ward (1974) defines it as to broadly refer to a process by which individuals learn to participate effectively in the social environment. Gronhaug and Venkatesh (2007) emphasize that socialization is a social process that involves interaction with others. Socialization includes the learning of social roles and the behavior associated with those roles. The way in which socialization happens and children learn depends upon socio-demographic attributes such as age, life cycle position, social class as well as knowledge, attitudes, motives and skills that exist. (Kuhlmann, 1983.)

Based on the definition of socialization, consumer socialization is defined as “process by which young people acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace”. In the definition, the focus is on childhood socialization, although it is recognized that not all learning takes place during this period of time. The discussion is limited to marketplace transactions, that is, the consumption-relevant skills, knowledge and attitudes. There is a distinction made between the directly relevant skills, for example skills at budgeting, pricing, knowledge of brand attitudes and shopping outlets and additionally attitudes towards products, brands and sales people. However, the more important consumption behaviour skills are indirectly relevant, those that motivate purchase but are not directly useful in purchase decisions or transactions. These include for example acquiring of symbols for enactment of particular roles. (Ward, 1974.)

Children’s consumer socialization is affected by multiple factors. The early literature emphasizes the role of parents, peers and mass media (Ward, 1974). Quite early on, though, the influence of school has also been seen as a relevant agent in consumer socialization process. The most relevant socializing agents are identified by the frequency of contact during a specific period and the extent of social power. (Kuhlmann, 1983.) Ward (1974) concludes that when consumption is seen by the child as a reward or as a status symbol, are both social in nature and mere functional consumption is asocial. There are also contradictory findings. When studying preteenage girls’ buying behaviour, Grant and Stephen (2005), found that parents and the

children's peer groups were fundamental in their consumption decision-making process. They found no evidence of advertising media rather than teenage magazines in having an effect on their consumption behaviour.

Ward (1974) also emphasizes the influence of social role enactment on consumption behavior. It implies that it should be understood how children acquire attitudes about the social significance of goods, in other words, how children understand the way that the acquisition of products or brands can be instrumental to successful social role enactment. Consumers socialization processes were seen as more subtle interpersonal processes rather than direct, purposive 'consumer training' in families and schools. The main findings from the studies are that parental influence decreases and peer influences increases as children grow older. Mass media influences are seen low and constant. (Ward, 1974.)

The social class affects the consumer socialization process of the child. The values, economic resources and level of education possessed by a family are important in the consumer socialization process. It is also suspected that symbolic meanings attributed to products and services may vary across social class. (Gronhaug and Venkatesh, 2007.)

The construction of self in childhood is characterized with material goods. Children's early interactions with material objects, such as toys or dolls, are bound with social interactions in which the symbolic meanings for these objects are established and internalized. In the development of self-concept children slowly learn to see themselves from the viewpoint of others. Young children learn to symbolic meaning of goods gradually through observing and taking part in others' interactions with objects, either directly or via media. Gradually, for example through comments made by the mother of other people, children are introduced to the idea that material objects provide symbolic information about the characteristics of the owner. In addition, they experience that other people react to them in terms of the objects that they own, for example their toys. (Dittmar, 2008:18.)

4.4.1 Reference groups and children's consumption

Reference groups can be defined as social groups that are important to a consumer and against which he or she compares himself or herself. In consumer socialization and the accumulation of cultural capital is a transfer between the child and a host of social networks, such as friends and family, and institutional contacts such as the school. Children's consumption relates to sets of complex interrelationships. (Martens et al., 2004.)

Children construct their identity and identify themselves from others with the help of brands in several levels and with different reference groups that can be either close to them or then affect on a larger societal scale. Rodhain (2006) studied the different groups that children identify themselves with through consumption. The first level is gender identification. It has been found that brands are more important for boys than for girls. The second level is identification to an age group. In the study in question wearing branded clothes was associated with older children. Third, brands also convey identification to a group of peers, in particular to the peers of the class. Children tended to identify with the group leaders by wearing the same brands as the leaders did. Fourth, parents seem to be the first and an important identification model for children. Parents also play a role in the identification process to peers by refusing to buy the brands their children ask for and explaining their decision to do so. Finally, through brands children identify with a bigger community or culture. Children associate certain products and brands to an ideal culture they want to be part of. By wearing the brands children feel part of the chosen community and also communicate their membership to others. On the other hand children may reject a brand because it represents a community they dislike and do not want to be associated with. (Rodhain, 2006.)

4.4.1.1 Parents

Research in the area on consumer socialization has emphasized the influence of parents on their young children's purchase behavior (Dotson & Hyatt, 2000). According to Caruana and Vassallo (2003), of all the environmental socialization agents, the parents have the most pervasive and important influence. Kuhlmann (1983) states that the obvious reason that parents have the predominant influence on their children is because Emmarly every kind of consumer behavior is practiced in the family context and children have a chance to observe and imitate it. Family influence on consumer socialization is often related to demographic characteristics such as the socioeconomic status of the household and the gender and age of the child (Gunter and Furnham, 1998:15). Also according to Rodhain (2006), parents are the first identification model for children. Many times then children associate their parents with a specific brand, they will want to have the same brand as well. The identification process takes place even though children cannot obtain all the same products as their parents.

The parents' ideas and values determines the cultural values they use to raise their children. The internationalization of these values will act as a representative of their parents values at the same time shaping their own. (Martens et al., 2004.) There is a difference of parent influence when it comes to products consumed at home or at school. Brands and children's own choice is more

relevant in the public sphere (such as at school) and mother's values more prominent for drinking in family situations at home. Through extensive brand experience the desire to buy brands is there, self-purchase is still limited and frequently adult-accompanied. (Duff, 1999.)

It has been found that girls find especially their mothers very influential when they are choosing clothes for school and for special occasions (Grant & Stephan, 2005). According to Quart (2003), parents influence predilection for high fashion brands. The children she had interviewed were speaking of high fashion brands as if they were talking about their family and friends. She noticed that children wear junior-sized versions of luxury brands that adults also wear. Children aspire to dress like they were women in their twenties and it is common for mothers and daughters who are part of the upper middle-class to wear the same expensive brand-name clothes. It happens that mothers strive to look younger and children older. (Quart, 2003:21.) Also Köksal (2007) stated that many brands have realized that they need to offer their products by considering the parents' needs and wants. Many brands, such as Gap, Ralph Lauren and Benetton have succeeded after realizing that parents reflect their brand choices in the children's market. In her article about child-brand relationships Ji (2008) concludes that a brand that tries to establish a relationship with a child should not ignore communicating with their parents.

In a study of brand relationships and children it was found that for example when it comes to brand relationships and children parents also have a strong role. In Fournier's (1998) scale of brand relationships these relationships can be described for example as arranged marriages that are involuntary unions between a brand and a consumer that is imposed by preferences of third party. There is normally and long-term, exclusive commitment, but low levels of affective attachment. This is particularly strong with children and brands when it comes to their parents. For example these relationships can develop to entertainment equipment at home. Although children may show commitment to the brand, they show little affection toward it. However, with more usage experience with the brand, there can later be also an affectionate relationship to the brand. Another type of brand relationship affected by the parents is called a one-night stand. Children may have little information about the brand and does not care about it, but nevertheless use it whenever their parents give it to them. (Ji, 2002).

Parents can affect children's brand relationship through three different ways. First, they can pass their own relationships with certain brands to children. Second, parents influence children's opportunity to interact with brands, for example the way they are able to interact with other

socialization agents such as peers, media and culture. Third, parents are most instrumental in teaching children basic rational aspects of consumption. (Ji, 2008.)

In a study of differences in the perceptions of parents and children on branding it was found that parents feel that their children were too concerned with brands and felt that children were influenced more by brand image than the actual product to be purchased. The research indicated that children are brand aware at a younger age than what their parents think. Overall, the parents were concerned over the influence that brands can have on their children. It was also thought that parents' less positive attitudes towards branding could affect the perceptions and attitudes of and children's level of understanding and recognizing brands. (Harradine & Ross, 2007.) Also Ji (2008), states that it is unlikely that children form relationships with a brand that their parents consider harmful or unbeneficial to their children.

Nevertheless, the influence of parents is not complete. Slowly, children begin expressing their independence from their parents slowly and become more attached to their friends. Slowly, there is a growing conflict between children's independent consumer behavior patterns. (McEmmal, 2007:311.) Before adolescence parents have more influence and control on how the children spend their time than peers. They also pass their values to children. For children who are 12 and under, parents are a more important influence on children's relationship with brands than their peers (Ji, 2008). Nevertheless, it does not mean that friends would not have an impact on children's brand preferences at all. According to Duff (1999), children's freedom of choice develops at school and awareness of peer group influences becomes increasingly important.

4.4.1.2 Peers

As children get older, the influence of parents on children's consumption decisions is decreasing and peer influence is becoming increasingly important. Roper and La Niece (2009) found that as children move through their childhood, peer approval replaces family as the main influence for the children's consumption behavior. Also meanings attached to brands develop as children grow older. The influence includes for example comments which peers make about products and brands and about the way they are advertised. Through communication with their peers children learn about their peers' product favorites and perhaps take these into account in evaluating products on their own. Also the symbolic meaning of goods may be learnt from peers. (Gunter and Furnham, 1998:29.)

Peer groups have an important role in consumer socialization. Social interaction is needed with diverse groups of people such as friends, classmates and members of more and less formal

organizations. (Aledin, 2009:23.) According to Banerjee and Dittmar (2008), materialism has become a significant part of children's lives, because they believe that in order to be popular among their peer group, they have to have the right games, clothes, shoes and a host of other material goods. The culture in peer groups values material goods above else. Materialistic values are internalized by children because they believe that they need material goods to be popular and accepted.

Grant and Stephen (2005) found that children make conscious decisions regarding the clothes they wear when they are with their friends. Clothing choices are influenced by which friends they are with and where they are going. (Grant & Stephen, 2005) Before becoming teenagers, children are essentially conformist, and fairly group-oriented. They tend to look outside of themselves in order to find out and what to believe. The important thing is to fit in. (Acuff, 1997.)

Although children are influenced by their peers they seem to be unaware of how much their friends actually are having an impact on their consumption choices and brand preferences. They may admit that they have purchased brands because of their friends, but they do not acknowledge that some of their friends might have been the main influence of some of their purchase decisions. (Roper and La Niece, 2009.)

Also older siblings have a strong influence on children's brand choices. When it came to information sources, older sisters were most important and respected. For example, girls ask their older sister for opinions about clothing choices. (Grant and Stephen, 2005.) Also Elliott and Leonard (2004) found that children may be jealous of older siblings that are given branded things and they ask for the same brand themselves in order to emulate the older sister or brother.

Children find it important to distinguish themselves from younger children and their old toys. Some childish concepts might be aggressively pushed away as new ones come along. (Acuff, 1997)

4.4.2 Children and New media

As the number of commercial messages directed at consumers increase, marketers develop new strategies in order to build long-term relationships with target consumers. These include media such as for example mobile phones and internet. The internet is fast becoming a serious alternative to shopping and browsing in conventional shops and stores (Tingstad, 2007; Dittmar, 2008:7).

In a study of children and online shopping the majority of children said that Internet was their preferred information source for shopping (Schor, 2007). According to Kenway and Mullen (2001, p.57), marketers have recognized the importance of reaching children through the new media forms. Roper and Shah (2007) found in their study that over nine out of ten children said that if they saw something new in television advert or magazine that they liked they were likely to buy it. New media, especially the Internet has become an important part of children's everyday lives. The Internet has become a commercialized medium that includes very few non-commercial sites for children. For example the growing practice of advergaming, in which companies create branded environments has been growing. (Schor, 2007.)

The computer environment has been traditionally seen as masculine, which can make women feel disempowered and excluded, whereas men feel at home online. This is likely to change among children and adolescents. (Woodfield, 2000.) It can be nevertheless, that girls still feel somewhat more uncomfortable with computers than boys. This happens through socialization, computers are still to an extent considered as machines that are masculine.

According to Ji (2008) in addition to brand usage experience, the primary opportunity that children have to interact with brands is through media usage, e.g. surfing brand websites. It has been found that it is acknowledged both by children and parents that their use of Internet for purchasing happens on an individual level rather than a family level. Children do not interest themselves in family related purchases and the nature of the technology is suited better for individual use. (Thomson & Laing, 2003.)

Children purchase online products rather than services and the things they buy are relatively inexpensive. The most important reason for buying online was that the things they bought could not be bought locally. This way they could get an access to a range of products their peers would not own. Children, to whom this exclusivity was important, were willing to pay a premium price especially for clothing and fashion related purchases. (Thomson & Laing, 2003.)

Nevertheless, not all study emphasizes the importance of media. When studying girls' buying behavior of clothing, Grant and Stephen (2005) found that the children attending the focus group did not mention radio or could not recollect any current advertising campaign. The only reference was made to television and teenage fashion magazines. There was no mention of Internet or other new media.

Commercial Internet sites are not free of problems. Nairn (2008) found that advertising on sites that were specifically targeted at children was often unfair and deceptive. Most of the adverts were not labeled and some of them hidden in the site content. The sites that were specifically created for children subjected the children on pester power. For example the sites of Barbie and Diddl were considered merely entertaining shops for the brands. They were constantly offering children the opportunity to create wish lists that can be sent to parents by email. It was also found out that children do not understand advergaming as being commercial, they see them as not advertising because it is play. They gradually learn to tell entertainment from commerce but the true nature of advergaming was not always understood by the 16 year-olds. Most of the sites that children were visiting were not created with a child-audience in mind and thereby included material that was not suitable for children.

4.5 Children's consumption symbolism in social situations

Children understand that brands are different that brands they symbolize different things and can also may make one more popular. In a study of branding and young children, children voiced a preference for the brand Nike and the most important reason for this was that they were the most popular brand of shoes, e.g. they are selling the most. Some children preferred Adidas, but there were also children with no preference of a sports brand at all. Half of the children who took part in the study said that they would be influenced by advertising campaigns to some extent. (Ross & Harradine, 2004.) Children's identity is evolving based on interactions to others. Further, Rodhain (2006) concludes that also brands play an important role in children's identity construction. Identity can be seen as being a result of the socialization process of children. She studied children at the school setting among peers and teachers. Children in the second and third grade of elementary school are in the process of building and transforming their identity of children into an identity of pre-teenagers.

The role of brand symbolism and social roles that brands play in children's lives has been studied by Nairn et al. (2008). By taking CCT as their frame of reference they studied how children adopt, adapt and assign meanings to brands. The children made a list of things they thought that were popular and "in" at the moment. The list included toys, pop stars, games and TV-shows. Previously it has been found that children see iconic celebrities from the fields of sport, pop music and popular culture as brands themselves. (Parker and Steinberg, 2004) Acuff (1997), states that children are impressionable and quick to attach themselves to celebrity and sports heroes. There were several themes identified in the study: First, brands and

advertisements are seen as providing entertainment and fun. Second, the nature of brands is strongly gendered. Third, acceptance or rejection of brands is used as rites of passage or group membership. Fourth, inauthenticity by a marketing organization or by a branded celebrity is derided and finally, brands must offer product quality and value for money. (Nairn et al., 2008.) The process in which the children discussed whether designate brands were cool or uncool was complex and contested, gendered and imbued with symbolic group membership rituals. In discussions about branded commodities, gender played a significant role. There is a strong distinction made between girls, boys and ‘tomboys’, girls who might like boys’ toys.

It has been shown that children show belonging to groups through consumption choices. Close to the concept of self is self image that means the way people see themselves and the way they wish to portray themselves to others. According to McNeal (2007) children ask for, and buy clothes that have brands on them in order to tell others who they are. Boys in elementary school like to wear clothes with athletic names on them and girls prefer brand names that suggest their gender such as Barbie or Britney. (McNeal, 2007:17) Using brands as a way of symbolizing self can start at early as age two and it continues for the rest of the person’s life. In the development of social understanding of brand symbolism is the social self that develops through interaction with peers. It consists of the child’s responses to others and of other children to the child. In- and out-groups develop after the age of eight. (McNeal, 2007:295)

The symbolic role of brands can have negative consequences on the life of children. Roper and Shah (2007) studied social impact of branding upon children aged between seven and eleven from lower socio-economic groups. They found that brands can cause of social division among children resulting in in- and out-groups. If children do not own the right brands they may be discriminated against or experience social impacts such as teasing, bullying, low self-esteem and social exclusion. It was found that children with no brands were not only seen as poor but they and their family were also seen as poor quality. Other children thought that they might be embarrassed because they lacked the particular brand. Children seemed to demonstrate a brand-obsessed culture and children coming outside this culture were in danger of facing social exclusion that may cause the child to feel isolated and even affect their performance at school. Brands can be used to hide children’s low socio-economic background.

Owning the same brands as their peers can make children feel equal to others. Therefore the ones who do not own brands are not seen as fashionable and therefore of lower social order. Additionally, children who owned the brands were seen as cool but also unfriendly. Children

that are perceived cool have power over the children who do not own the brands and this can be used in order to express superiority and can trigger bullying. Even though these children in addition to cool were described as “bullies” and “rude”, children still wanted to be cool themselves. Therefore being cool and owning the right brands could enhance ones popularity and help them be respected and accepted by the rest of the children. There is a pressure on the cool children to keep up with what is happening amongst the newest brands. According to the authors the feeling of the fact that children may feel worthless because they do not own a certain brand and even lowers their self esteem shows how much influence brands have on young children. Children as young as 7 and 11 may feel insecure as a result of the pressure created by brands. (Roper and Shah, 2007) It has been found that brands do not only affect the purchases of trainers or observable products, but there is a need to buy them in everyday, purchase decisions, for example when it comes to groceries and lunch-box choices. (Roper and La Niece, 2009).

They found that children form stereotypes about the owners of trainers even if they do not know the people in question. Elliott and Leonard (2004) studied the consumption symbolism of less-privileged British children. The owners of branded and expensive trainers are seen as rich and young and in contrast the owners of unbranded and inexpensive looking tainers are believed to be poor and old. The children who are wearing branded trainers are seen as popular and being able to fit in with their peers. Therefore children wished to own branded trainers in order to fit in with their friends and the popular children at school. If meeting a new group of people, the children interviewed would have chosen the person with the coolest trainers to talk to first. Not having branded trainers could lead to teasing or even bullying. The children wished to have brands in order to avoid being bullied. The symbolic meanings were not the only reason to desire a brand. When asked about why they wished to own a particular brand (in most cases Nike), the children first gave a practical response followed by an emotional one.

Although Roper and Shah (2007) saw brand symbolism among children of the low socio-economic class negative, they also found some positive aspects of branding emerging from the study. First, children can learn significant skills from certain brands. This can be seen for example in the use of branded educational computer games that children might have learned to use already at an early age. Second, the concept of celebrity brands could also be seen as a positive aspect of branding. For example family-oriented role models were seen as good examples for children. However, there is always a danger of celebrities behaving badly and thereby influencing children in a negative way. The third positive finding was that brands were considered keeping children occupied and distract

Children are not always using brands as symbols themselves. Instead this might be done by their parents. Children are sometimes reflecting their parents' social and material status. Children can act as symbolic representations of their parents' cultural orientations and attitudes. (Martens et al., 2004) This means that when it comes to brand symbolism, children are not only carrying symbols of their own personality, but they are also conveying the values of their parents. This way children are in a way symbols themselves.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Methodological choices

The study is qualitative in nature and the focus group interview has been chosen method for the research. The intention of the study has been to understand the role that brands and consumption play in the social lives of children.

5.2 Ethical issues when studying children

When it comes to studying children, it is important to take into consideration ethical issues. Children need to be studied on their own terms and by avoiding conflicts in social situations. In this study, the parents' of the children were asked for permission to participate in the study. The children participated voluntarily and could leave the situation at any point if they so wished. The different communication patterns were taken into consideration, and it was ensured that all of the children had the chance to tell their opinions. The focus group discussions were held in a small classroom that was comfortable and familiar for the children. In addition, the discussions were kept short enough to ensure that the children did not get fatigued.

5.3 Data collection method

The study was conducted by focus group interviews. This method was chosen, because the study in question aims at studying the social meanings of brands in children's lives and social behavior is well studied in group situations. According to Moisander and Valtonen (2006:74) focus groups make it possible to understand how certain market segments (in this case children) create their worlds in discussion with each other. It has also been found, that focus groups are a good method of studying children. According to Gunter and Furnham (1998:158) focus groups can yield valuable information form children about their consumption habits and preferences and also provide further understanding of the language they use to discuss these matters. Groups need to be small enough, in order for the children to be able to discuss the topic in peace and to avoid peer pressure or someone dominating the discussion. According to studies of studying children, it is best to keep girls and boys apart, because at this age (8-9 years old), the interests of children are different for girls and boys and the communication among a single sex may be

easier. Also, when conducting focus groups with children, it should be considered that children may not be able to hold their attention for a long time and therefore the discussion should not last too long. (Gunter and Furnham, 1998; Morgan & al., 2002, Wyatt & al., 2008.)

The data was collected in an elementary school in Espoo. The pupils who attended the discussions were on the second grade of Finnish elementary school, which means that they were eight to nine years old. The discussions were done in groups of three to four girls or boys. First, I contacted the head master of the school by phone and later I was contacted by a teacher of the class that was partaking the research. The parents were asked for permission for their children to take part in the study. All of the parents agreed. The children's willingness to take part was also asked and one boy did not want to attend the focus group.

The focus groups took place in early May 2009 and each lasted from 30 to 45 minutes. The duration of the discussions was based on previous research, for example Morgan et al. (2002) found that in discussions that lasted more than 45 minutes the quality of responses began to deteriorate. Two groups were female and five male.

The focus groups started with introductions and introduction to the theme of the discussion. After that the children got to write their favorite things on a piece of carbon. From these things I chose some for further discussion. For the last ten to fifteen minutes the children got a chance to draw their dream bedroom. By having different techniques it was easier for the children to concentrate and this way every member of the group got a chance to participate actively. In addition Moisander and Valtonen (2006:79) have found that using projective techniques can be a useful way in generation of cultural talk in conjunction of interviews and focus groups.

The groups varied a lot in terms of concentration and data provided. Some children were enthusiastic and articulate whereas others had problems concentrating or they did not seem to like the situation. These groups tended to last shorter times than those that had more interested children in them. Overall, it was felt that most of the children enjoyed the situation, because they got the chance to talk about things that were interesting and important to them in a comfortable situation with other children they already knew.

5.4 Data analysis Method

According to Moisander and Valtonen (2006: 102) to analyze means to examine the data methodically, for example by dividing the thing analyzed into smaller parts and studying the

interrelations of the parts in order to understand something about the studied object as a whole.. The analysis was started off with the by listening the discussion once soon after it took place and after that transcribing it. The tones' of voices of the children and for example laughter was also transcribed to get a more complete understanding of the data. The data analysis of the text was done with rigour but without exact systematic procedures and techniques that according to Moisander and Valtonen (2006:106) can take make the analysis too technical of a procedure.

Moisander and Valtonen (2006: 102) also state that the context in which the data is produced and interpreted is important. The data in this research was co-produced by me, and the children partaking the discussion. The girls were class-mates and therefore knew each other before the discussion.

The interpretation of data is not objective. According to Moisander and Valtonen (2006:107), texts are open to multiple interpretations and I as an analyzer of the data interpret the data according to my pre-understanding of the phenomenon, and I co-produce the meaning of the data with the children who participated in the study. My culturally conditioned knowledge of the subject matter is based first on the view I have of children of this age as a whole and second on the view I have of people living in this area of Espoo (Westend). I see children as people with lots of different interests and ideas and as people who are not behaving only based on their cognitive development, but are in addition affected and are affecting their social surroundings. The people of Espoo I consider to be somewhat more affluent than people in many other parts of Finland or the metropolitan area of Helsinki. The pre-understanding of the disciplinary academic knowledge is based on the marketing and consumption culture courses I have studied and the books and articles I have read during this spring on consumption and brand symbolism. The basic assumptions will affect my analysis and interpretation and also have already affected the way I present my questions and the questions and themes I constructed the discussions around.

I started off the analysis by finding norms in the text. According to Moisander and Valtonen (2006:115) it is necessary to think why there are norms and why these norms were referred to in certain situation. In the discussions with children I noticed mainly implicit norms that came forth in the way that the children talked. The norms in the children's talk were presented by nervous laughter when they were unsure about how to bring forth a certain topic, or whether it was allowed to discuss the topic at all or they way they talked about difficult things such as girl that were not behaving in a way 'that girls normally behave'. After norms, I looked at the way

the girls talked about 'others' the brand loving older girls they liked to call divas, the dolls and celebrities on the Stardoll site and a female classmate who wanted to be a boy and therefore behaved differently from the other girls in the class. Moisander and Valtonen (2006:117-118) state that looking at the way people produce 'other' can offer insight into the nature of subject positions of different market actors. By searching these discourses in the text I found things that I otherwise would have not necessarily noticed. Further, after reading the transcript several times, more themes arose that I separated into categories and subcategories. Finally, the main themes found in the empirical findings and analysis sections arose.

6. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Children communicate with brands constantly. They meet brands in both personal and social situations. In this chapter the findings of the research are presented. In this research, there are three different environments for brand symbolism to develop and brand relationships to form. They are personal environment, the environment of in-groups and the environment of out-groups.

The personal environment is discussed in the first chapter. Children construct their personal identity with the help of brands. They distinguish themselves from others as individuals by using brands as symbols. At the same time, they hold some possessions without brands valuable. These possessions that are important to their self-concept are also discussed in the first chapter.

The second chapter focuses on the influence of the children's in-groups on their brand symbolism and relationship development. The most important in-groups are their parents, peers at school and the online environment, where they constantly interact with other children and people e.g. in online communities.

The third chapter discusses the influence of out-groups on children and brands. Children wish to distinguish themselves from younger children and at the same time avidly follow and sometimes imitate the older children. The children in the study were found to form brand relationships to different kinds of brands. The relationship types were also varied. Not all of the children demonstrated relationships to any brands, on the other hand some portrayed connections to brands that could be considered long term and will have an effect on their consumption patterns and behavior also when they get older. In the literature they are linked to the relationship types presented by Fournier (1998), Ji (2002) and Kates and Robinson (2008).

6.1 Private symbolism

Children use brand symbolism to identify themselves from the environment and in constructing and maintaining their private identity (Ross and Harradine, 2004). This can be seen in the way they distinguish themselves from others by using brands as symbols and the way they hold some possessions of theirs very valuable.

6.1.1 Identity construction

Emma had realized that there is a difference between brands and through distinction of brands it is possible to bring forth one's own personality. When shopping for her avatar at the social networking site Stardoll, she described a brand she likes:

Emma: I like visiting stores like Evil Panda and another which name I can't remember. They have kind of fun clothes in their stores, a little bit different.

Emma understands that the way she dresses her doll and the brands her doll wears communicate something to the other users on the site. She is using the Evil Panda clothes to show her identity to others. According to Dittmar (2007:27) people use material possessions to express who they are and construct a sense of who they are and would like to be. Brand is not only of utility to her, but it is a way of distinguishing herself from other users who do not wear as 'different' clothes as her doll does, who are into more popular brands. Through symbolic goods children can realize who they are (McCracken, 1988), in this case a member of a social unity that wishes to make a difference between herself and other members of the site.

6.1.2 Cherished possessions

The children interviewed gave many examples on how important certain objects had become to them. The significant objects were normally old and torn toys, clothes or sports equipment. The results are similar to the study by Kamptner (1991) who found that (the older) children named stuffed animals, sports equipment and toys as their most treasured possessions. The reasons for their attachment were their personal symbolic ties to these objects and also their physical properties. According to Belk (1988) these possessions could be considered as parts of oneself. During the focus group discussions stories of these objects surfaced spontaneously, the children brought the stories up on their own. Additionally the stories were often fairly similar and commonly included words such as ugly or broken.

According to Belk (1988) the objects become parts of our extended selves when we create or alter them. Using an object for such a long period of time that it becomes broken and rugged may give the children a sense of altering it in order for it to become their own and additionally, a part of themselves.

Eetu tells about his first floor ball stick:

“Like my first floor ball stick was kind of very good but it was not fancy at all, it was so ugly but it was good. It had lost all of those signs, they had torn all the stickers and all the fancy things away and then it was kind of ugly but it was great. In the end, its blade broke.”

These objects were rarely of any particular brand. Brand names or monetary value was seen as something irrelevant or even as something that could not be attached to an object loved so strongly. It was considered that these beloved objects could be branded but the brand would not be any part of the importance of that object.

The objects were often characterized as old, ugly or broken. These features that could often be considered negative, but in the contrary they made the objects even more valuable to the children. Perhaps the abundance of material objects in the lives of these children made them respect the old and broken things more, they were something stable in their lives and they had such value that could not be replaced by new expensive things. The children would mention only one or two of these special objects, which were one-of-a-kind and could not be replaced by new ones if lost or thrown away.

Often the important objects were given to the children by their relatives as gifts. Sara describes her favorite soft toy bunnies that she received as a present from her grandfather:

“My bunnies... They must be... they are very old. There are two of them. The first one I got from my granddad when I was really young. And then he gave me another one and first my mom didn't dare to give it to me but when she did I was like looking on both sides what, what?”

Although the second bunny was given to Sara by her grandfather later than the first one, she still considered them both as important. In this case the bunnies would have not become as important to her, if they had not been given to her by someone she felt was important in her life. In a way, it is not only that the object she feels is part of her extended self but that with the help of the toy she also feels a connection to her grandfather. The bunnies are not just some toys brought home from the store, but they inhabit feelings and memories.

Although the objects had become shabby and old, once they were shiny and new. Emma tells about her Bratz-doll:

“But my first Bratz was kind of fancy and now it is broken to pieces. Its hair is going up. But it was fancy when I got it, it had all kinds of make up.”

Emma's story reminds Venla of her old toy that had now become similar as Emma's Bratz. The children could well remember the way the things had been in the beginning and understand that it was through their own usage that they had changed. Therefore it was not only a cold object or piece of clothing that was important for them but also the memories they attached into making the thing into what it was today.

According to Belk (1988) losing an important object can be seen as diminished self, because possessions are regarded as parts of ourselves. The research at the homeless shelter (Hill, 1992) found that the children had somewhat lost their sense of competence when losing special possessions, most importantly their homes. They found comfort in talking about possessions that they hoped would remain safe at their friends' or relatives' house until they returned. The children who attended the focus group discussions in this study had very different living circumstances, but nevertheless losing an important object was a memorable and sad moment in their lives. The objects (most often clothes) were often lost when the children's parents decided that they were in too bad a shape to be for example worn and they needed new ones. Many times the children themselves would have been for example happy to wear the broken clothes even longer, but it was not considered sensible by their parents. This happened to Eetu and his beloved shoes:

"I don't care if my shoes are ragged, as long as they are good. [I had shoes] that by mom and dad accidentally threw in the garbage although I wouldn't have wanted that. They had holes in them through which the water was coming into the shoes. It was kind of difficult when I stepped into mud and the water was going straight in."

As Belk (1988) states, the loss of self is greater when possessions are lost involuntarily. This can explain the way children talked about the objects that had been lost or thrown away by their parents. They would have not voluntarily stopped using these goods because of the emotional bond that they had with them. Although through time the usage of objects would have become less important (or impossible through growth) they would still some time keep their significance through the memories associated with them. Losing things involuntarily causes one a feeling of being less in control and is therefore more difficult to handle. The children's objects had become parts of themselves through time and constant usage, and the loss of them for example through their parents made them feel less in control of their lives and themselves.

In addition, the children seemed sometimes to shy away from talking about for example expensive clothing brands that their parents bought them and they wore. Many times they passed

the subject by only indicating the logo on their shirt without mentioning it out loud. In contrast, they seemed to be more than happy to discuss their old, worn out belongings. Perhaps among the children it was more socially acceptable to bring forth things that were not expensive or branded but old and important to them as people.

The importance of private non-branded products to the children show that they do not yet place strong emphasis on the social meanings that consumption has. On the other hand, the symbolic meanings came forth in other parts of the focus groups. With some children it was more evident than with others. Kemptner (1991) states that the move from pragmatic and self-concerned focus on possessions to an emphasis on their symbolic features happens as children become older. Children in this study are in the midst of this change.

6.2 Our symbols

As we live in a social world, many decisions in our daily lives are not done alone. At the same time we are constructing our personal and social identity (Elliot, 2004:129). This is the case in particular with children, who depend on their parents, and as they grow older, their peers help them realize the symbolic meanings of brands and consumption. The traditional consumer socialization literature has found parents, peers and television to be the most important socialization factors in children's lives (Ward, 1974). In this research the first two were clearly present, but television was often replaced by a newer media, the internet. The different socialization agents are a basis and play a crucial role in forming of in-groups in childhood and children learn to distinct themselves from others through consumption symbols that are symbolizing their group.

6.2.1 Parents

As previous research has found, at this point of children's lives their parents have the strongest say in what brands to purchase (Kuhlmann, 1983; Dotson and Hyatt, 2000; Caruana and Vassallo, 2003). It was found that the parents' opinions mattered the most when it came to brands and consumer decisions. At this age parents seem to be the most important influence on children and their brand preferences and relationships (Ji, 2002; Ji, 2008; McEmmal, 2007, Rodhain, 2006). Families can be considered in-groups and for example through their clothing choices children and their parents can show their belonging to a group (Jenkins, 2004)

Although friends at school are becoming a more and more important influence on the brand and consumption choices of the children, parents still seem to have main impact on their consumption habits. Children identified with their parents and felt they were members of the group of family. Of the various social categories and in-groups people associate themselves with family was the most crucial one.

Parents' influence is natural since at this stage children have fairly little money to consume on their own, and most of the consumption happens with the parents. Children were more aware of the brands that they had been introduced to by their parents. Also Ji (2008) has found that parents affect children's ability to come into contact with brands. In this research, the children interviewed rarely went shopping by themselves, and their clothes were normally bought by their mother, either without them or together. Children might have had different ideas for example about the choice of clothing brands, but they still went along with the choices of their parents, or in most cases their mothers.

In this research, the parents' effect on children's brand preferences and consumption habits could be seen in two different types of products. First, it was the influence on the things that the children were consuming at the moment, mainly clothing but to an extent, also toys. Shopping of current products was done with their parents in stores and some of the children told that they also had been shopping clothes online, usually with their mothers. Second, it influenced the brand preferences of adult products that the children wished to own when they grew up. According to Ji (2008) parents affect children's brand relationships by passing on their relationships to their children. Parents influence could be mainly seen in the children's preferences of car brands, to which they normally wanted to own because their parents had one also. It could be noticed that for example their friends or the cars the parents of their friends owned had no impact.

Almost all the children wished to own a car of the same brand as their parents did. This could be explained by the limited knowledge that children had of cars. Some of them, who were more interested in cars in general, would mention also other brands of which they found information on the Internet. Influence of peers in this category is limited, since cars do not seem to be a popular topic of conversation.

A: The reason I like Saab, is because both of my parents, my dad and my mom have Saabs.

T: And then, I like BMWs because both of my parents have them, and then our BMW has this big TV in it.

The children had no knowledge of cars different than the ones at home. It is highly potential that they will purchase the same brand of a car that their parents have had. It was usual for the families of the children to be loyal to one brand of cars, many of their parents had cars of the same brand. This loyalty will probably transfer to their children as well. Also the bad experiences of their parents with some cars led to the children dislike and distrust these brands.

Influence of parents could also be seen more subtly in the products that children would have preferred even without their parents motivation. For example the gaming console Wii, which was very popular among the children, was clearly promoted also by the parents. The children frequently that Wii is good for you, because you can do exercise while playing. The use of a play console as an exercising equipment is something that the children would not have come up on their own, it is clearly something that their parents think is a favorable function. The health benefits of sports by using Wii are strongly promoted in its marketing. Through their parents approval, the children could justify liking a product that in some other case could have been found not as preferable for the children.

A: I like Wii.

M: Wii sucks.

A: But you can move at the same time when you play

I: So is Wii popular now?

A: Yes because one plays and moves. Then people watch the screen and then they move at the same time.

Parents' opinions also affected the children's view on stereotypical toys. For example Alma, a nine-year-old girl states that her mother's opinion of the popular Bratz dolls affect her somewhat, and she does not want to play with them.

I: Do you like Bratz?

A: No

I: Why not?

A: Well, for starters my mother won't let me buy them and I don't care for them.

I: Why doesn't your mom let you buy them?

A: Well, because she doesn't think they look very nice.

I: Why don't you like them?

A: I just don't somehow like them.

Alma acknowledges her mother's opinion and that it also shapes her own view on the Bratz. Nevertheless, she cannot quite grasp her own motives for not liking the dolls. Her mother's thoughts are the main influence for her not wanting to play with the Bratz, but she further finds her own opinion being the ultimate factor in not being interested in them. Previous research has found that parents are concerned that their children are too concerned with brands (Harradine and Ross, 2007). In this case, it could be that Alma's mother was perhaps afraid of the model that the Bratz dolls with tiny clothes and plenty of makeup give to her daughter.

Children's way of playing and the way they saw the materialistic world differed substantially. Some of them were still in the age of playing outside with the children in the neighborhood, when others were more concentrated on playing sports and others in the pre-teenagers' world that they were about to enter. Much of the differences can be credited to home environment and what is valued in the family. According to Martens et al. (2004) the parents' values shape the children's values. At the same time children act as representations of their parents' values. For the children it was mostly their mothers whose values of life were the most influential, as the children were not allowed to do things that their mother didn't find appropriate. It could be noticed in their speech that the children were still in a phase where mothers' opinions were respected and taken seriously, there were only mediocre signs of rebellion against mothers' wishes. Some children showed strong admiration to their mother, although sometimes it was replaced by an admiration to an older brother or sister.

Many children told that their parents were an influence on their clothing choices. Some of them were happy about this, but some others would have chosen different brands if given the choice. Olivia had adopted her mother's sense of style and obliges it when it comes to the style of the jeans or the brand of her clothes. Her mother is a fan of the clothing brand "Gap" and often shops for the brand either in the USA (there are no retailers of the brand in Finland) or online is something that connects the two. According to Quart (2003:21) parents are a strong influence in the predilection for high fashion brands. Children in families that have strong regard for luxury brands tend to wear the same brands as their parents do. Also Harradine and Ross (2007) found that parents apply the same criteria when selecting their own and their children's clothing.

O: Normally I wear Gap's clothes.

I: *Why?*

O: Well... my mother likes them terribly and also I think that they feel pretty nice on.

I: *Do you buy them together with your mom?*

O: Yeah, when we were... like in America, there was this huge store of Gap's clothes. Sometimes we order them online with mom.

I: Do you like any other clothes?

O: Well... no, I don't really like any other clothes.

Olivia sometimes wears also other clothes, but normally it is always Gap. There is a strong possibility that Gap will be her favourite brand also when she gets older, because the company offers clothing to adults as well as to children. In her group, Olivia was the only one who showed any interest to brands or clothing in general. The other girls were more interested in reading and playing outside with their friends. When the group was asked, what kind of people would normally wear more expensive brands the other two girls went quiet, but Olivia answered shyly but that they would probably be a bit richer than others. This characterization about people who wear brands (that she also considers herself to be part of) is most likely to have been affected by the way brands and consumption as symbol of a certain level of living are thought about in her family.

By wearing more expensive clothes by Gap, Olivia is showing her friends at school, that her family is affluent, maybe more affluent than others. Additionally, it is the whole family that is bringing forth their values through the brand choices of the children and parents alike. In a way, she is a status symbol for herself and for the whole family. The popularity of brands such as Gap, Ralph Lauren and Benetton was also pointed out by a study in Turkey on consumer behavior preferences and children's clothing (Köksal, 2007). It is stated that these brands have understood that parents reflect their brand choices in the children's market and marketing to them is essential in order to reach the children. It seems that through globalization the same high street brands that are popular in the USA are also popular in Turkey and Finland.

The brand is also Olivia's way of expressing her belonging to a group, that of her mother and herself (and perhaps the whole family). According to Belk (1988), consumption symbols such as brands can be used to define the group self, in this case the family. As Olivia is connecting to her mother through her brand choice, she is also making herself distinguished from the children in her class, she sees herself more affluent than others. The Gap as a status symbol is effective, because of the difficulty of attaining clothes of this brand it can still be considered exclusive. (Dittmar, 2008.) However, the use of the brand Gap as a status symbol is not without problems. In order for it to be an explicit symbol of the family's status, its meaning should be understood by the others in the relevant social group (Wattanasuwan, 2005), e.g. the other children in her class.

Since the clothes are bought online or abroad, the other children may not be aware of the meaning that the symbol Gap stands for. Therefore it is possible that the status symbol is left unrecognized by the peers.

Also the boys in the study had experienced the effect of their mother's brand preferences on their clothing. Joonas would have chosen differently, but his mother was a fan of Benetton:

S: Adults like brands, at least my mother likes for example Stadium, Intersport... Was it supposed to be Benetton or something like that.

I: *What kind of a brand is that?*

S: It is a dumb brand. I was bought a Benetton shirt, my mom is a fan of it and it always says Benetton's shirt on them.

I: *You're wearing one now also. Why do you think your mother likes Benetton?*

S: She thinks they are smart [clothes]. Because I don't like striped shirts that you always have to wear.

I: *If you could decide for yourself, would you buy Benetton clothes?*

S: No... I would buy Adidas.

Ross and Harradine (2004) concluded that children prefer sports brands because then they feel cool and older. Also Hogg et al. (1998) found that children recognized sports brands compared to other clothing brands notably well. Sports brands also act as elements of identity with their most popular peers. As found here, wearing of sports brands is not always possible, because at this age parents still have a strong impact on the brands their children wear. Joonas would have preferred Adidas, but her mother's opinion on 'smart' clothes was still more important. There was a contradiction between the two brand preferences. The boy understood what the brands Benetton ("smart") and Adidas ("sports") stood for. More than being a smart and well-behaving boy, he wished to be an athlete, like the ones he saw on TV and admired. He wanted to identify with the celebrities that can be considered as brands themselves (Parker and Steinberg, 2004). Having no role-models wearing the Benetton brand did not make it desirable. By wearing an Adidas t-shirt he would be conveying his values and likes to others, by wearing a Benetton shirt he was merely conveying the values of his mother. Through wearing a sports brand he would symbolize his own personality, but at the same time he would symbolize himself belonging to a group of athletes, that he one day wanted to do for living.

This might change relatively soon, when he begins identifying more with his peers instead of his parents and slowly starts affecting his clothing choices more. According to Korte (2007), people can use different management strategies when comparing the groups they belong to. In this case

Joona is comparing his family to the people who wear sporting clothes. He has a possibility to move from one group to another, but the switch is not possible yet but will happen soon as he starts to question the decisions of his parents more and identifying more with his friends at school and at sports the teams he plays in.

Parents were also influencing the brand relationships children were forming. At this point, some of the children's brand relationships had already lasted a long time. The children tended to like for example sports equipment that they had gotten to know and received as presents when they were younger. According to Ji (2002), these could be described as first love relationships with brands, which have a great impact on the child. The relationship is characterized by a strong adoration of the brand and the relationship has significant meaning to the child's development of self-concept and gaining of competence. One of the children stated that he always buys a Select football, because he got one from his father when he was small and therefore likes it and knows that it is of good quality.

I: Can you remember the last time you bought something?

S: I bought a football.

I: What brand was it?

S: Select.

I: Why did you decide on that one?

S: Because I have always had a ball by Select and my dad bought one Select ball when I was really young and therefore I have always from then on bought a Select ball.

Through being bought by his father and being the first love of football brands in his life, the Select brand has earned a strong place in his world of brands. These kinds of relationships can last until adulthood. Therefore it is normal for the marketers to reach children already at an early age and aim at forming these first, crucial relationships with them.

Also a toy brand called Hello Kitty has succeeded in creating long brand relationships. Through printing its brand on countless products, it has remained popular among girls in different age groups. The girls of one group discuss the brand and how it is suitable for also older people.

E: For example, when I threw a pyjama party then my mom had to be bought a pyjama and then she was bought Hello Kitty pyjamas.

I: Did It have to be a Hello Kitty pyjamas?

E: Well no, it just had to be nice.

I: Hello Kitty is nice?

E: Yes, it's cute, it's cute!

V: I have two Hello Kitty pyjamas.

E: I have two Hello Kitty toys. I bought both of them in a Chinese store in Sweden when there is this guy who cannot spell r.

S: Well, like my dad's brother's wife is she like when she goes she's like a flight attendant, so when she sometimes goes to all of these [countries like] Japan and brings me usually Hello Kitty things.

Hello Kitty products are popular among the children, but they are also suitable for their parents, therefore it seems the brand has established a relationship that can last for a long time. The relationship may not be exclusive or intensive, but stable enough to be evoked after childhood. Because the duration of the relationship and the repeated usage, the brand relationship to Hello Kitty could be considered a true love (Ji, 2002). Although the relationship would not be as passionate as to some other brands, it is long lasting and the children are strongly committed to it.

6.2.2 Symbols in forming groups

In their daily life at school, brands were not as important as suspected. Nevertheless, brands often came up in children's speech and children seemed to be forming groups or ruling some children outside of the group, because of differences in brand preferences.

Although not mentioned until late in the interview, Sara was wearing a t-shirt by a big Stardoll-brand, Donna Karan. Apparently the wearing of branded clothes was recognized by the girls, but it was not standard to discuss it openly. Sara did not say anything about her shirt, she only pointed at the logo on it. Nevertheless, Emma discussed her usage of H&M-clothes more openly. Perhaps H&M is a more accepted brand among the girls, because they have better possibilities to attain these products themselves. She mentioned that her socks, top and pants were all from the store and that she liked the store because they had clothes for different ages and she could go shopping there together with her mother. Thus the girls recognized the brands that they were wearing and most possibly also knew the effect wearing clothes with recognizable logos had on their peers.

Popularity in the class can be enhanced by owning cool things, although it is not always easy to admit that a class mate has gotten something that they would themselves like to own and jealousy ensues. The importance of toys and brands is not as important as found previously in studies of less-privileged children (Rodhain, 2006; Roper and Shah, 2007).

I: How does something become popular?

E: Well, because everybody wants to own it. Well, if it's for example so nice. For example if I get this very incredible crown that is golden and everybody is like...

V: And then I want it also. Like one [person] always gets this one thing and then the others want it also.

E: Except it depends a little on the taste.

S: For example like these best friends when they see something lovely on someone else then they are like jealous and they don't feel like talking anything to her, like oh, how lovely that is! Instead they think like yeah that is ok... although for real they think that it is so lovely!

E: Yeah, and then they say, that "I don't really like" although they would actually like it.

In one boys' group there was talk of shoes as the Adidas Superstars were popular among the boys. The boys did say it mattered what brand their shoes had, but nevertheless they knew well who owned the popular Superstar shoes:

A: ... Now I have Superstars that you just slip your feet in, but I never tie them I just slip my feet in.

I: Do others have Superstars also?

A: Yeah, in my class, Emppu has them, Valtteri has had them, Marius and me have them.

Therefore, the brand seemed to have an influence on the social ties of the children and because the boy could mention all the other children in the class that had the same shoes. Although not necessarily being very important, owning the shoes had some meaning when groups in the class were formed. According to Belk (1988) one of the most important ways of expressing group membership is through shared consumption symbols.

As previously found (Ross and Harradine, 2004), brands are not consumed only for their symbolic meanings, but they have to fulfill their promises related to their performance and quality. The boys in one group considered the comfortableness of their skates the most important factor in choosing them, but the way they looked and what brands they had was also of interest.

I: Which is more important, that they look good or that they feel good?

L: That they feel good in my feet.

I: So it doesn't matter what they look like?

L: Well basically no, except if they are these fake blades that many have.

M: Or if they have these bondings.

L: Oh yeah, they are just terrible!

I: What brands are these?

L: For example those Salomons.

I: So Salomons are not that good?

L: Certainly not!

M: Yeah it's a skiing brand.

I: What if your parents told you that you're going to go and by Salomon skates?

L: I would rather lock my door than go there.

M: I would probably go straight away and buy some used CCM skates.

...

I: Do you think it would be embarrassing to go to the practice in Salomon skates?

L: Yeah.

M: They have such awful bondings.

M: We had someone at our hockey school who had those bondings.

L: Yeah, they were so stupid.

I: Did you mention them to him?

L: No, he was Chinese or something.

M: He couldn't speak any Finnish.

I: He was nice anyways?

M: I didn't even talk to him.

The children who had skates of different brand or funny ones with fake blades or bondings were somehow different. There was a boy in class who had problems with the other children, and in the discussion he was suspected to have skates of the different kind. They also knew a boy had come to the practice with weird skates, he was a Chinese boy who could not speak any Finnish and therefore could not easily be part of the group. According to Tajfel (1982) stereotyping and prejudice are important consequences of categorizing people into in-groups and out-groups. As shown before, forming of groups and prejudiced behavior happened also when it came to brands and the symbolic meanings they had. The Chinese boy in the ice hockey practice had different brand of skates that also looked different and at the same time he could not speak Finnish and was different himself. Before learning to speak Finnish and buying skates that were acceptable among the children, he would have little chance in moving into the in-group of the ice hockey team.

6.2.3 Online bonding

Although the online environment cannot be considered a group, in a sense it was an important socialization agent for the children. Shopping online is normally done with other people, most

often with mothers. Brands that are searched online are discussed later in class with friends that have similar interests. Additionally, the social networking sites that some children were members of are naturally social in nature and were helping the group formation also in real life.

Children interact with brands when surfing the brands' websites. Previously it has been found that new media, especially the Internet has become an important part of children's everyday lives. Children today have excellent access to the Internet, which is an increasingly commercialized medium (Schor, 2007). This was also the conclusion of the study in question. The amount of time spent online varied a lot among the children, but all of them had access to the Internet at home, some even with their mobile phones. The children rarely spent time on non-commercial sites and even when sending email, they were surrounded by advertisements, that they most of the times found annoying.

For the girls it felt at first embarrassing to talk about computers. In a way, they still seemed to be thought of as more of a boys' thing. This was also found by Woodfield (2000), who states that although the fact is likely to be changing among children and adolescents, the computer environment has traditionally been seen as 'masculine'. This can make women and girls feel disempowered and excluded, whereas men and boys feel at home online. Nevertheless, when the girls were encouraged, they gladly talked about the games they played or Internet sites they visited. Most of the boys visited gaming sites, where it was possible to play games for free.

The Internet pages children mentioned in the focus groups were all commercial in nature. Stardoll (www.stardoll.com), which is a social networking site for mainly young girls' demands a payment for purchasing branded clothes for the avatars. Miniclip (www.miniclip.com), which was very popular among the children, offers free gaming, but is filled with colourful advertisements that are hardly recognizable from the games on the site. Disney's (www.disney.fi) highly interactive site is of good quality and the main purpose seems to be advertising for Disney Production's movies or Disney Channel, that many of the children had at home. Happytree (www.happytree.com), another gaming site, is not as filled with advertisements, but it is not possible to play a free game without first watching a commercial. Iltasanomat (www.iltasanomat.fi) is a Finnish tabloid, which also offers free gaming with a lot of advertisements on its site. Runescape (www.runescape.com) is an online role-playing game that promotes itself to be free, but various upgrades and virtual products are chargeable. Other sites children visited were mainly for a brand of clothes or other things that interested children. None of the sites was totally free of purchasing encouragement or clear advertisements.

Advergaming sites, sites where children can play games, but the main stress is on marketing, such as that of Disney, were familiar to the children. When asked what they did on the Disney site, they told that they had played games there. Many of the children also had Disney channel at home, the ones who had it at home sometimes stressed that it was not free. Some of the girls were eager to go and play a new game of their favourite program h2o on Disney's site. Additionally, they said they would love to have h2o toys at home to play with if they could find them in stores. This way marketing combines different channels, the children can access their favourite shows through television, DVDs, toys and internet. Commercial Disney is everywhere and the children have sufficient skills and knowledge to find the things they want through different channels.

The commercial nature of children's online sites can also be seen on sites where nothing can be bought in real life. Money is also needed at social networking sites popular with the children, such as Stardoll, Habbohotel or the gaming site Miniklip. Many of the children were members of these sites, but it did not come up in the discussions, how they handled the purchasing of 'play money' on the sites.

Heikki describes Rune:

"I play it. Well, you can buy all kinds of things and you can cultivate maybe... then you can get a pet and hunt and make your own home and then you can beat up other guys and develop... and things like that".

Children are accustomed to sites being commercial and that money is needed for successfully playing the games.

6.2.3.1 Shopping online

The children could normally remember the brands that were searched online. The products varied from clothes to mobile phones and toys such as assembled airplanes. Also Thomson and Laing (2003) found that Internet was children's preferred source of information. In addition, the Internet is ideal for forming brand connections, because it offers an interaction between the child and the brand (Schor, 2007).

Several children mentioned shopping online for clothes with their mothers. In a previous study (Thomson and Laing 2003), it was found that not being able to purchase products locally was the most important reason for ordering things online. This led to being able to own exclusive and often premium priced clothes that their peers would not possess. Buying fashion items only

available for them was clearly the case also in this research. Products that differ from their peers would give them credibility in their peer group at a time when they are constructing their identity. (Thomson and Laing, 2003). The clothes searched on the Internet were normally more expensive branded clothes that their mothers were “fans” of. Products purchased online were NY caps or Gap clothes that could not be bought in Finland. Thomson and Laing (2003) also found that children many times initiated online purchases due to advertisements they had seen offline for example in magazines. In this research it was found that the main influence of buying things online was not advertisements, but the influence came from the parents or from the children’s friends that they had seen wearing particular brands bought either online or abroad. Lauri describes online shopping with her mother:

I: Have you seen the products you see advertisements of online in the stores?

L: Yeah, many times.

R: Well, no...

I: What for example?

L: Well bread

R: Bread!

L: Well I have seen t-shirts at least. When I’ve seen those on my mom’s computer.

I: What kind are they?

L: Well they have these green ones and all sorts.

I: Did you buy them then?

L: No.

I: Would you have wanted to?

L: No, they were terrible.

I: Were they of some particular brand?

L: I can’t remember if they were the ones that have... no wait I’ll think, it was that... Hilfiger.

Online shopping was almost never done alone and only one boy mentioned that his friend had bought things online with his own money. This is because online shopping almost always requires a credit card, which limits the possibility of children under the age of 18 to buy anything. Therefore parents or older siblings need to purchase the products for their children. Thomson and Laing (2003) found that most children taking part of their study expressed frustration at their inability to use credit cards for purchasing online themselves and having to persuade their parents to make a purchase online.

Other sites that children visited were sites of their favorite brands, Nokia for mobile phones or Ferrari for cars.

I: Do you go online?

...

R: I go and see all sorts of things that I can buy there.

I: What for example?

R: Everything like mobile phones and that sorts.

I: Can you buy them online then or in a store?

R: Well, you can buy them online.

I: What brand are they then?

R: Nokia.

Thus, the brands that were searched online were not only those that children would themselves buy. They were merely looking at products that they someday wished to own, e.g. cars. This way brands' Internet sites can be seen as entertainment and information sources for the children. For the products they could buy, such as phones, they would probably purchase with their parents either on- or offline.

It was generally well understood, that online some things were free, and others not online. The children also recognized that they needed to be careful not to wander to the sites that were not free and were actually selling something.

Advertising online was considered annoying and if the children had the choice, internet would be advertising free. Advertisements were everywhere and they were unreliable.

I: Are there many ads online?

R: Well yeah...

E: Yes, tons of them.

I: Where have you seen them most?

E: At all these gaming sites.

What kind are they?

R: Kind of...

E: They are like buy buy buy!

R: Yeah, that kind of silly stuff.

E: Just like, buy this new game, you get something on top and then then it says something on a font this small.

I: Are they kind of cheating?

R: Yeah.

E: Yeah, just like that.

One boy talked reluctantly about his encountering with advertisements:

I: Have you ever seen advertisements online?

L: Yeah, maybe, no...

I: What kind?

L: None, I haven't gone to any news sites.

I: News sites have advertisements?

L: Yeah, I guess.

6.2.3.2 Superstars or not – symbols online at Stardoll.com

The girls are great fans of the online social network site Stardoll (www.stardoll.com) that has almost 32 million members worldwide at the moment. In a way, stardoll.com is a site where young girls are able to live their dream lives as teenagers by creating their own avatars and shopping for them at online shopping malls. Stardolls can be bought clothes, makeup, jewelry, furniture and all the other things girls would themselves wish to own. Shopping is done by buying Stardollars with credit cards or mobile phones. The site is social in nature and members can visit and chat with each other online. All of the three girls in one group were avid users of Stardoll site and for example Emma had been a member for 1,5 years already. The Stardoll environment is highly commercial, the brands sold on the virtual shopping mall are the same brands as you can buy in a real store. The front page of the network site shows several items on sale and for example a daily shopping tip.

Brand recognition in Stardoll-environment was high among the girls. Of the 38 or so brands sold on the Stardoll mall the girls could easily name almost half. They could also divide the brands into clothing, makeup or hair producers and mention several real-life celebrities who had their own shops at the shopping mall.

The girls also understood that brands were different and that they had different meanings. Emma says that although it is more important that the clothes looked good, she mainly bought clothes with brands that she liked. One of her favorites was a brand called Evil Panda.

When asked, girls wished they could own the same brands they bought online to their dolls in real life. They also knew this was possible, but to their knowledge more easily done in the USA. For example one of the super brands, Donna Karan, had brochures of real clothes in their store. It has been found in previous studies that exposure at an early age to and early defining experiences with brands will last long and affect later consumer behavior (Braun-LaTour et al., 2007). Therefore it can be suspected that the girls will buy or at least remember the brands later when they start to make their own purchase decisions.

There is a strict hierarchy on the Stardoll site that seems to be based on a one's ability to purchase things for her doll. According to Sara, dolls are divided into "superstars and non-superstars, and superstars get some things more than the non-superstars". Being a superstar costs about six euros a month and superstars are able to buy clothes that are not available to the other users. Therefore normally the superstars have more expensive branded clothes on them than others.

Venla: "Usually these superstars, all of them have branded clothes".

The hierarchy between the superstars and non-superstars reveals that the girls were highly aware of the possibilities being a superstar offers. They also seemed to realize that branded clothes were most often seen on the superstars who could be considered better than dolls wearing clothes available to everyone. Thus, there was a clear divide between two different groups: the superstars and the non-superstars. If the children wanted to move from the less-respected group to the other, they would need to buy the membership. Therefore, moving from one social group to the other was based on the possibility to pay for it. Further, this possibility depends on the parents' willingness to invest in their children's dolls.

It is possible also to get one's own picture appear on the first site. This was thought to be very respected. When one is superstar enough or a celebrity (who normally sells their clothes or jewelry) it is possible to have one's own Stardoll room that the other members then can visit. For the girls it is essentially important what their Stardolls look like. They seem to live their dream adolescences that are waiting for them now in the online environment and somehow practicing for what is to come.

The girls had sometimes troubles understanding the difference between Stardoll-money and real money.

Sara: "In real life, now for example something in Stardoll, a dress costs like ten euros, that is really fancy, then in real life it is really expensive. So in real life [the money spent] is little, but in Stardoll it is actually really expensive."

When joining Stardoll one gets 56 Euros for initial things for the Stardoll, later on money needs to be uploaded. Later in the discussion, Venla mentions a bag which brand she has been struggling to remember the whole time.

Venla: "So, for example the bag. I can't remember its brand, but it's something.. There are green and purple of them and they have some strings attached to them. I do not understand why they are so expensive."

Later she wonders where the money people buy the things with even goes. It is clear that even though the clothes had expensive brands on them, they would not be acceptable for the girls to wear if they did not look good or cute. Normally in the discussion, looking good is seen more important than brands as such.

6.2.3.3 Friends in the virtual worlds

Nairn et al. (2008) state that when it comes to children, the concept of brand does not only encompass only products or services, but can include also "branded celebrities", for example sports stars, actors or pop stars. The girls who were members of the Stardoll site, felt they were forming relationships with the celebrity brands that had shops or rooms on the site:

E: Some of the celebrities have like their own rooms and then they are like very popular. And not like someone like Kate Winslet or... Well she is kind of popular but not in Stardoll.

S: Yeah, it is not like real, because she would never have the time. For example like that Nicole from the Pussycat Dolls, she has her own.

E: And those who have rooms, you can ask them to be your friends.

S: Yes, I have that Nicole!

I: Can you buy clothes from those celebrities who are at Stardoll?

V: Yes, they have, for example the Pussycat Dolls they have their own store there.

S: And, they kind of really are there, because that Nicole has in real life some seven months ago been there.

The girls had the feeling that they were close to the celebrities and contrary to previous culture of branded celebrities they could reach them and "be friends with them". Celebrities who spent time in their favourite online environment were more interesting and important to them than the

ones who did not have time for Stardoll. At the same time as the girls could be friends with these celebrities, they could also buy clothes designed by them. Therefore the aim of the pop stars to be part of the online environment was not only to form contacts with their current or future fans, but also to profit from them purchasing celebrity branded clothes for their dolls. Famous pop stars such as Faith Hill, Avril Lavigne, Darin or the model Heidi Klum have their own shops on the site. As Emma tells, there is a difference between fan products and real things designed by the celebrities:

E: ... And Avril Lavigne has one of her own [store] that she has been designing them, they are not like any fan clothes. Yeah, she has like designed them herself, there are no Avril Lavigne fan signs or anything else. I have a shirt, pants and a skirt of those.

Celebrity brand relationships are difficult to put into a category of brand relationships, because the children themselves consider the celebrities more as friends than as brands. In the world of celebrities things are changing rapidly. Additionally, the children did not seem to have exclusive, strong relationships with any of the celebrity brands. Therefore their relationships could be considered fad lifestyle brand relationships. The girls collect different celebrity brands as friends around their avatars in Stardoll. They do this for example in order to gain credibility in the social network site. On Fournier's scale these relationships could be considered casual friends or buddies, these brand friendships are low in intimacy, and they are characterized by infrequent engagement and include few expectations for reciprocity or reward. (Fournier, 1998.)

6.3 Their symbols

Brand symbolism and relationships do not form only based on the groups children belong to, they are also influenced by groups they wish to belong to and groups they no longer felt attached to, i.e. older and younger children. These out-groups are discussed in this chapter.

6.3.1 Older children wearing brands

When asked about what kinds of people wear branded clothes, the girls in one group quickly named these people as 'divas'. According to the girls, a diva is someone who finds it very important not to shop in inexpensive stores and is someone who is 'not even pretty'. The divas' parents spoil them and they can be seen in the movies and when shopping in Espoo, a Finnish city that is generally regarded as a wealthy area. Divas are approximately 15 or 16 years old.

They do not want to wear clothes that are not branded, because they find them crumbled. It is interesting, that this was the exactly same age that the girls had previously estimated to be the age of Bratz dolls in real life. Bratz dolls represented fashion and teenage life for the girls.

In previous research, also Rodhain (2006) found that brands are often associated with older children. She sees brands as symbols for identification to an age group. Branded clothes are often worn by older children and for the children “to be respected as a future teenager, it is necessary to wear more expensive branded clothes” (Rodhain, 2006).

Also, when a friend of a diva does not have branded clothes they mention it to them in a mean manner. Emma recognized these symptoms in her older sister, who she mentioned several times during the group discussion.

Emma: “My older sister a little bit of a diva. She is 11 but will turn 12 next year. She is two years older than me. She always has to do her makeup, although my dad always tells her not to. I sometimes tell on her, that’s fun.”

Emma distinguished herself from her older sister and found her interests somewhat peculiar. However, her doing makeup and being interested in fashion is at the same time interesting to Emma and also her friends, who had suffered from their curiosity when Emma’s sister had shouted at them to go away from their room when they dared to take a peek there.

Boys in one group found the equivalent for branded divas in their school. They are three to four years older boys who the boys do not talk to, but they nevertheless seem to be conscious of their doings during the breaks at school. Although not as elaborately, the boys talked about the older children in a similar way that girls did.

I: What kinds of brands do older people like?

E: Puma.

M: And for example Quicksilver.

I: Why do they like Puma?

E: Because it makes these hip hopper hoodies.

M: Hip hopper hoodies like this one.

...

I: What else do they like?

R: New York Knicks caps.

E: I have one just like it.

I: What do they do on their free time?

R: They play computer games and then they go with girls...

E: They date.

R: Yeah.

E: The boys in our school who are on the 5th and 6th grade go almost every recess... they are with girls. Right?

R: Yeah, at least the ones on the 6th grade.

E: Yeah, the 6th graders are more hiphop than the 5th graders.

The boys talked about the older boys more cautiously than the girls. However, they had noticed similar characteristics as the girls. The older boys were showing their personality through consumption symbols such as hiphop hoodies that the children in the group were not yet interested in. The children realized the differences between clothing brands such as Adidas that they wore themselves and Quicksilver or Puma that were preferred by the older boys. These brands were associated with the older children's lifestyle of hanging out with girls at the recess. Perhaps the boys realized that when they would be ready to wear the same clothes the older children wore, it would also mean that they would be ready to move to the interests that they had.

The boys in one group were discussing the popularity of video game consoles. The way they talk about older children and the popularity of the consoles and their own preferences, the transition from childhood onto the so-called tweenage years can be seen.

A: The most of all I like to play Wii.

I: When did Wii become popular?

A: Well, it might be so now that Wii is not that popular anymore like it used to be, because PlayStation came now afterwards and all the teenagers are starting to play it now. Although Wii is a lot better when you ask people from my class.

I: Why do teenagers find PlayStation better?

A: Because it has these war games and is cordless and they can go as far as five meters away and they don't have to be close [to the console].

I: Do they play Wii at all?

A: No

R: Some of them do.

A: They will play some war games.

J: Yeah, but nothing like...

A: Like Wii Mario Galaxy.

I: Do you think you will also like PlayStation more when you grow older?

R: I don't know, there'll probably be some new stuff then.

A: I maybe already now like PlayStation 2 more than Wii.

R: I think the same, like PlayStation 2. It has like everything.

The boys first tell told they liked Wii more, but after discussing the popularity of PlayStation 2 among the older children they finally decided that they might also prefer PlayStation. In another group, the boys told they were not at all interested in Nintendo anymore and that they had left it to their little brothers.

The discussion above describes the contradiction of their feelings. On the one hand, the children feel that they are still being younger children, liking children's things. On the other hand, they find that they are moving (or that they should be moving) towards the life of that the teenagers they know are living. In addition, the boys seem to take as self-evident that the older children were those who decided what was popular or not. They somehow felt inferior to the older children, who in the hierarchy of the school as the oldest were now on top.

Boys in one group had strong opinions about people who wear brands:

I: Do some people think that brands are important?

E: Yeah.

A: Probably yes.

I: What are these people like?

E: Well those kind of...

R: I would say older people.

A: Frankly, they are girls.

I: A bit older?

A: Yes, older girls

The children mentioned often their older siblings, who were considered to belong to the categories of either divas or hiphop hoodie wearers. The ones that had older sisters or brothers seemed to be somewhat more interested in brands in general. This could happen through imitation of their siblings. Previous research has also found the importance of older siblings on brand preferences (Elliott and Leonard, 2004; Grant and Stephen, 2005). According to Grant and Stephen (2005) children may be jealous of older siblings' branded things and ask for the same things in order to emulate their siblings.

Overall, the older children are not liked, yet admired. Although not liking them, the children wish someday to be like them, as they are respected and admired. At the same time, the world of the teenagers is still very far away and somehow also frightening to them.

Sara: "For example, some teenagers are quite weird. Once when it was my birthday I was eating with my mom in McDonalds and in the bathroom there were some teenagers doing makeup and taking pictures in the bathroom."

The children are in the phase of admiring the brand wearers but do not yet feel that should be necessarily wearing the brands themselves. They know what awaits them but they still wish to stay in their world of children and not teenagers.

Children were also forming relationships to brands that they did not possess, but wished to own later. Some of them were dreaming of cars they would own when they grew up. Also, they knew well the technical features of some mobile phones they did not yet possess and were very determined that the only possible brand to own was Nokia. Although Ji (2002) and Kates and Robinson (2005) would not consider these brand relationships because of their lack of interaction with the brand, the children had strong connections to the brands. Many times these relationships were strongly affected by their parents' brand relationships.

I: What is a popular mobile phone at the moment?

L: Well, I would like...

R: Express Music.

L: Yeah I... do you know the newest model, it's got Internet connection and then it has this camera, so that you can see your own picture.

R: Yeah, and it has all these...

L: It's got this mp3-player, you can put a memory stick and then you can like put pictures in it.

R: And then you can put incredibly many songs on it.

L: And then it has like two cameras in the newest model and then it has one like three... like four megapixel camera in the newest one I think.

I: Who's the producer?

Nokia.

Are there any other good producers?

L: Well no, no.

Nokia was the children's favourite in mobile phones because it was Finnish and they found the phones to be of good quality.

6.3.2 The brands of younger children

A difference to between the children interviewed and younger children was also noticeable. The children felt they needed to distinguish themselves from their younger peers, or sometimes younger sisters or brothers. The girls in one group said that they had played with Barbies earlier, but now they were only for their little sisters. Although Barbies were not liked, the feelings were not as hostile as met by Nairn et al. (2008). Also the boys had noticed that the Nintendo game console that they no longer used was now popular among their younger siblings. Acuff (1997) found that children find it important to distinguish themselves from younger children and their toys. Some childish concepts may be pushed away aggressively in order to make way for the new toys associated with their age or children older than them. In a way, the children were using the possibility to move from one age group to another.

Some children found that they were somehow guiding the younger children toward their own world and they felt somehow responsible for them. For example the girls found that Barbies were for the younger girls and they themselves were more into Bratz. Their younger sisters, that were only two years old were imitating their older sister and also playing with Bratz. Additionally, Olivia was saving her Barbies because they were popular among her younger friends.

Olivia: Well I have terribly many [Barbies], well in our yard there lives a girl from our class and a girl who is a little older and we have so many like very smaller friends in our circle... like they like to play with Barbies and that is why I save them, when they come to our house to play with them.

This way Olivia would have been ready to leave Barbies to the past, she agreed to still spend time with them because of her younger friends. In a way this also gave her an excuse to not to have to move to the world of the olders, the younger children kept her safe in the world of the Barbies.

When asked about non-branded floor ball sticks, one boy mentioned that his little brother had one without a brand. For the younger children it was not as important to have brands, because they did not understand the meaning of them. In this way it was also recognizable that brands were again associated with older children's lives and that younger children were not as interested in brands.

The children, who had younger siblings that they played with regularly, were less interested in brands than those who had older siblings and who played more with children of their same age.

Especially the girls who had younger brothers were not interested in brands or consumption in general at all, they were more interested in running around outside with their friends and playing games. These children often had no Disney Channel at home unlike many others and in general they tended to watch TV less than some other children. It could be thought that when they finally started to be interested in brands, their little sisters and brothers will follow them along. Therefore on the one hand, older siblings lead their younger ones to the world of brands, and on the other hand younger siblings postpone the transition from their older siblings to the world of the pre-teens.

The children interviewed were themselves midway going from brand-free world to that of brand richness. They could distinguish themselves from the younger children, but also felt that they had not reached the level of brand importance that their older peers had.

Also brand relationships were forgotten. The girls of one group had a strong relationship with Bratz-dolls. These brand relationships had lasted for a while already and seemed to be starting to fade. When it comes to Bratz dolls, it is the quantity that counts. All of the girls remembered how many Bratz they had at home and the amount varied from “not too many” to over fifty dolls. Their relationship to the brand was strengthened by Bratz movies which all of the girls owned and watched. The relationships were characterized by strong marketing efforts by the company producing new dolls and other products around them. Although the dolls were popular, it could be noticed that they were slowly losing their glamour:

V: It is kind of annoying, when you take their shoes off, it looks like they have these stump feet.

The relationship to Bratz had been strong and long-lasting, but as the girls were getting older the relationship was slowly fading as new, more important things came along. Naturally, it happens to all the toys that children have, as children get older their toys get replaced by new ones. Therefore for brands such as Bratz it may not be possible to form long relationships with children beyond some years. Their aim it is to form the relationships as early as possible in order to profit from them longer. Emma tells that her 2-year-old younger sisters are already interested in their older sister’s former favourite toys and also that her older sister aged 11 is already moving away from Bratz, only using them to “do hairdos for them”.

There has been a strong passion for the Bratz dolls, although they are not as important anymore for the girls as they might have been a year before. Marketing efforts of Bratz are strong and they are characterized by targeting the children through multiple channels. These relationships

that fade away slowly, can be characterized as phase relationships by Robinson and Kates (2005). They are defined by long-term commitment and high passion for the brands. However, they do not last forever.

According to Acuff (1997) the computer and video games have gained great success among children, especially among boys. Also during the focus groups of this research, there was much talk about favorite video game consoles and games. The boys' relationships to their gaming consoles were similar to the relationship to Bratz, although they could simultaneously have relationships to different gaming brands. The industry is producing new versions of old consoles on a rapid speed. The popularity of a console can change quickly, when they are replaced by new technology. Nevertheless, although not being loyal to one brand only, the children were ready to defend the console they had at home at that moment against other consoles. For example, among the children there is a big difference between owning a PlayStation 1, 2 or 3. Nobody owned PlayStation 1 anymore, but there was discussion about the benefits and disadvantages of the other two. Although the children found the console they owned the best, they were not stuck to them. They realized that the rate of the development of new products was fast and soon the consoles they owned would be dated and they would need to ask their parents for new, perhaps completely different ones.

6.3.3 No symbols for me, please

It can be seen that brand relationships and preferences are forming, and that brands are worn in order to say something about the values of the children or their parents. Nevertheless, for some children clothing brands do not yet play any role and they are nonchalant about the kind of clothes they wear. They are not included in the groups that are formed around certain consumption patterns (Belk, 1988). Nevertheless, through ignoring brands and fashion, they are still bringing forth and explaining to their environment something about themselves and their personality. Here a girl that some others had portrayed as someone who would like to be a boy describes the way she dresses:

A: Well I have it so as my mom always says that for my cousins it is so that sometime they have to have everything pink and some other week they always have to have a skirt and like that. So with me it is terribly easy to dress me because for me it is basically the same what I wear. And for me and my brother it is very good because we get my friend's her mother gives us lots of her old clothes when they become too small for them.

So when rebelling against the way many other girls in her class were dressing she was showing her individuality and values by disregarding the brands and girly clothes they preferred. She was distinguishing herself from the group of girls who unlike her were very interested in fashion and clothing. In the same way that the other girls see her as different, she sees them as different from herself and does not consider herself belonging to the same group or category. The others considered the girl as someone who would want to be a boy. Indeed, perhaps the category that she wished to belong to was a group of boys that were her friends.

Also some boys said that they had no interest in the brands that for example their sports equipment had. However they knew well which were the 'best' and the most popular brands and knew what made a brand different from the others.

7. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The main research question asks about the role of brands in the construction of children's identities. In this research it was found that the children were using brands as meaningful symbols in their construction of identity. Brands were most important when it came to social meanings and forming of in-groups and admiration of out-groups. Although often implicitly, the children understood that people convey messages of themselves and of the groups they belong to through consumption symbols such as brands.

Overall, it can be said that the children were neither a coherent group interested in brands and consumption or nor a group that had no interest in these. Some children had more materialistic values than others. There was variability which based on the data comes from the background of the children.

The three strongest influences for being interested in brands already at this point in their lives are the values of children, older siblings and the consumption of mass media, in particular the internet. The children were forming groups, but the brands were not the distinct factor in these relationships, rather they formed around interests such as sports, games or fashion.

The next chapters discuss the following three research questions.

7.1 Individual behaviour

The second more focused research question was concerned with the role of brands in private identity construction. Personal identity construction at this point seems to be happening through different symbols than brands. More important to the children are what sports they play, what TV shows they watch and how they play and spend their free time at home with their families. The most important things for the children's selves were not branded. Nevertheless, as McCracken (1988) has pointed out, consumer system supplies individuals with the cultural materials to realize who they are.

Although the children lived in a financially affluent area, consumption and brands were not as important to them as traditional values that are normally associated with childhood. The stable income of the families in the area and the safe environment they lived in did not make it

necessary for the children to accentuate their families' wealth, as it could be suspected that most of the families had a possibility to purchase expensive clothes, toys, sports equipment or mobile phones.

The most important products or possessions for the children were not of any particular brand. They were beloved things that the children had received from their parents or other important people in their lives and they had kept these things for several years, or if they had gotten lost or thrown away, they were missed. These things, as Belk (1988) states, could be considered as parts of children's selves. These possessions were more important to the children than any new, popular branded toys or cool expensive clothes. It can be concluded that these things were a part of their private self-identity and their loss was always a sad incident in their lives. However, as the self is constantly in change as children grow up these possessions will be replaced by new ones. The beloved toys or shoes may not be entirely forgotten, but they will move to the background as memories rather than staying in their core selves for longer times.

It was found that in the constructing of private identity, the children seemed to place more importance to other things than the symbols that brands carry, although the influence of brands cannot be totally disregarded. The products that children considered most important for example received from people that they loved.

7.2 In-group influence

The third research question discussed the role of brands in the formation of in-groups in the children's lives. This research found no evidence of strong forming of groups around any particular brands or severe stereotyping and discrimination of others based on owning of particular brands. However, the children who were good friends with each other tended to like a certain group of brands, for example one group of girls liked Bratz, Stardoll and a television show H2O, but the other group was not interested in these things at all. It emphasizes the fact that children at this age like to form groups and like to do things that are popular among their peers as well. The popularity of a product or a brand spreads quickly inside the inner circle of friends but does not necessarily reach the other groups.

Among the boys there were contradictions about the way sport equipment brands were talked about. On one hand, they were quick to say that the brand made no difference. On the other hand, they strongly disliked some brands and were definite that they would not want to own those brands. Some discrimination based on brands could be seen in the discussions of the

children. A Chinese boy who did not fit in because he could not speak Finnish and owned a funny looking brand of skates at the ice hockey practice was left out. Additionally, a boy who was an outcast in the class was suspected of having skates of the similar brand. Although the admiration for the brands was not always openly discussed, some brands were seen as inferior and owning these brands could lead to being left out of the group. Nevertheless, the wrong brand alone was not a sufficient reason for being left out, but rather the brands were extensions of the child's role as an outsider. The same was seen in the girls' discussion about a girl they thought would like to be a boy. Her preceding quality was being a tomboy and at the same time she was not into certain brands or products that were popular among the other girls.

Although the parents influenced which brands of clothing the children were bought, the children preferred the brands that were popular among their friends in their sports teams. Many times there were few brands that were found to be good and the others were considered not eligible.

There were differences in the values of children and these differences seemed to be reflecting the ideas and values of the parents. Some children were more aware of brands than others and the voice of their parents could be heard implicitly or sometimes explicitly. Some children showed strong enthusiasm when it came to certain clothing (girls) or electronic equipment (boys) brands and were very sure of the brands that they would and would not buy. On the other hand, some children were still living the childhood that many hope their children to be living. That is a childhood of friends, learning, reading and playing outside by using own imagination.

The general atmosphere in the discussions was that brands and consumption were not idealized, but the truth at home with some of the children was most likely different. These subjects would not probably rise to the conversation in the daily dealings with their peers, but when they had the opportunity to speak about brands and consumption, they openly discussed their preferences. Many times one child would voice their opinion about the importance of brands, but withdraw when the other children did not share his opinion.

Brand preferences were clearly forming based on the likes of the parents. It can be said that some children had already formed brand relationships to products that their parents liked. It can be suspected that these preferences and relationships will also have an effect in the future. When the connection from childhood is strong enough they will last into adulthood. One of the strongest preferences was a girl's affection to the clothing brand Gap. The influence of her mother whom the girl admired was seen in her refusal to appreciate any other clothes than those produced by Gap. Otherwise, instances of true loyalty to a brand were rare and came up in the

discussion only regarding mobile phones or air planes that were favoured because they were domestically owned companies.

The children's parents were not only an influence on the children's brand preferences, but they were at the same time restricting the brands and products the children could purchase. It cannot be taken for granted that children will automatically prefer for example clothing brands that their parents buy them, but at this time in their lives they have no other possibility than to wear what their parents wish them to. The children would for example feel more comfortable wearing sporting brands, but in their mothers' opinion clothes by Benetton are "smarter" and therefore preferable. This means that when it comes to groups, children are still more a part of the family than a group of friends at school or in this case, the group of athletes who wear athletic clothes at school.

Without a doubt, childhood is getting shorter. The children participating in the study were on their way of entering youth, or at least their preteen years. The change was taking place, but was not taking hold of the children at the same time. The most influential factor of the rate of the change was the family, including the parents and siblings. Older siblings are easily imitated by children as they are showing a way to the world youth. At the same time, younger siblings seem to be slowing the pace of moving into the preteens, as the children who had younger brothers or sisters seemed to be more interested in playing games and were less interested in watching TV, computers and consumption.

Naturally, the use of mass media such as television and Internet enhances the children's interest in consumption. The media is full of advertisements and the television shows and Internet sites are more often than not ways of promoting commercial products. For the girls the television programs they watched and the toys they played with were also promoting a way of life full of consumption. The Bratz and H2O portrait girls as being interested in fashion, boys and make up and the girls idolize these characters. They are older than the girls themselves and therefore suitable for being their role models. The girls wished to be like them, own the things they had and be admired by the boys like they were.

As found in previous research (Nairn et al., 2008) children considered celebrities as brands. What is an even newer phenomenon is that through shared online environments, celebrities can be also considered friends. The girls who were members of Stardoll.com had pop stars as friends and they considered this a privilege. The authenticity of these relationships can be naturally questioned. Celebrities are members of the networking site, because the sites are selling virtual

clothing branded with their names. The more “friendships” and admirers they create on the site, the more enthusiastic girls they find who are willing to purchase these clothes. The commercial nature of the relationships was not understood by the girls taking part in the discussions.

The children who were interested in consumption and brands were closer friends with children who were also interested in these matters. On the other hand, the children who liked to read and play outside had similar friends. This is where the older siblings and mass media have the strongest effect. It was common that a child has seen something interesting on television or the Internet, or heard older sibling talk about it and further awoken an interest, which then spreads at school through groups of friends and groups of children admiring them and being interested in similar things. In the meanwhile, the other children not as interested in these things and who are not as good friends with the children interested in brands have kept on with their normal free time activities. The initiation comes from a child who has older siblings, who uses media a lot or whose family in general values consumption and emphasizes it in its behavior.

Internet has established a position in the children’s lives. However, like among brands, there were differences between the amount of time children were spending online and what they were doing when online. The girls who used the Stardoll website seemed to be the most enthusiastic users and this was also the site where the children could most easily develop their brand symbolism skills. The environment of Stardoll is highly focused on appearance, clothing, shopping and celebrities. It can be questioned, if a site that aims at profiting through the virtual consumption of children is ethical and whether children aged eight or nine should be allowed to join, even if parents’ approval is needed before registering.

There was evidence of children constructing their identities through brands and their relation to their peers. Their peers’ role played a significant role in the decisions that children made about which brands they felt or did not feel favorable or whether they were interested in brands at all. When constructing their social identities children rely on feedback they receive from their outside environment, their parents and their peers. Also the children’s siblings played an important role.

7.3 Out-group influence

The fourth research question was concerned with the importance of out-groups on children’s construction of identity. Children interviewed were in the process of moving from their childhood to their preteens. This could be seen in the way they were leaving things from their

childhood years behind. The girls were keen to point out that certain toys, such as Barbies were for the younger children and they were more into Bratz. It was also found that the children thought that sports equipment without any brands was more suitable for younger children than themselves.

At the same time the children were distinguishing themselves from the younger children, they also made a difference to the older ones aged 15 to 16 years old. They had peculiar ways (doing make-up, going on dates, taking pictures) that the children were wary of. They also wore different brands than themselves. The girls pointed out that the older girls were spoiled and would not wear clothes bought from less expensive stores. The boys on the other hand had marked that the sport clothing brands the older boys wore were different from the ones they wore themselves. It was not yet possible for them to move on to this world. Further, they did not wish to do this, because moving to the world of older children would also mean moving to the world of dating and girls.

Some children wished to make a strong difference between themselves and the world of older consuming children. They wanted to play and were happy without too much media such as television and Internet. They also did not feel the need to buy expensive or fashionable clothes, but agreed to wear the clothes their parents (usually mothers) bought them. This is the way most of our generation remember what it was to be like when we were children. The things of adolescence came along many years later. Nevertheless, his way of living one's childhood is becoming more uncommon. The media is full of young children dressing as they were adults and at least for the girls they are what they wish to be.

In addition to in-groups, also out-groups had an influence on the children's understanding and use of brand and consumption symbolism. Out-groups were either admired or they were seen as something the children needed to distinct themselves from. Out-groups were forming mainly on the basis of age, there was no forming of strong out-groups in their own age group or inside the class. Naturally, not all the children could be good friends with each other, but there was no evidence of strong discrimination or forming of out-groups based on certain high-end brands alone. The groups on this specific age level were mainly forming around interests such as fashion, game consoles or sports.

8. CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Theoretical and managerial Implications

8.1.1 Theoretical implications

This thesis has to an extent continued the research on children and brand symbolism and brand relationships suggested by Nairn et al. (2008). The research has added to the understanding of children and their relationships to brands and their use of brand symbolism. More precisely, it enhances the knowledge of brands and children in higher economic groups and the way brands are discussed in social situations in the environment of school class. The study has focused on children aged eight and nine who visit the second grade of Finnish elementary school in Espoo, Finland. Previously there has been a lack of children's behavior in online environment, especially when it comes to sites of commercial nature. This thesis has shed light on those subjects as well.

8.1.2 Managerial implications

Although the research has not been done from the marketer's point of view, it has some implications for the marketing of children's products and services. Marketers should realize that children use brands and brands are important especially in social settings. However, admiration of brands is not universal, and some children are more interested in them than others.

Children's interests develop in phases. They move from one interest to another faster than before and leave toys from earlier childhood quickly behind. They are also accustomed to fast technological developments, they expect new versions of game consoles or Bratz dolls to be released often. Marketers cannot expect an interest to a brand designed children in mind to last for a long period of time.

Children at this age emulate their older siblings and friends. They admire them, although they are not necessarily ready to be like them. When moving into their preteens, they already have an understanding about the way they are supposed to dress and how to spend their free time.

It should not be forgotten however that parents at this stage still have strong control over the brand preferences and consumption possibilities of children. This should be taken into consideration by designing ethically sustainable products and services for children.

8.2 Suggestions for further research

The research on children and consumption and brand symbolism has many ways to follow.

One of the most important future research interests is children's use of Internet. Some children are using Internet daily, others more rarely. In any case, most of the Internet sites created for children are commercial in nature. The influence of these sites to consumption behavior and consumption symbolism should be studied further. Also children's online communities and advergames sites offer possibilities for future research.

This research has focused mainly on the social meanings of brands to children. By using individual interviews, more understanding could be gained of the personal meanings of brands that children may have been reluctant to share in a focus group situation with their friends.

There are naturally differences between genders when it comes to consumption symbolism. This could be studied further. Additionally, it might be interesting to do comparative study between different age groups to find out how the symbolism develops as children get older. Presumably, the findings will become even more interesting as children grow older. Research could be conducted also in different income groups and in different parts of Finland.

Brand relationships and the influence of early relationships to those that are developed later in one's life is also an interesting area of research.

REFERENCES

- Aaker, Jennifer and Fournier, Susan, 1995. A brand as a character, a partner and a person: Three perspectives on the question of brand personality. *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 22(1).
- Abrams, D. and Hogg, M.A., 1990. "An introduction to the social identity approach" in Abrams, D. and Hogg, M.A. (Eds.), *Social Identity Theory: Constructive and Critical Advances*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York.
- Achenreiner, Gwen Bachmann and John, Deborah Roedder, 2003. The Meaning of Brand Names to Children: A Developmental Investigation. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Vol. 13(3).
- Acuff, Dan S., 1997. *What kids buy and why*. The Free Press.
- Alasuutari, Pertti, 1995. *Researching Culture: Qualitative Method and Cultural Studies*. Sage Publications Ltd.
- Aledin, Samil, 2009. Teenagers' brand relationships in daily life – a qualitative study of brand meanings and their motivational ground among teenagers in Helsinki and London metropolitan areas. Doctoral thesis. Turku School of Economics.
- Angrisani, C., 2002, The tween scene: highlighting demographic appeal. *Brandmarketing*, September
- Arnould, Eric J. and Thompson, Craig J., 2005. Consumer Culture Theory (CTT): Twenty Years of Research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 31(4).
- Autio, Minna, 2006. *Kuluttajuuden rakentuminen nuorten kertomuksissa*. Doctoral thesis. University of Helsinki.
- Banerjee, Robin and Dittmar, Helga, 2008. "What is beautiful and who is "cool"? Consumer culture and socialization", in Dittmar, Helga (Ed.), *Consumer culture, identity and well-being. The search for the 'Good life' and the 'Body perfect'*. Psychology Press.
- Belk, Russel W., 1988. Possessions and the extended self. *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 15(2).

Belk, Russel W., Bahn, Kenneth D. and Mayer, Robert N., 1982. Developmental Recognition of Consumption Symbolism. *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 9(1).

Belk, Russel, Mayer, Robert and Driscoll, Amy, 1984. Children's Recognition of Consumption Symbolism in Children's Products. *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 10(4).

Bengtsson, Anders, 2003. Towards a Critique of Brand Relationships. *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 30(1).

Bourdieu, P., 1984. *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. London: Routledge.

Braun La-Tour, Kathryn A., La-Tour, Michael S. and Zinkhan, George M., 2007. Using Childhood Memories to Gain Insight into Brand Meaning. *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 71(2).

Caruana, S. and Vassallo, R., 2003. Children's perception of their influence over purchases: the role of parental communication patterns. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, Vol. 20(1).

Campbell, Colin, 2004. I shop therefore I know that I am: The metaphysical basis of modern consumerism. In Ekström, Karin M. and Brembeck, Helene (Eds.) *Elusive Consumption*. Berg.

Cook, Daniel Thomas, 2004. Beyond either/or. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, Vol. 4(2).

Cook, Daniel Thomas, 2007. The disempowering empowerment of children's consumer "choice". *Cultural discourses of the child consumer in North America*. *Society and Business Review*, Vol. 2(1).

Dittmar, H., 1992. *The Social Psychology of Material Possessions: To Have is To Be*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Dittmar, Helga, 2008. *Consumer culture, identity and well-being: the search for the 'good life' and the 'body perfect'*. Psychology Press.

Dotson, Michael J. and Hyatt, Eva M., 2000. A comparison of parents' and children's knowledge of brands and advertising slogans in the United States: implications for consumer socialization. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, Vol. 6(4).

- Duff, Rosemary, 1999. Children's drinks – what children really think. *Nutrition & Food Science*, Vol. 99(3).
- Elliott, R., 1994 Exploring the symbolic meaning of brands. *British Journal of Management*, Vol. 5(2).
- Elliott, R., 1997. Existential consumption and irrational desire. *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 34(4).
- Elliott, R., 2004. Making up people: Consumption as a symbolic vocabulary for the construction of identity. In Ekström, Karin M. and Brembeck, Helene (Eds.), *Elusive Consumption*. Berg.
- Elliott, R., Eccles, S. and Hodgson, M., 1993. Re-coding gender representations: women, cleaning products and advertising's "New Man". *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, Vol. 10(3).
- Elliott, Richard and Wattanasuwan, Krisadarat, 1998. Brands as symbolic resources for the construction of identity. *International Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 17(2).
- Elliott, Richard and Leonard, Clare, 2004. Peer pressure and poverty: Exploring fashion brands and consumption symbolism among children of the 'British poor'. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, Vol. 3(4).
- Escalas, J.E., Bettman, J.R., 2003. You Are What They Eat: The Influence of Reference Groups on Consumer's Connection to Brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Vol. 13(3).
- Featherstone, M., 1992. *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*. Sage Publications, London.
- Firat, A. Fuat and Venkatesh, Alladi, 1995. Liberatory postmodernism and the reenchantment of consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 22(3).
- Forte, Russell F., 2007. A review of social identity theory with implications for training and development. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, Vol.31(3).
- Fournier, Susan, 1998. Consumers and Their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 24(4).

Grant, Isabel, J. and Stephen, Graeme, R., 2005. Communicating culture: A examination of the buying behaviour of 'tweenage' girls and the key societal communicating factor influencing the buying process of fashion clothing. *Journal of Tarketing, Measurement and Analysis for Marketing*, Vol. 14(2).

Gronhaug, Kjell and Venkatesh, Alladi, 2007. Products and Services in the Perspective of Consumer Socialization. *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 20(10).

Gundlach, M., Zivnuska, S. and Stoner, J., 2006. Understanding the relationship between individualism–collectivism and team performance through an integration of social identity theory and the social relations model. *Human Relations*, Vol. 59(12).

Grube, Joel W. & Wallack, Lawrence, 1994. Television Beer Advertising and Drinking Knowledge, Beliefs and Intentions among Schoolchildren. *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 84(2).

Gunter, Barrie and Furnham, Adrian, 1998. *Children as Consumers: A Psychological analysis of the young people's market*. International Series in Social Psychology, Routledge, London and New York.

Harradine, Rod and Ross, Jill, 2007. Branding: a generation gap? *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, Vol. 11(2).

Heilbrunn, Benoît, 1998. My brand the hero? A semiotic analysis of the consumer-brand relationship. In Lambkin, M., Fowall, G., Van Raaij, F. and Heilbrunn, B. (Eds.), *European Perspectives on Consumer Behaviour*. Prentice Hall Europe.

Hill, Paul Ronald, 1992. Homeless Children: Coping with Material Losses. *The Journal of Consumer Affairs*, Vol. 25(2).

Hogg, M.A and McGarty, 1990. Self-Categorization and Social Identity in Social Identity Theory: Constructive and Critical Advances, Edited by D. Abrams and M.A. Hogg. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Hogg, M.A, Terry, D.J. and White, K.M., 1995. A tale of two theories: A critical comparison of identity theory with social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, Vol. 58(4).

Hogg, M., K., Bruce, M. and Hill, A.J., 1998. Fashion brand preferences among young consumers. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, Vol. 26(8).

Holt, Douglas B., 2002. Why do brands cause trouble? A dialectical theory of consumer culture and branding. *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 29(1).

Jenkins, R., 1996. *Social identity*. Routledge.

Ji, Mindy F., 2002. Children's Relationships with Brands: 'True Love' or 'One-Night' Stand? *Psychology & Marketing*, Vol. 19(4).

Ji, Mindy F., 2008. Child-brand relations: a conceptual framework. *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 24(5-6).

Kamptner, N., 1991. Personal possessions and their meaning: A life-span perspective. *Journal of Social Behaviour and Personality*, Vol. 6(6).

Kates, S., 2000. Out of the Closet and out on the Street!: Gay Men and Their Brand Relationships. *Psychology and Marketing*, Vol. 17(6).

Kenway, Jane and Bullen, Elizabeth, 2001. *Consuming children: education – entertainment – advertasing*. Open University Press.

Korte, R.F., 2007. A review of social identity theory with implications for training and development. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, Vol.31(3).

Kuhlmann, Eberhard, 1983. Consumer Socialization of Children and Adolescents. A Review of Current Approaches. *Journal of Consumer Policy*, Vol. 6(4).

Köksal, Mehmet Haluk, 2007. Consume behavior and preferences regarding children's clothing in Turkey. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, Vol. 11(1).

Langer, Beryl, 2004. The business of branded enchantment: Ambivalence and disjuncture in the global children's culture industry. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, Vol. 4(2).

Ligas, Mark and Cotte, June, 1999. The Process of Negotiating Brand Meaning: A Symbolic Interactionist Perspective. *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 26(1).

Lee, Martyn J., 1993. *Consumer Culture Reborn. The cultural politics of consumption*. Routledge, London and New York.

Martens, Julia, Southerton, Dale and Scott, Sue, 2004. Bringing children (and parents) into the sociology of consumption: Towards a theoretical and empirical agenda. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, Vol. 4(2).

Martensen, Anne, 2007. Tweens' satisfaction and brand loyalty in the mobile phone market. *Young Consumers*, Vol. 2(1).

McCracken, Grant, 1988. *Culture and consumption: New approaches to the symbolic character of consumer goods and activities*. Indiana University Press.

McEmmal, James, U., 2007. *On Becoming a Consumer: Development of Consumer Behavior Patterns in Childhood*. Elsevier Inc.

Moisander and Valtonen, 2006. *Qualitative Marketing Research: A Cultural Approach*. Sage Publications Ltd.

Moore, Elizabeth S. & Lutz, Richard J., 2000. Children, Advertising, and Product Experiences: A Multimethod Inquiry. *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 27(1)

Morgan, Myfanwy, Gibbs, Sara, Maxwell, Krista and Britten Nicky, 2002. Hearing children's voices: Methodological issues in conducting focus groups with children aged 7-11 years. *Qualitative Research*, Vol. 2(5).

Nairn, Agnes, 2008. "It does my head in... buy it, buy it, buy it!" The commercialization of UK children's web sites. *Young consumers*, Vol. 9(4).

Nairn, Agnes, Griffin, Christine and Gaya Wicks, Patricia, 2008. Children's use of brand symbolism: A consumer culture theory approach. Vol. 42(5/6).

Olsen, Barbara, 1999. Exploring Women's Brand Relationships and Enduring Themes at Mid-life. *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 26(1).

Parker, A. and Steiberg, D.L. (2004), "The transfigural and the totemic: David Beckham, sexuality and popular culture". *Warwick University Magazine*.

Pecheux, Claude and Debraix, Christian, 1999 Children and Attitude toward the Brand: A New Measurement Scale. *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 39(4).

Phelps, Joseph E. & Hoy, Mariea Grubb, 1996. The Aad-Ab-PI Relationship in Children: The Impact of Brand Familiarity and Measurement Timing. *Psychology & Marketing*, Vol. (13)1.

Piacentini, Maria and Mailer, Greig, 2004, Symbolic consumption in teenagers' clothing choices. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, Vol. 3(3).

Piaget, J., 1960. "General problems of the psychological development of the child" in Tanner, J.M. and Elders, B., (Eds.), *Discussions on Child Development: Proceedings of the World Health Organisation Study Group on Psychological Development of the Child IV*. International Universities Press, New York.

Quart, Alissa, 2003. *Branded: The buying and selling of teenagers*. Arrow.

Robinson, Patricia and Kates, Steven Maxwell, 2005. *Children and Their Brand Relationships*. *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 32(1).

Rodhain, Angelique, 2006. *Brands and the Identification Process of Children*. *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 33(1).

Roper, Stuart and Shah, Binita, 2007. *Vulnerable consumers: the social impact of branding on children*. *European Opportunities International*, Vol. 26(7).

Roper, Stuart and La Niece, Carolina, 2009. *The importance of brands in the lunch-box choices of low-income British school children*. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, Vol. 8(2/3).

Ross, Jill and Harradine, Rod, 2004. *I'm not wearing that! Branding and young children*. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, Vol. 8(1).

Saltmarsh, S. (2009). *Becoming economic subjects: agency, consumption and popular culture in early childhood*. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, Vol. 30(1).

Schor, Julia B. *In the Service of Young People? Studies and Reflections on Media in the Digital Age* In ? Ulla Carlsson & Cecilia von Feilitzen (Eds.). *When Childhood Gets Commercialized, Can Children Be Protected*. The International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media.

Stets, J.E. and Burke, P.J., 2000. *Identity theory and social identity theory*. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, Vol. 63(3).

Tajfel, H., 1982. Social psychology of intergroup relations. *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol. 33(1).

Tajfel, H. and Turner, J.C., 1985. The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In S. Worchel and W.G. Austin (Eds), *Psychology of intergroup relations*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall.

Thomson, E.S. and Laing, A.W., 2003. "The Net Generation": Children and Young People, the Internet and Online Shopping. *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 19(3/4).

Thompson, J.B., 1995. *The Median and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Tingstad, V., 2007. "Now it's up to you!" Children consuming commercial television. *Society and Business Review*, Vol. 2(1).

Vignoles, V. L., Regalia, C., Manzi, C., Gollledge, J. and Scabini, E., 2006. Beyond self-esteem: The influence of multiple motives on identity construction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 90(3).

Ward, S., 1974. Consumer Socialization. *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 1(2).

Wattanasuwan, Kritsadarat, 2005. The Self and Symbolic Consumption. *Journal of American Academy of Business*, Cambridge Vol. 6(1).

Woodfield, R., 2000. *Women, work and computing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wyatt, Tami H., Krauskopf, Patricia B. and Davidson, Rachel, 2008. Using Focus Groups for Program Planning and Evaluation. *The Journal of School Nursing*, Vol. 24(7).