

Review of recent literature for the Bailey Review of commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood

A review by the Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre



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The commercialisation and premature sexualisation of childhood

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This paper presents a rapid review of literature on the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood to inform the work of the Bailey review team. Two other papers have been submitted: a short note outlining the data available in existing surveys and the options for buying into omnibus surveys, and a separate paper describing international regulatory frameworks relevant to the commercialisation and premature sexualisation of childhood.

Key research questions

The work conducted aimed rapidly to review literature available since 2008 that addresses the impact of commercialisation on children and their parents, particularly in relation to sexualisation, undue pressure on parents, risks and benefits. It thus builds on, rather than reproducing, reviews already done for the three government reports that inform the Bailey review. To the extent possible in the five weeks available, it has digested the literature to address the following research questions:

- Does commercialisation lead to the sexualisation of children?
- Do marketing and advertising techniques encourage particular forms of consumption in children and lead them to exercise 'pester power'.
- What is the impact of popular culture on both sexualisation and gender stereotyping in childhood?
- Do gender-specific retail products have identifiable impacts on sexualisation?
- To what extent does exposure to marketing and advertising of goods and services such as alcohol which are not aimed at children affect children's consumption, desires to consume and sexualisation?
- What impact does the commercialisation of childhood have on inequalities between families and children (e.g. on the basis of ethnicity and the economic resources available)?
- To what extent does commercialisation and increasing technologisation of childhood lead some parents to feel that their ability to parent is compromised and that they are subjected to undue pressures to purchase?
- What forms of regulatory framework and practices protecting children from excessive or unfair commercial practices and advertising techniques are employed in other countries?

The work for the Bailey report focused on four sets of issues:

- "Wallpaper" issues
- Inappropriate products

- Children as consumers and the new marketing techniques used to reach them
- Consumer voice

The current report follows this structure as much as is possible given that the literature does not neatly address the questions with which the Bailey review is concerned. However, 'consumer voice' does not constitute a separate section and relevant issues are presented in several sections. Regulatory frameworks and practices are addressed in a separate paper by June Statham and colleagues (available on the Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre website). The remit of this literature review was to produce an assessment of evidence relating to the questions addressed by the Bailey Review, rather than to make recommendations.

Methods

(i) UK and international literature in English published since the Byron, Buckingham and Papadopoulos reviews were produced (2008, 2009 and 2010 respectively) was identified through use of internet search engines (e.g. Google Scholar) and bibliographic databases such as the British Education Index; Australian Education Index; Emerald; ERIC; ESRC Society Today; Family Plus Text; IngentaConnect; International Bibliography of the Social Sciences; J-Stor, PsychInfo and the Social Science Research Network. The keywords used included: commercialisation; sexualisation; consumption; advertising; marketing; media; risks; harm; benefits; children; childhood; families; mothers; fathers; parenting and the names of the authors of the three reviews mentioned above.

ii) Key people researching in the field were consulted about their work in progress and the recent literature they know in order to ensure that material reviewed was more up to date than published literature. These included Professor David Buckingham; researchers at SIFO, the National Institute for Consumer Research in Oslo, Norway; the Department of Psychology, Norwegian Centre for Child Research (NOSEB) at the Trondheim Norwegian Technology University; the Copenhagen Business School and colleagues at the Norwegian Centre for Advanced Studies project on Personal Development and Sociocultural Change.

iii) The abstracts of papers presented at relevant conferences and seminar series were read and, where relevant, authors were contacted or their work electronically searched. These included Ros Gill's and Jessica Ringrose's current ESRC-funded seminar series 'Pornified? Complicating the debates about the sexualisation of culture' and the 2010 Child and Teen Consumption international conference held at Linköping University in Sweden.

b) The literature search procedures described above were used to pick up reactions to the three reviews. In addition, the authors' names were put into Google to gain understanding of how they have been received outside academic literature.

Background: The reception of the three earlier reviews

The three earlier pieces of work were:

- 1) reviews on child internet safety led by Professor Tanya Byron (Byron, 2008 and Byron, 2010);
- 2) the assessment panel led by Professor David Buckingham on the commercialisation of childhood (DCSF/DCMS, 2009) and
- 3) the review by Dr Linda Papadopoulos on the sexualisation of young people (Papadopoulos, 2010).

All three reviews conducted at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century took evidence from a wide range of sources and included literature reviews. While they were on different subjects, they were interlinked to some extent in that David Buckingham did a review of the literature on children and new technology, particularly video games and the internet for the Byron Review. Byron and Buckingham each considered both positive and negative aspects of children and technology and children and commercialisation and have been praised for taking balanced views. In a careful academic review, for example, Merris Griffiths (2010) says of the Buckingham report that:

'The authors endeavour to present a reasoned and balanced snap-shot of research findings. ... Published research in this field – often inflected by the social codes, conventions and agendas of the countries in which the work was produced – can be emotive, highly politicised and polarised. Buckingham et al. note that a key problem with attempting to assess the 'evidence' is a lack of transparency, and the often limited scope and questionable quality of the research (p. 33). Methods are often unclear and samples ill-defined, yet the emergent patterns are presented as irrefutable 'fact', forcing the bigger debate into cyclic truisms. The authors do what they can to move beyond the binary arguments by mapping the more subtle 'shades of grey', applying a range of complex considerations to their assessments, and identifying tensions, contradictions and inconclusive results.' (p. 172).

The 'balance' in the Buckingham report meant that it documented the complexity of commercialisation and childhood, rather than identifying clear cut policy recommendations. The Buckingham report was also welcomed by organisations such as the IPA (Institute of Practitioners in Advertising), which supported the Advertising Association's welcome for the report, while recognising the need for responsible marketing to children. As an academic with a track record of more than three decades of research in this area, Buckingham has gone on to build on the work done for his review in later research (Buckingham et al., 2010).

The Byron review has also largely been welcomed for its balance (e.g. by Microsoft), although members of the gaming industry disapproved of the recommendation to introduce a cinema-style ratings system for video games. The report has been highly influential in, for example, getting the UK Council of Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) set up to bring together organisations from industry, charities and the public sector to deliver the recommendations from the report. A follow up progress report was

published a year later. David Buckingham also considers the Byron report balanced and its conclusions complement those of Sonia Livingstone (e.g. 2009), who has researched children and Information and Communication Technologies over the last few decades.

There has been a rather different response to the Papadopoulous report, which included a broad range of research traditions in its review of the sexualisation of young people for the Home Office. Australian researchers Vares and Jackson (2010) consider that it takes an internally contradictory approach to the understanding of children and their abilities and skills, as both questioning images and storylines based on sex on TV, but as typically lacking the ability for cultural critiques of sexism. For Vares and Jackson, her conclusion that sexualisation of children and young people exists and is harmful has not been adequately demonstrated. They question her equation of frequent internet access with exposure to pornography, the risk of being sexually solicited, and increased pressure to present themselves in sexualised ways, which treats extreme cases as routine. Furthermore, they argue that she frequently equates sexualisation with sexual bullying and violence and, as a result, overstates the certainty of her conclusions on sexualisation. In a similar way, Caitlin Murch (2010) considers that the report lacks critical evaluation in its focus on the sexualisation of young people in the UK as a growing menace.

Bragg and her colleagues (2010, including David Buckingham) suggest that the Papadopoulous report demonstrates similar limitations to the American Psychological Association (APA) report on the sexualisation of girls (2007), which they suggest is unsystematic and partial. More damning criticisms were produced by Clarissa Smith in an academic review of the Papadopoulos report.

I had no great hopes for Linda Papadopoulos' Sexualisation of Young People Review and it didn't disappoint. Commissioned by the Home Office as part of its drive to incorporate research into the policy agenda and, in this instance, to contribute to its formulation of initiatives to combat the problem of violence against women, the review was intended to uncover the ways in which 'sexualisation' has contributed to a climate in which violence against women is condoned. ... (p. 175)

The above criticisms of Papadopoulos' report should not be read as a diminution of the real social evil that is domestic or more generalized violence against women, but this review contributes nothing to our understandings of those problems. Moreover it fails to illuminate anything substantive about the ways in which sexual themes are components of myriad media forms which young people are encountering and seeking out. It has nothing useful to say about the ways in which children and young people might engage or participate in the contemporary media landscape, sexual or not. It was unlikely that Papadopoulos would engage in any form of research that would be recognizable as 'audience research' but young people deserve a better accounting than this. (p. 178)

Nonetheless, despite such criticisms, the Papadopoulos report, the APA report and the report for the Australian parliament (Rush and La Nauze, 2006) are widely popularly cited.

The Rapid Review

The quality of the new evidence reviewed below is variable since studies are done in different ways, on different samples and in different places and timescales. Some qualitative studies involve very small samples, but produce a depth of understanding of the processes or patterns involved, while quantitative studies on larger samples often provide breadth at the expense of depth and, particularly in the few systematic reviews done on young people and alcohol, bring together studies that differ in ways that necessarily make conclusions tentative. Nonetheless, there are commonalities and areas of agreement in parts of the literature that helpfully illuminate relevant issues.

'Wallpaper' issues

At the start of the decade, in January 2011, concerns about children's unwitting and unwilling sexualisation by predatory adult males were widely discussed in the British media following the publication of Barnardo's (2011) report, *'Puppet on a string'* that draws on the experiences of their specialist services to argue that more, and younger, children and young people (girls and boys) than ever before are being sexually exploited (from ten years of age) and that the perpetrators of the abuse are becoming more organised and use more sophisticated grooming techniques, including Information and Communication Technologies (internet and mobile phones). The context in which this sexual exploitation occurs is one in which society has become more sexualised than previously.

It is commonly accepted by academics, policy makers, media commentators, NGOs and activists in many countries that there has been a sexualisation of culture over the last decade (Attwood, 2010). This sexualisation is characterised by increased permissiveness in sexual revelation, exhibitionism and voyeurism and with sexuality increasingly being part of many people's identities. The evidence cited for this increased sexualisation of culture includes taken-for-granted: sexualised content of music videos; 'porno chic' in advertising; sexualized representations of women in the media; the marketing of clothing and accessories that sell or represent sexualised identities (e.g. clothes with slogans such as 'porn star' or 'fcuk me' or children's toys and accessories adorned with the Playboy bunny); young people's wearing of 'shag bands' to signal availability for particular sexual acts; new spaces for sexual entertainment (e.g. lap-dancing clubs) and the proliferation of Internet sites for sexual encounters and/or presentations (Gill, Renold and Ringrose, 2010). Paasonen et al (2007) define sexualisation of culture as referring to a wide range of cultural phenomena and pornification as pointing to the increased visibility of hardcore and soft-core pornographies and the blurring of boundaries between the pornographic and the mainstream. The growth in sexualised images and products targeted at young girls and in electronic technologies, are seen to encourage girls to 'grow up

too fast' and become 'too sexy too soon' (Vares and Jackson, 2010) rather than maintain the innocence they are assumed to have (Faulkner, 2010a).

There is, however, much less agreement on what the effects of the sexualisation of culture, in general or specifically on children, might be and the widespread public concern has not been matched by a volume of research in the UK; one of the reasons that the ESRC has funded a seminar series (2010-2011) on the sexualisation of culture (Gill, Renold and Ringrose, 2010). There are, thus, some disagreements in the literature. For example, Beasley (2008) points out that it is easy to overlook contradictory cultural information, for example, that alongside 'skank chic' (the wearing of low-cut jeans and thong underwear that started in the late 1990s and is now disappearing as a fashion) was paralleled by skater fashions (oversized jeans and t-shirts that disguised, rather than sexualized, the female form). Equally, in a quantitative study of 207 USA young women students in the USA, Nowatzki and Morry (2009) found that 'self-sexualizing behavior' was linked to media portrayals of women's sexual attractiveness that constituted sociocultural ideals, but not to sexist attitudes in the young women. They argue that sexualizing behaviour may be viewed by the young women as empowering in a society where sexual objectification of women is prevalent. In a review of 'the harms of pornography exposure', Flood (2009, p.391) similarly finds that 'exposure to media which sexualises girls and women is associated with greater acceptance of stereotyped and sexist notions about gender and sexual roles, including notions of women as sexual objects'.

Commercialisation is interlinked with all these instances of sexualisation and, in a similar way to the sexualisation of society, most societies are considered to have become increasingly commercialised over the last half century (Trentmann, 2009). Children are argued to have taken on the role of consumers earlier and to a greater extent than in previous generations (Brusdal and Lavik, 2008; Ekström, 2007; Goodchild, n.d). Many commentators date this from popular recognition of the 'teenager' in the 1950s (Abrams, 1959) and, more recently, identification of 'tweenagers' as pre-teens who emulate teenage tastes and style. However, there is evidence that youth culture developed earlier, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century (Savage, 2007; Tinkler, 2000). It can be difficult to prove that commercialisation has increased. For example, Saga and Netmums (2010) collaborated to establish whether parents spend more on children at Christmas now than they did in previous generations. They found that 61% of parents born in the 1930s said that they spent less than £50 in total on Christmas presents for their families, whereas only fourteen percent of 'today's' parents said they spend less than £50 and 22% admitted to spending £200 plus. Sixty-three percent said that they go without things in order to buy their children presents. More than 90% of the over 50s said that they believed that Christmas is becoming too commercialised. However, the analysis of the amounts spent by older parents did not take inflation into account or consider that asking about the distant past is different from asking contemporaneously when parents actually have small children. In addition, the items brought are likely to have been different at the two time points. Nonetheless, children constitute a large and valuable market for many industries (McNeal, 1987).

The areas of commercialisation and sexualisation are areas of rapid change as fashions and the technologies available change. In addition, manufacturers and marketers aim to provide fast moving consumer goods (FMCG). Many parents, therefore, find it difficult to keep pace with what children are doing and what is being marketed to them, particularly through Information and Communication Technologies that many children spend more time on, and so are more familiar with, than many parents. Many parents report that they are unsure how widespread undesirable practices may be or what to do about them (Nairn, 2008). They, therefore, feel that they do not have a voice or redress for inappropriate commercialisation and sexualisation of their children, but believe that there should be regulatory frameworks that address problems in this area (Mothers Union, 2010).

Katherine Rake (2010), the Chief Executive of the Family and Parenting Institute voices both parental and third sector concerns about the effect of commercialisation on families, (which is broader than a focus on the impact of advertising on children). The Family and Parenting Institute (FPI) has consistently been concerned with commercial pressure on parents and their children, publishing a report *Hard Sell, Soft Targets?* in 2004, that drew on a MORI poll they commissioned. They documented enormous concern expressed by parents about the amount of television advertising their children saw. More than four fifths of the parents polled said they considered that companies targeted their children too much. Since then, Compass, The Children's Society, Care for the Family, Which and the Mothers Union amongst others have highlighted parents' anxiety about the effects of commercialisation on their children. This included advertising leading to arguments between parents and children and children 'pestering' their parents to buy material goods for them. There is some research evidence, however, that parents often feel more sanguine that their own children have not been commercialised or sexualised than about other children in general (Buckingham, 2011).

While there is ample evidence that parents do express concerns about commercialisation and sexualisation, research studies find little evidence that family communications about consumption and sexualisation are fraught with tensions (see below). Equally, parents tend to be sceptical about whether legislation can successfully address their concerns. This was the case in the FPI MORI poll and has been found in research since (e.g. Buckingham et al., 2010). The review of the literature below suggests that it is important to consider the ways in which parents and children from different social classes negotiate purchasing requests and decisions, how children and young people navigate their positioning in their peer groups through consumption, parents' sympathies with this and how children manage marketing in all its proliferating guises.

Two initial background issues

In his book to be published in 2011, David Buckingham raises the question of whether the apparent 'sexualisation' of children might partly be accounted for by decreases in the age at which they reach physical and sexual maturity. In other words, society is increasingly sexualised, but are children drawn into sexualisation partly for biological reasons? The age of menarche (onset of menstruation) in the

United States and Europe dropped by around 2.5 years in the first part of the twentieth century, and has levelled off in recent decades. However, the onset of puberty (for example, as indicated in breast development and the growth of pubic hair) appears to be occurring ever earlier (although affected by body mass and ethnicity (Akslae et al., 2008; Kaplowitz et al., 2001). From the evidence available, Buckingham suggests that around one-third of seven-year-old girls are now showing pubertal characteristics, which means that they might, for biological reasons, be becoming aware of themselves as potentially sexual beings at an earlier age. This may also mean that some might need some of the products (such as ‘training bras’) that have attracted criticism for being sexualised.

It is also important to note that the issue of the sexualisation of children has long been addressed in ‘parent training’ and childrearing manuals. In a special issue of the journal of Historical Sociology, Egan and Hawkes (2008) and Hawkes and Egan (2008) analyzed childrearing manuals from England, Australia and the USA in the second and third decades of the twentieth century and concluded that there was both a progressive and restrictive new discourse that acknowledged and normalized the ‘sexual child’ but insisted on the need for expert guidance in its management in order to produce stable adults. This proved to be a complex task for parents who were expected to convey proper instruction without perpetuating shame and ignorance or encouraging inappropriate, premature development of sexual consciousness. The approaches taken in the texts *‘were committed to a level of sexual enlightenment of the children from a very young age, much younger than is generally thought necessary today...the commitment to avoiding the child acquiring a negative attitude to sex legitimated what through modern eyes are practices that would be considered distinctly problematic’* (p. 459).

Two points from this historical analysis are relevant to current debates. First, concerns about how to manage the ‘normal’ sexuality of children without prematurely sexualising them are far from new. Second, children’s agency was marginalised in the texts in favour of seeing them only as adults to be; an issue that is currently debated (e.g. Nairn, 2008). According to Hawkes and Egan (2008), this truncated the potential for open acknowledgement that children are sexual and discourses of protection foreclosed the possibility that children have sexual agency (Egan and Hawkes, 2008).

Recent research literature on sexualisation and young people’s views of (in)appropriate products

The issue of the ‘premature sexualisation’ of girls is highly polarised and is internationally debated (e.g. Vares and Jackson, 2010). Both poles of the debate, accept that there has been an increasing sexualisation of society. However, they differ in the conclusions they draw. Many popular books (such as Hamilton, 2008; Levin and Kilbourne, 2008) and academic reports from different countries (e.g. Papadopoulos, 2010) present a strong case that children are being prematurely sexualised by media and commercial culture (including ‘tween’ magazines, television programmes and music videos). According to this view, it is media and commercial

culture that need to be addressed and controlled to ameliorate premature sexualisation.

In a report for the Australian Institute, Rush and La Nauze (October 2006) coined the metaphor 'corporate paedophilia' to describe advertising and marketing that directly sexualises children and is, therefore, an abuse of children and public morality. This position is one to which many parenting organisations subscribe (e.g. FPI; Mothers Union). In 2007, The American Psychological Association (APA) established a Task Force on the Sexualisation of Girls that reviewed the psychological literature on sexualisation, primarily on teens and women. It defined sexualisation as different from 'healthy' sexuality in that it treats a person's value as coming only from his or her sexual appeal or behaviour, to the exclusion of other characteristics and equates physical attractiveness (narrowly defined) with being sexy. People are, therefore, sexually objectified by being made into objects for others' sexual use. In other words sexuality is inappropriately imposed upon children (APA, 2007).

There is, however, a rather different position that is very critical of this body of work. It is worth examining in more detail the reception of the Rush and La Nauze (2006) report in order to clarify the grounds on which it is criticised. For Rush and La Nauze (2006) the metaphor 'corporate paedophilia' serves to describe advertising and marketing that directly sexualises children and is, therefore, an abuse of children and public morality. In December 2006 the Australia Institute published another discussion paper by Rush and La Nauze, *'Letting Children be Children: Stopping the Sexualisation of Children in Australia.'*

Rush and La Nauze present two main forms of evidence to inform the policy implications they draw. The first is of advertisements for children's clothing, a sample of teen and 'tween magazines from which they tried to quantify the amount of 'sexualising material' and popular television programmes. They found from their analysis of the adverts that both boys and girls are increasingly being posed and represented in ways that are thought of as 'adult', which they term 'grotesque'. For television, they pointed to the 'high degree of sexual innuendo' in music videos and television shows like *Big Brother* and *The O.C.* The second form of evidence consists of a review of evidence from previous research about the apparent increase in 'body dissatisfaction' and eating disorders among children. Rush and La Nauze argue that inappropriate attention to physical appearance may stop children from being engaged in other important 'developmental activities' and that the circulation of 'sexualised' material may encourage children to initiate sexual behaviour before they understand the consequences, which may include 'grooming' of children by paedophiles. Rush and La Nauze do not suggest that the media are solely responsible, but that they 'may' play a role. However, their focus is on the harmful role played by the media and marketers (encapsulated in the title 'corporate paedophilia').

The reports were highly influential, having an impact on the February 2007 'Report of the American Psychological Association Taskforce on the Sexualisation of Girls' (which has had some of the same criticisms levelled at it). In Australia, Julie Gale

established Kids Free 2 B Kids in 2007, as a not-for-profit, independent organisation with a wide membership drawn from across Australian society to raise awareness of, and campaign against, the sexualisation of children in the media, advertising and clothing industries. In August 2007 Women's Forum Australia released its magazine entitled "Faking it". This focuses on the issue of the sexualisation of women and girls through fashion and beauty magazines. In October 2007 the Australian Psychological Society published a tip sheet for parents entitled, 'Helping Girls Develop a Positive Self Image'. It aims to help parents to address the issue of sexualisation with their daughters, with a view to raising their self esteem and reducing eating disorders and depression. In June 2008 the Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts published a report on the '*Sexualisation of Children in the Contemporary Media*'. There has been lots of debate and publications on the issue in Australia and one retail company pursued legal action against the Australia Institute on the basis of the October 2006 discussion paper.

However, there are many academic criticisms of Rush and La Nauze, including methodological critiques. In particular, the studies available are criticised for not providing convincing evidence that the issues with which they are concerned have become more prevalent in recent years. In addition, young people are physically maturing, and engaging in sexual activity at earlier ages than previously. However, there is no clear evidence here that media and marketing cause this or are paedophilic (see, for example, Egan and Hawkes; Grieshaber, 2010; Lumby and Albury, 2008). The very drama and memorability of their title is in itself problematic in not making a temperate claim, but becoming a slogan that overstates their case. This is particularly problematic since what constitutes a 'sexualised image' is not adequately defined and is left open to subjective interpretation since, for example, what constitutes physical attractiveness is necessarily subjective (Lumby and Albury, 2008). Rush and La Nauze also take for granted that children's viewing of 'sexualised' images will produce 'physical, psychological and sexual harm', but there is no convincing evidence of such a link (e.g. Buckingham et al., 2010; Lerum and Dworkin, 2009). Lumby and Albury (2008) suggest that research needs to focus on children's own experiences of media images, rather than taking for granted, as in the APA report, that there is definitely a deleterious effect of sexualisation. This would help to establish if there is harm as a result of premature sexualisation.

Other academic criticisms include that:

- Rush and La Nauze fail to distinguish sufficiently between material that targets a teenage audience and material aimed at younger children (Lumby and Albury, 2008).
- The sample of media analysed is very small and highly selective.
- They do not define either sexualisation or what constitutes a sexualised image (Vares and Jackson, 2010).
- A related point is that they make no distinction between 'sexual' and 'sexualised' or 'objectifying' representations. Buckingham et al., (2010) suggest that '*it would seem that any reference to sex or intimate relationships, and almost any representation of a human body, is perceived by the authors as 'sexualised'. This results in some readings that can only be described as extremely partial (for*

example in the case of The O.C., a series that focuses centrally on the emotional dilemmas of the characters and very rarely shows any form of physical or sexual contact between them). Even more disturbingly, the authors seem to read strongly adult connotations into images of children: as Lumby and Albury put it, they imply that ‘dressing young girls in crop tops or bikinis carries the same cultural messages as dressing a mature adult woman in identical clothing’.

- They make no convincing links between representation and reception—what is shown does not tell us who is watching/reading with concentration, how that content is read, or the influence it may have—a common difficulty in studies of media reception.
- They assume that children’s engagement with the images they (Rush and La Nauze) analyse are necessarily harmful to those children, but they present no convincing evidence of this (Buckingham et al., 2010).
- They reproduce a popular myth that childhood is necessarily sexually innocent and childhood is simply an absence of adulthood. This in itself leaves children vulnerable to exploitation because their innocence is constructed as tempting to paedophiles since adults themselves read sexualisation into images of children. At the same time, children are not equipped to deal with the adult world (Faulkner, 2010b; Taylor, 2010).

The fact that the Rush and La Nauze report is widely cited indicates that many people consider that the issues they raise are serious ones they consider should be kept on public agenda. Equally, there have been some angry ripostes to academics making points such as those presented above. For example, the New Zealand journalist Carol Moynihan, who edits *Family Edge* and is deputy editor of *MercatorNet*, says of the special issue of the journal in which Taylor (2010) appears:

‘So here we have a really absurd situation. On the one hand, clerics and others being jailed for treating children as sexual agents and destroying their innocence. On the other, academics training childcare teachers to believe that childhood innocence is a myth and that they must actively shape the sexual awareness of their little charges. To be sure, the gals at the universities of Monash, Canberra and Canterbury (New Zealand) are not advocating physical intimacy with little children, but it is difficult to see how their theories would exclude it. It would be interesting to see them tested in a court of law.’

However, the scholarly critiques presented above make a compelling case that Rush and La Nauze’s reports do not provide evidence of excellent scholarship.

UK research literature on sexualisation and children since 2008

The study most relevant to consideration of this issue was conducted by David Buckingham and his colleagues, who were commissioned by the Scottish Parliament to investigate the sexualisation of childhood. The resulting study (Buckingham et al., 2010) builds on, and takes forward, the Buckingham report. The study involved a survey of the kinds of products available in high street stores, interviews and deliberative focus groups with children and parents.

The study starts from an acknowledgement that it is difficult to define 'sexual' or 'sexualised goods' and so considered five possible categories of products, particularly defined as making reference to: sexual practices; sexual contexts; emphasising of body parts and shapes culturally associated with adult sexuality; styles considered 'high fashion' for adults and goods that contain references to gender stereotypes. In order to do this, they made 38 observational visits to 32 retail outlets in different areas of Scotland. They subjected a selection of products to a more detailed textual analysis. While the study did identify some 'sexualised' goods aimed at children, these were relatively few, and their availability was limited. However, the children use retail outlets and spaces not only for shopping, but also for leisure and interaction with peers and parents. Buckingham and his colleagues therefore argue that, in addition to looking at goods themselves, it is important to take account of the wider context in which products are displayed and marketed since children might purchase goods in contexts where they are surrounded by sexual imagery and products, even if such products are not aimed at them. In addition, they make a case for the importance of paying attention to the ways in which goods are labelled, arranged and displayed. The ways in which products are offered for sale may implicitly encourage children to appear older than they are.

A second part of the study involved working with three schools in different areas of Scotland and devising three lessons to be taught by English and Media Studies teachers in the school timetable. They observed at least two lessons in each school and collected written materials produced from the lessons. They also conducted two focus groups in each school that covered a total of 57 students (39 girls and 18 boys) aged 12-14 years, from different socio-economic backgrounds and nine focus groups with parents (35 women and eight men).

The study found that, in general, children recognise and understand potential issues of sexualisation in different ways from adults. Both parents and children interviewed gave accounts that indicated that they make nuanced, contextual decisions about what they consume, and consider several criteria. The potential sexual connotations of products were only one dimension they might consider. Some parents argued that 'little has changed' and that children have always wanted to 'grow up too soon' and to experiment with adult identities. Parents did generally feel that there is new and growing pressure from commercialisation, but, they also recognised children's expertise in contemporary consumer culture and sometimes their own lack of expertise that they felt could undermine the authority of their own views. In addition, most parents interviewed held broadly 'democratic' ideals of childrearing and felt that around the age of 12 or 13 years, children should have the final say on their clothes and items of personal care.

Both lack of expertise and beliefs in children's rights to individuality and freedom to express themselves could make it difficult for parents to exert control over their children's purchases. Some would have liked support in dealing with what they saw as commercial exploitation since alternative goods and products were not always available, but they recognised that this was unlikely to work. They also recognised

that other parents and children could take decisions about products that undermined their values, so that they might oppose 'sleepover parties' or Bratz dolls, but felt they could not refuse invitations or presents. Similarly, primary schools have begun to hold final year 'proms' that encourage adult eveningwear and limousine hire, which parents found it hard to resist, even if they could not really afford these. Parents' responses to, and practices in relation to, 'sexualised goods' were, therefore, contextual, dependent on societal structures and other people's decisions, rather than their own individual choices.

Parents expressed gendered anxieties about sexualised goods. They were concerned about their daughters' psychological well-being, but none felt that their *own* daughters were becoming 'too sexual too soon' and they did not feel that goods alone could sexualise them. However, girls were thought to put themselves at risk if they appeared older than they were or dressed in ways likely to be read as sexual. Boys' consumption and developing sexual identities were generally viewed in a far more relaxed way. This finding reiterates those of a larger-scale study of consumption in 12-18-year olds done in Birmingham, Milton Keynes and Oxford, where young people and parents said that parents attempted to exert more control over the appropriateness of clothes bought by girls than by boys (Croghan et al., 2006; Phoenix et al., 2009).

In the Scottish study, Buckingham and his colleagues conducted a series of classroom activities and focus groups with young people in their early teens in order to explore their perceptions of potentially 'sexualised' products (Buckingham et al., 2010). They found that the young people rejected the idea that they were passive victims of the marketing of sexualised goods. In keeping with the findings of studies on children's economic socialisation, they displayed extensive knowledge of marketing techniques and gave examples that showed that they were well able carefully to understand what products were designed to do and to make active choices about which products to buy. They indicated that their knowledge about how to 'read' products such as clothing and accessories developed as they grew older and they were aware of the risks of appearing older, particularly for girls. The perceived risks ranged from paedophilia to general risks about loss of reputation and misjudgments. Their choices in relation to sexualised goods reflected peer group norms, to do with inclusion and exclusion, and with feelings of comfort and confidence and so was influenced by social settings such as high school.

Another UK study that is still producing publications was conducted by Chris Pole (the Principal Investigator), Sharon Boden, Tim Edwards and Jane Pilcher (2005) and funded by the ESRC/AHRB. They conducted a small-sample ethnographic study with seven families from different ethnic groups, income levels and urban-rural locations, who had at least one child between the ages of six and eleven years in 2003-4. They focused on children's consumption of fashion. Seven focus groups were conducted with parents; two in a remote rural village in the northeast of England, two in an affluent English shire city, two in a disadvantaged area of a Midlands city and one in London. Focus groups were held in five areas with children and ethnographic work involved home visits with seven families spread across England (selected via the

parent focus groups, Boden, 2006). Other methods used allowed the tracking of children's consumption of clothing over a calendar year. These included semi-structured interviews with, and diary-work by, parents and methods designed to provide insight into the role of children as consumers of clothing, including accompanying them on shopping expeditions (Pilcher, 2010).

Pilcher (2010) reported that 6-11-year-old girls enjoyed dressing up in fashionable clothing, and saw it as a way of 'ageing up' towards feminine adulthood, in much the way that Penelope Eckert (1994) has suggested that young girls use clothes etc., as resources to make themselves 'the next step older in the heterosexual marketplace' (c.f. Haavind, 2003). They negotiated their choice of clothes etc. with their parents and some clothes were restricted to domestic contexts. The girls displayed both anxiety about, and disapproval of, 'revealing' clothing. Even so, it was far from clear that they recognised the specifically sexual implications of such clothing, or showed a strong sense of who the audience for their body revelations might be; the issue was formulated more as a matter of 'modesty' than of sexual provocation.

Rebekah Willett (2008a), a colleague of David Buckingham's, reported findings with similar implications. She studied girls' uses of online 'doll-maker' sites¹ as a means of exploring their perceptions of body image and sexual politics. The early teenage girls in her study were very self-consciously critical about these issues, and presented themselves as entirely able to resist the 'tyranny of slenderness'. They also differentiated themselves from invisible 'others' whom they believed to be more at risk of succumbing to negative media influences. While Willett's account rejects the view that girls are simply dupes of consumer culture, she also challenges the emphasis on 'compulsory individuality'. The girls saw the maintenance of a slender, healthy body as an individual responsibility, a matter of self-surveillance and self-discipline. Willett argues that, far from being free to 'express themselves', however, the forms of young people's expression are subtly regulated by forces outside themselves.

The complexity of the issue of how young people negotiate self expression, sexualisation and identities is further illustrated in a study conducted by Rebekah Willett and Jessica Ringrose, of young people's negotiations of social networking sites, funded by the Norwegian Centre for Child Research (NOSEB) and the Centre for the Study of Children Youth and Media at the Institute of Education. They conducted group and individual interviews with 11 boys and 12 girls aged 14-16 years old in a class in two South London schools in an area of high social deprivation. Most of the young people were using Bebo, a social networking site. They first conducted group interviews, then viewed the young people's Bebo sites and then interviewed six girls and one boy whose Bebo sites 'raised important issues around sexual representation and identity' (Ringrose, 2010: 171-2). They then continued to observe the Bebo sites over a period of two months. Ringrose (2010) reports that the seven young people interviewed had explicitly hypersexualized 'skins' (i.e. backgrounds) on their

¹ Doll-maker sites allow those who visit to select doll characteristics, clothes and backgrounds and make and animate dolls. These can be children's dolls, but can also be grown up avatars.

websites and also highly sexualized game and quiz applications that sexually commodified the female body.

For the girls, there was a complex negotiation of how to represent themselves on their sites since there was an intense visual imperative to represent the self as sexy and sexually confident, while not appearing 'too slutty' amongst their peers. In the group interviews, there was often condemnation of the term 'slutty'. Yet, one of the six girls followed up over time called herself 'whore' and another 'slut' (as do 25,000 Bebo users) and had an explicit tagline, referring to selling sex and sexual positions. At the same time, she expressed anxieties about how she looked and relationships with boys and took for granted traditional gender power dynamics. The sexually confident self presentation did not seem to lead to sexual confidence in everyday life. The symbols used on the social networking site, like Playboy bunnies were also sometimes used in everyday life and, in at least one instance, was bought by a mother, highlighting the fact that not all parents feel concerned about what could be considered the sexualisation of childhood. Overall, there was a normalization of pornography and sexual commodification of girls' bodies.

Research literature on sexualisation from outside the UK since 2008

Elm (2009) conducted research on sexualised presentations of self on Lunarstorm, the largest Internet community portal in the Nordic countries. From a sample of 500 15-19 year old young women and men, Elm selected ten young women's personal sites, chosen because they involve particular experimentation, for analysis and, in addition, conducted semi-structured interviews (through MSN) with three female users. Four themes emerged as particularly important: looks and style; (hetero)sexual desirability; sexual moderation and modesty. The girls made carefully elaborated presentations of self that showed a 'proper femininity', but balanced images that might be seen as 'too perfect', with what were claimed to be 'ugly pictures' (but in which they wore make up), so that they appeared modest. They also steered a line between appearing sexually attractive and showing sexual moderation and said that they considered it pathetic, tragic and disgusting to show their bodies online. Yet, the three interviewees had, at some time, all published photos of themselves in scanty clothing. They also used a strategy common in Lunarstorm, of enticing visitors into clicking links by giving their photos and diary entries sexually suggestive titles, which did not live up to the expectations they encouraged. They recognised that sex is an effective way to get attention, but that it has to be used with caution and within certain frames. Acceptable reasons for publishing 'undressed' photos online could be for fun, as part of joint display with friends or in an artistic context. However, the safest thing was to use hints and innuendos, without publishing any explicit photos. Elm considers this an agentic strategy, in that it could be seen as both an acceptance, and a repudiation, of normative femininity by going along with normative ideas about the display of the female body while resisting fixation with the sexualized body.

Vares and Jackson (2010) conducted a study of 71 11-13 year old 'tween' girls in four classrooms in two areas in New Zealand. They first conducted focus group discussions which explored girls' perspectives on what constitutes a 'tween' and

'tween' popular culture, then gave the girls videos to take home for a month to record video media diaries or v-Logs, followed by further focus group discussions when the diaries were completed. They suggest that children are far from being duped by the media into a passive acceptance of stereotyped or 'sexualised' gender roles. While the girls saw the media as providing valuable 'resources' for learning about sex and relationships, they often read such material critically, comparing it with their own experiences and their observation of peers and adults around them, and questioned romantic fantasies and idealised body images. They were, for example, critical and rejecting of celebrity sexualised styles in music videos for themselves. Vares and Jackson point out that the girls in their study were not bombarded with media messages because they were selective in their choice of viewing and general use of media and were critical of media messages. In addition, in contradiction to Papadopoulous's (2010) suggestion that parents do not know what games their children play, the girls' video diaries showed many instances of parents playing computer games with their daughters; something that was also true for some parents in the Californian Digital Youth project (Mizuko et al., 2008) and in the EU Family Platform research (Livingstone, 2009).

A Norwegian ethnographic study of 67 10-year-old girls and boys found that girls differed in how comfortable they were with 'teenage' activities such as discos and that popular children were able to impose activities on the others. Mari Rysst (2010a) distinguishes between childhood sexuality and adult sexuality and argues that there is a heterosexual focus in the girls' environment on sexuality, dating and having boyfriends. However, those practices involved little intimacy and showed ambivalence towards heterosexual physical contact. The peer group operated controlling mechanisms that stopped girls from acting much older than their culturally understood age. Rysst (2010b) found that these 10-year-old girls operated a complex and multi-faceted system for classifying clothing, which reflected values associated with both gender and social class. They did not see the clothes that many adults consider to be 'sexualised' as such and, instead, saw them as 'cool' and fashionable. This fits with earlier UK research reports that children actively refuse adult perceptions that some clothes are 'sexy' (Buckingham and Bragg, 2005; Pilcher, 2010).

In keeping with the findings from Willett (2008) and Ringrose (2010), Pomerantz (2008) found from a study in a Canadian high school that 'style' (clothing, hairstyles, bodily adornments, and accessories) functions as a kind of 'social skin', a means of communicating identity in social settings. As in most studies of young people's consumption and sexualisation, however, Pomerantz argues that girls are not merely dupes of marketing and that their attachment to brands does not signify a chronic lack of self-esteem, conformity or need for attention.

The issue of pornification of children and young people was explored in a review done at La Trobe University, Australia, by Michael Flood (2009). He found that there is relatively little research material available that documents the impact of 'pornography consumption' on children and young people and that more is needed since children and young people are routinely exposed to pornography on the

internet, in X-rated videos and in sexualised representations in the culture. Flood cautions that protecting children from sexual harm does not mean protecting them from age-appropriate materials on sex and sexuality since to maintain them in ignorance can foster sexual abuse and poor sexual and emotional health. In addition, pornography by itself is unlikely to influence an individual's entire sexual expression and is moderated by parental involvement, including discussions, and by their sexual, emotional and cognitive responses as well as the type of material and the duration and intensity of viewing. Flood cites US and Australian surveys that found that ten percent of 10-17 year olds described themselves as very upset by unwanted exposure to pornography and that more than half of 11-17 year olds had experienced something on the internet they found offensive or disgusting. Some of these children and young people were upset by how their parents might react to knowledge of their exposure to such material, rather than by the content itself. Both age and sex mediated children's responses. Younger children were least likely to find pornographic images remarkable or memorable, older children were more likely to be upset or disturbed and teenagers only annoyed. Boys have been found to be more likely than girls to report feelings of sexual excitement on viewing pornography and 14-17 year old boys in one study were more likely to be positive about sexually explicit websites, while young women found them 'dumb', gross' or 'demeaning' to females. Correlations have been found between greater exposure to sexual content and young people's: beliefs that their peers are sexually active; more liberal sexual attitudes and sexual activity with perhaps decreased sexual intimacy; more infidelity and sexual 'addiction'. Flood argues that pornography is a poor sex educator since most 'is too explicit for younger children; most shows sex in unrealistic ways and neglects intimacy and romance; most pornography is sexist; and some is based on and eroticises violence' (p.395).

Research literature on commercialisation of childhood: Children as consumers and new marketing techniques

It is important to note that much research of relevance in this area focuses on consumption, and so is broader than commercialisation. In affluent countries, it is well established that young people are regular shoppers. For example, in a survey of 12,000 Norwegian school students aged 12-19 years, Brusdal and Lavik (2008) found that most had been shopping at least once in the previous week. However, almost half the boys had not been shopping in the previous week, whereas only a quarter of the girls had not, regardless of age. The analyses indicate that shopping did not prevent young people from being involved in other activities. However, the more money young people spent on clothes, the more friends-oriented and less family-oriented they were and greater friend-orientation was found to correlate with poorer school performance. For the young people overall, shopping seemed to be part of social life.

New marketing techniques

Children and young people live increasingly 'media saturated lives'. However, television retains its importance in children and young people's lives, so that, in Norway, for example, marketers successfully used TV shows in conjunction with

other marketing opportunities, to create and maintain brand loyalty and ensure the longevity of a fictional pirate called *Captain Sabertooth (Kaptein Sabeltann)*, which seeks to establish itself as a long-lasting "children's classic" rather than merely a passing 'craze' and so to market Kaptein Sabeltann merchandise (Hagen and Nakken, 2010).

Although television remains important, the internet has long been important to many children and young people and is gaining an increasing foothold on their lives (Hagen, 2010a; Raamat et al., 2008). Yet, most research on children and consumption disproportionately focuses on television and advertising and has not kept pace with the multiple ways in which children encounter new marketing techniques. In the UK context, recognition of the power and ubiquity of newer, electronic marketing techniques has led to a change in regulation. On 1 March 2011, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) will extend the rules in the UK Code of Non-broadcast Advertising, Sales Promotion and Direct Marketing, beyond regulation of advertisements in paid-for space and sales promotions to all marketing communications online, including the rules relating to misleading advertising, social responsibility and the protection of children. The remit will apply to all sectors and all businesses and organisations regardless of size and will cover advertisers marketing communications on their own websites and marketing communications in other non-paid-for space under their control, such as social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter (but not journalistic and editorial content and material related to causes and ideas). Advertisers who breach these standards will be subjected to two new sanctions; the removal of paid-for search advertising so that ads that link to the page hosting the non-compliant marketing communication may be removed with the agreement of the search engines and the ASA could place advertisements online highlighting an advertiser's continued non-compliance (CAP, 2011). The need for the change in regulation indicates the fast-moving nature of advertising so that regulators, children and young people all have to devise circumstances post hoc, for dealing with new strategies. In this context, it is also difficult for research to keep pace with assessing the impact of new forms of advertising.

Online shopping appears to be less important for young people than their other online activities. A survey of 7393 12-18 year olds in nine EU countries and 1350 young people in Quebec with follow-up interviews with 24 young people in each country found that almost all looked up information on the internet, but few reported shopping online (Mediappro, 2006). There are, however, national differences in this, so that young Danes, for example, are more familiar with online shopping and buying and view it more positively than do young Estonians, although young people in both countries report more confidence in physical shops and face-to-face contacts than online stores (Raamat et al., 2008). This is undoubtedly a circumstance that is likely to change as young people spend more time online. While there are undoubted advantages to online shopping, there is some (limited) evidence that children can buy things online that are now rarely sold to them in high-street shops (such as knives), although enforcement of online gambling regulations since 2005 shows that it is possible to have effective and efficient regulation of children's commercial transactions online (CHIS, 2010).

Social networking sites such as Facebook are highly commercial spaces, both in the sense that they are commercially owned and operated, and in that they frequently serve as vehicles for marketing or for gathering information about consumers' habits and preferences through tracking technology (Buckingham, 2011; Montgomery, 2007). They also, arguably, encourage commercially-defined constructions of identity since users are required to define themselves through their consumer preferences, and through specific acts of consumption. They are, for example, encouraged to use branded resources to design their personal profile pages, and to engage in communication with others; and they are effectively forced to 'advertise' and 'promote' themselves, or rather particular versions of themselves (Skaar, 2010). This is compelling for some young people at an age where questions about personal identity formation and establishing their positions amongst their peer groups are of central importance to them (Buckingham, 2011).

Advertisers are now estimated to spend more on internet advertising than on television advertising-£1.75 billion in the first half of 2009, with the UK apparently having the greatest market share for online advertising (Internet Advertising Bureau UK, 2009). Internet advertising techniques include ambient marketing, 'online behavioural advertising' and peer-to-peer techniques.

Willett (2008b) explains the shift in advertising with the proliferation of the internet and some of the issues it raises.

According to Montgomery [2007], advertising has been "turned on its head" by the web, where once brands sponsored a website and now sites are brands unto themselves. The sale of YouTube to Google in October 2006 for \$1.65 billion demonstrates this point; although Google already had a videosharing site, it did not have the audience that YouTube offered, and so YouTube was seen as a valuable brand identity that could be purchased. Neopets, a website which involves nurturing a pet and preparing it for contests, was an early adopter of immersive advertising. Interactions on the site take place in a branded world (e.g., users can "eat" at McDonalds), and it is easiest to acquire points for the survival of one's pet through consuming interactive advertising. Seiter describes how viewing ads, completing surveys, and doing advertised price comparisons through Neopets give users far more "Neopoints" than training one's pet or winning contests. Importantly, Seiter found that children had no awareness of the economics of the site, seeing it not as a commercial venture but as a lone individual's fun invention. According to Seiter, "the high level of involvement helped to dull [children's] awareness of the commercialism" (p. 100)

Self-regulation remains the norm for advertising to children, but legislation is increasingly being passed in this area (Nairn, 2008). In spring 2008 the EU Unfair Commercial Practices Directive covering misleading and hidden advertising became UK law. As a result, unlabelled advertorials, deceptive 'free offers' and direct exhortations to children to buy advertised products or persuade their parents or other adults to buy advertised products for them was prohibited. However, laws passed in one jurisdiction may be made irrelevant by internet advertising, which can

be produced in one jurisdiction and accessible in others where it would be banned if locally produced. Sites in the USA are not, for example, subject to the EU Directive on Unfair Commercial Practices. Similarly, television channels can be made available in countries with very different legislative frameworks and general outlook. Further difficulties arise in the definition of a child, since a 'minor' is variously defined in different legislation. 'The Information Commissioner – responsible for regulating UK data protection – takes the view that children over 12 are capable of giving their consent to their details being collected by third parties' (Nairn, 2008). The Children's Charities' Coalition on Internet Safety (CHIS, 2010) focuses on those under the age of majority (since full contractual status is only achieved at 18 years in the UK).

Mayo and Nairn (2009) point out that it is very difficult to gather evidence of undesirable activity on the internet since web pages can disappear without trace at any time. It is, therefore, important to spell out the principles that should not be breached. Nairn (2008) highlights these as deception (when adverts are so embedded in content that it is not clear that they are adverts); advergaming (now common advertising-sponsored video games that embed brand messages in entertaining animated adventures designed to promote brands; labelling of marketing messages in ways that children cannot understand as attempting to sell them things; unsuitable content for the age range that use particular websites; encouragement, however indirect, to ask parents for goods and viral or peer marketing, which facilitates and encourages the passing on of marketing messages to peers and so appeals more to sceptical young people than does traditional advertising. In addition, advertorials are also difficult for children to recognise as advertising (CHIS, 2010) and children can be encouraged to spend money in buying 'skins' to decorate their website (see the discussion of Ringrose, and Pomerantz, above). For all these marketing practices, 'the gap between seeing something you think you want and being able to get it had been potentially hugely truncated by the internet', particularly one-click purchasing (CHIS, 2010, p. 14).

Nairn (2008) gives the example of how marketing of Mattel's enduringly popular Barbie doll can draw in young children who are enjoying playing in a total virtual environment for Barbie.

For example, on www.barbie.com girls can move their avatar around a virtual world with a room, a closet, mail, games and a shopping centre. They can earn Barbie Bucks, shop at Furnifever, visit the Cafe, Cinema (only showing Barbie DVDs), Posh Pets, Park, Stylin' Shop, and Club Beauty. When we looked at this site in November 2008, some of these areas could only be entered by buying a subscription to the VIP club.

Girls are also offered a Barbie pre-paid Visa card, although this is not yet available in the UK. Eligibility for the card is determined by spending \$100 on Barbie products.

'Freemium' games are one of the fastest growing areas of internet revenue, with Zynga's FarmVille, that launched on Facebook in 2009, being a market leader. Such games are free to download, but contain premium items that can lead children to spend large amounts of money, often with parents being unaware that their children

are spending money on them. Kelly (2011) suggests that *'Whether harmless fun or a devious ploy to trick kids into spending their parents' money, one thing everyone can agree on is that freemium games are a major source of revenue'* (p. 15).

Much current concern focuses on the ways in which tracking cookies can be used to tailor advertising to children and young people. CHIS (2010) explains that such 'online behavioural advertising' (OBA) is justified on grounds of not bringing irrelevant advertising to people's attention. However, not only is OBA intrusive, without informed consent being provided, but companies such as Facebook, various music sites and Google collect the data and sell them on. According to research done for the Wall Street Journal, popular children's websites use more tracking technologies than do popular websites aimed at adults. In addition, an increasing proportion of eight to twelve-year-old children use social networking sites, even if these specify minimum ages above twelve years. The danger here is that children can reveal information about themselves that not only makes them targets of marketing, but that might subject them to bullying, sexual 'grooming' or sexual subjectification. Children may, through 'free' social networking sites, thus be behaving in ways that make it easy for their rights to privacy to be breached and to engage in the cyberbullying that shifts between students in multiple, new ways (Kofoed and Ringrose, 2010). This constitutes an area of concern for many national, European and other regulators (CHIS, 2010). The area is becoming more complex as location apps, make location-based services more feasible and advertising potentially more efficient. CHIS (2010) recommends that the UK follow the example of Spain and the USA and prescribes a definite lower age limit (still to be decided on) that applies solely to the internet and other remote environments. Children under the recommended age would have to have their parents' permission to disclose personal information. How compliance can best be achieved, however, is subject to debate. Nonetheless, the success of age restrictions on gambling sites indicates that such restrictions are possible.

An alternative approach is to include critical assessment of online advertising in the school curriculum. MediaSmart provides free teaching materials for this purpose as well as informing parents and children themselves. Digital Adwise is the third set of MediaSmart materials. It has been devised by Rebekah Willett, a media-literacy specialist at the Institute of Education (see her study discussed above) and consists of materials for primary schools designed to teach children to recognise and think about the adverts they see online. The lessons are freely accessible and aim to help children to identify and understand the commercial purpose behind online marketing techniques such as viral marketing, the use of social marketing sites and online games. It is designed for KS1 and KS2 students to use individually or in small groups on classroom computers. Arguably, as young people, teachers and parents become more aware of the ways in which e-commerce proliferates, children are likely to develop increased sophistication in relation to online advertising and personal disclosures comparable to the sophistication repeatedly found for more traditional television advertising (Young, 2010).

Families and 'pester power'

The term 'pester power' emerged in the USA in the 1970s and has been taken up in the UK, as a focus of one concern about the commercialisation of childhood. It is not so familiar in Scandinavian countries. The research evidence available on 'pester power' suggests that parents are influenced by a range of issues in buying products for their children, including value for money, educational qualities, and the longer-term potential for enjoyment and use of particular products, as well as the persistence with which children make requests.

Evans and Chandler (2006) collected data from 45 7-11 year olds (24 girls, 21 boys), some of whom were affluent and some of whom were impoverished. The children completed diaries over a weekend period prior to the researcher going into the school. They then took part in small group discussions and completed an activity to rewrite the end of a story in which the central characters discuss how they might negotiate with adults to obtain commodities such as toys, games and clothing. To investigate the role that parents occupy within the children's consumer biographies, nineteen parents (fourteen mothers and five fathers) aged between 28 and 47 years were individually interviewed mostly in their homes, with two fathers interviewed in their workplace. Evans and Chandler (2006) found that, regardless of the economic resources available to them, the parents take account of value for money, educational qualities, and the longer-term potential for enjoyment and use of particular products, as well as the persistence with which children make requests. They were influenced by their own childhood experiences (including to give children things they had not had). Mothers were reported to be the parent coordinating decisions about children's consumption. For the children, consumption was a way of positioning themselves and others in their peer groups. Fears of risks outside the household affected parents who lived in poorer areas somewhat more than those who lived in more affluent areas.

In a study described above, (Pole et al., 2005), Boden (2006) found that in the case of children's clothing, parents consider factors such as quality, value for money and age-appropriateness as well as branding. Boden also found that children can influence their parents' tastes in clothing, helping to 'modernise' their personal style; a form of 'reverse socialisation', first identified by Karin Ekström (2007) in Sweden, which also applies in areas such as technology and media consumption (Livingstone, 2009). Thomson, Laing and McKee (2007) studied 20 middle class Scottish families with at least one child aged 13-15 years and found that children had direct influence over their family purchase decisions and were sophisticated in the range of strategies they used.

From her US ethnographic study, Pugh (2009) suggests that consumption fits into an 'economy of dignity' in that access to consumer culture is a key means of establishing status and acceptance for young people as well as a demonstration that they are sufficiently cared-for by their parents. They, therefore, constantly compete over the amount and value of possessions and experience tension between the desire to fit in with a particular group and the desire to be individual. Pugh suggests that consumption is not simply a matter of acquiring goods, but also of experiences.

Children's education and hobbies are high on the list of expenses parents consider legitimate and important (c.f. Waerdahl et al., 2009). According to Pugh, middle-class parents are able to purchase not only goods for their children, but also the social contexts in which their children live, such as neighbourhoods, schools, childcare, holidays and out-of-school activities. They may well prioritise this over the accumulation of 'stuff'. The different 'pathways' parents are able to buy for their children further reinforce segregation and inequality. This fits with Buckingham's (2011) point that childhood is being commercialised in many more ways than just the buying of goods since their environments and educational institutions are increasingly commercialised.

Since 2004, Ridge (2007) has been conducting a qualitative, longitudinal study of low-income working family life that involves interviews with 50 low-income lone mothers and 61 of their children who were initially aged between eight and fourteen years. Ridge (2002; 2007) found that children in such families showed a complex understanding of their parents' financial constraints. They were, therefore, often reluctant to ask their parents to buy things they thought their parents could not afford. This fits with findings from other literature. For example, Elizabeth Chin's (2001) ethnographic research showed that black 10-year olds in an impoverished neighbourhood also tried to protect their parents by moderating their demands in order to avoid causing additional stress. This thoughtfulness was particularly observed in the girls in the study. In a review of qualitative studies on children living in poverty, Ridge (2011) conducted a review of qualitative research exploring the lives and experiences of low-income children in the UK. She found that children often felt that family needs were in tension with their own social and material needs and desires and with the advantages and opportunities enjoyed by their more affluent peers. Children were sensitive to the possibility that lone parents might feel lonely and ashamed by their poverty and that mothers and fathers might argue about money. There were thus everyday social and emotional costs to living in poverty.

Just as children tried to protect their parents, so parents living in poverty tried to protect their children from the stigma of poverty. They would, for example, sometimes go without things in order to provide their children with high-status items of clothing (something that Gordon et al., 2006 and Middleton et al., 1998 have also found). The situation is different for families with comfortable amounts of disposable income, where children are more likely strategically to return to purchase requests, knowing how best to persuade their parents (Croghan et al., 2006).

Catriona Nash (2009) conducted an interview study with mothers and fathers in three families and four focus groups with their 5-10 year old children and other children in Ireland. While her sample is very small, the study illuminates how parents and children negotiate purchase requests. She concludes that the parent-child purchase relationship is viewed as a game by both parents and children and is a well-rehearsed game in which parents and children understand each other's roles. Both parents and children balanced their requests and refusals according to principles that included the perceived benefits of a product, price and the money available. The

balance of power between parents and children shifted in relation to particular requests. Mothers received the greater part of the requests because they spent more time with children and did the shopping. However, children knew which of their parents was more likely to be sympathetic to particular requests (the 'soft target') and played parents off against each other. The children did not pester their parents and their purchase requests were considered similar to any other requests children might make to their parents. They were considered natural child behaviour and children understood and accepted that refusals were a possible outcome of their purchase requests and experienced no undue distress. Television was a minor source of such requests with peers, parents and in-store influences being claimed to be more important. Parents in particular considered stores influential on such requests. In making their decisions about what to buy for their children, Boulton (2009) found that mothers' considerations include how other people will view their children. These findings fit with a larger study (20 middle class Scottish families) that found that parents viewed children's strategies for influencing their purchase decisions positively and that negotiations were generally relaxed, particularly where children drew on product-related knowledge and information (Thomson, Laing and McKee, 2007).

Hamilton (2009) conducted a study of 30 Northern Ireland low-income rural families with a child under 18 years living at home that involved individual and joint interviews with family members on their everyday lives and consumption practices. Her findings are consistent with those of Nash (2009). She found that these low-income families had various strategies to avoid conflict over consumption decisions that included allocating responsibility for the budget to one person, ensuring open communications about the family's financial situation and granting children their requests where possible. These strategies were both an important coping strategy for dealing with life on a very limited budget and a response to living on limited money. There was strong evidence of family cohesion. However, conflicts could arise if children disregarded financial limitations, which some did occasionally. This occasional disregard highlights the complexity of the relations children and young people have to negotiate in consumption. Phoenix (2009), for example, found that when 12-18 year old UK young people who knew that their families were living in poverty asked for money for consumption (which was rare); this was because children were concerned about their place in their peer group.

Consumption in the peer group

'Peer pressure' is frequently perceived as a key influence on children's requests for purchases and, as we have seen above is often considered by parents a compelling reason for trying to buy children material goods in order to prevent them from being teased or bullied. Evans and Chandler (2006), for example, found that children as young as seven years were very aware of the need to 'fit in' with friends and the possibility of being marginalised if they wore the 'wrong' clothes or failed to get the latest consumer objects (see also the discussion of Pugh's (2009) notion of the 'economy of dignity' among schoolchildren, discussed above). Children are, therefore, in constant competition over the amount and value of their possessions.

Anne Martensen (2007) conducted a study of Danish 'tweens and found that most of her sample considered that a mobile phone is important in their lives partly because of the social status it confers. As such, it is a pass to being accepted among friends, a tool for teasing classmates and a site of envy of classmates who have a 'cooler' phone.

Most of the research here looks at older children (teenagers) and points to a fundamental tension between the desire to affiliate and belong to the group and the desire to assert individual autonomy (Buckingham, in press 2011), between 'fitting in' and 'sticking out' (Miles et al., 1998). Milner (2004) found that US school students use the symbols, logos and products of the commercial market as means of claiming and marking out status hierarchies, to define social power and solidarity, to impose conformity to the norms of the group, and to express resistance to adult authority. According to Milner (2004), adolescents have considerable autonomy but little real economic or political power, so they use the power they have to create status systems based on consumption.

Similar processes are apparent in children's use of branded clothing (Buckingham, 2011). As with the development of consumption in youth culture and with recognition of childhood sexuality, this is not a new phenomenon. Rose (2010) has shown how rapid innovations in design – more in boys' clothing than in girls' – in the late nineteenth century were used to drive consumer demand. This in turn became a focus of competitiveness and bullying in the playground. In recent years, however, the emphasis appears to have shifted from clothing in general to brands more specifically: as brand names and logos have increasingly been on display on the clothing itself, brands themselves have come to be used as key signifiers – as means of making claims about one's own identity, and of judging others (Phoenix, 2009).

This is not to imply that brands are equally important for all young people, or always in the same ways. While some studies report that girls are more 'fashion-conscious' than boys (Pole et al., 2005), others suggest that boys are more inclined to show an interest in brands *per se* (especially in relation to sportswear) than girls (Phoenix, 2009). While younger teenagers may have less disposable income, they have been found to more interested in brands than older teenagers (Croghan et al., 2006). There can also be resistance among some older young people to the prominence of brands, although of course this resistance might itself be seen as a form of statement about identity. Most young people are keen to claim that they are by no means 'fashion victims' or 'followers of the crowd' (Phoenix, 2009): although there is ample evidence from research of the ways in which children use brands to mark out particular social identities, to define group norms, and to establish hierarchies of status through consumption (Kenway and Bullen, 2001).

Consumption and clothes style can serve to reinforce stereotypical assumptions and inequalities based around gender (Frosh et al., 2002; Phoenix et al., 2009; Swain, 2002). Social class differences are also relevant here. In a quantitative comparative study of, low- and high-income teenagers, Isaksen and Roper (2008) found that low-income teenagers are less clear in their self-concept and are more susceptible to

interpersonal influence than their high-income counterparts. They suggest that an inability to “keep up” with the latest fashion trends (due to restricted consumption opportunities) may result in a damaged self-concept among low-income teenagers, which leads to heightened susceptibility to consumption pressures and hence intensifies the negative socio-psychological impacts of living in poverty.

In her review of literature on UK children living in poverty, Ridge (2011) suggests that ‘children’s accounts highlighted three main areas of pressure: adequacy of income; a deficiency of material resources; and a lack of key material and symbolic markers of social inclusion in childhood such as branded goods and trainers. For children ‘not having enough money’ — created considerable material, social and familial tensions. Constrained access to material goods and childhood possessions, toys, bikes, games and appropriate clothing was a common experience. However, going without was not restricted to toys and leisure goods — some children were also going without food, bedding, towels and other essential everyday items. Poverty, particularly poverty sustained over time, meant that children were not only unable to keep up with the purchases and possessions of their peers but also often unable to replace lost, stolen or broken items.

Having appropriate clothes and trainers was also an important concern for children. Wearing the ‘right’ trainers conferred popularity and ‘coolness’. In a study of the consumption of sports shoes (‘trainers’) by less affluent children in the UK (Elliott and Leonard, 2004), the children spoke about how they had been bullied and ridiculed by their peers for wearing the ‘wrong’ brands; and described how they would buy branded trainers partly in order to prevent this and to disguise the reality of their economic situation at home. Similar findings emerge from a study of 12-18 year olds conducted by Croghan et al. (2006). ‘Style failure’ – resulting from the inability to afford branded clothing – was seen as a justification for discrimination and exclusion. Children who failed to wear the correct branded clothing were marginalised, teased or harassed. As a result, low-income children sometimes struggled to get the ‘right’ trainers.

This issue, of differentials between children from low and high-income households and hence struggles over differential ability to consume, and so to construct identities, may be particularly relevant for the UK, which continues to fare relatively badly in comparisons with affluent countries. The UNICEF Report Card 9, ‘*Children Left Behind*’ (2010) measures how far the most disadvantaged children have fallen behind those at the median level in health, educational and material well-being in 24 countries. The UK is ranked alongside countries such as Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic in the bottom two fifths of countries. The UNICEF (2010) analysis suggests that UK government spending has prevented many children from falling into poverty, but the UK has a particularly high level of inequality in access to basic educational resources at home. They conclude ‘that children are falling significantly further behind in some countries than in others. In particular, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, and Switzerland are leading the way in limiting how far behind the least advantaged children are allowed to fall’ (UNICEF, 2010).

According to Buckingham (2011), research in this area could be seen to lend support to popular beliefs about the harmful influence of the intersection of consumerism and of 'peer pressure'. Yet there is no evidence that the existence of branded goods in itself *causes* greater conflict within the peer group than would be occurring otherwise: media and consumer products may serve as a vehicle for some undesirable aspects of peer group interaction, but they do not create them. Equally, the term 'peer pressure' seems to conceive of children as powerless victims rather than active participants who negotiate their peer group relations (Buckingham, in press, 2011).

International research on commercialisation

There have been several recent studies conducted in the Netherlands of the 'unintended effects' of television advertising, including increased family conflict, materialistic values, 'life dissatisfaction' and feelings of unhappiness and disappointment (Buijzen and Valkenburg, 2003, 2005). These consequences appear to be more acute for younger children, whose lack of knowledge and experience is believed to render them more vulnerable to persuasion. As a result of their inability to delay gratification and their tendency to use less sophisticated techniques in seeking to persuade parents, this is seen to lead to conflict within families. However, these studies only establish associations between these different variables: they do not provide evidence of causal relationships.

The same researchers have also explored the ways in which parents might mediate the effects of advertising (including of food), and how this relates to family 'communication styles' (Buijzen, 2007, 2009; Buijzen and Mens, 2007). In general, it seems that 'active' mediation, which entails talking to your children about what they watch, is more effective than 'restrictive' mediation, which attempts to reduce their exposure – suggesting that a 'media literacy' approach might be effective in countering the influence of television advertising. However, these studies tend to isolate 'communication styles' from other aspects of family life and to reduce the issue of families' consumer behaviour to a simple cause-and-effect equation. They are unlikely, therefore, to capture the complexity of 'unintended effects' of television advertising and how they may be countered. In a Canadian questionnaire study of 307 school students with a mean age of 16.4 years, Kim, Lee and Tomiuk (2009) asked young people about their consumption decisions. According to their questionnaire answers, mothers (but not fathers) were highly influential on both girls' and boys' purchasing decisions.

More qualitative studies of family life on supermarket shopping and food buying in Scandinavia (e.g. Gram, 2010; Nørgaard and Brunsø, 2010) suggest that children pragmatically adopt a range of strategies in requesting purchases, few of which entail anything that might be defined as 'pestering'. Likewise, parents' responses do not suggest that such requests frequently result in conflict or that they are mostly annoying or exasperating; and few children seem disappointed by their parents' refusals. Significantly, a relatively small proportion of such requests appeared to be caused or prompted by advertising; and advertising declines in significance as children get older. The overall picture that emerges here is not of families riven by

conflict, unhappiness and materialistic attitudes. This fits with Nash's (2009) small-scale research in Ireland suggesting that parent and children's negotiations of purchase requests have a game-like format and are generally not sources of stress.

Pugh's (2009) three year ethnographic study of US families (published as *Longing and Belonging*) explores how commercial forces connect with the social meanings surrounding parental care. She suggests that this plays out in very different ways across social classes. In general, the affluent parents in her study are highly ambivalent about their children's involvement in consumer culture. They struggle to restrain their children's consumer desires, for example by means of rules and allowances; they eschew conspicuous consumption in favour of 'symbolic deprivation'; and in some instances express considerable disdain for children's tastes and for commercial values more broadly. Yet, those upwardly mobile parents who had experienced feelings of deprivation in their own childhood sought to give their children 'the things they never had', sponsoring their consumption even as they attempt to restrict it. By contrast, the low-income parents are less ambivalent. They are highly sensitive to their children's feelings of exclusion from the peer group, and seek to protect them from the stigma of poverty by providing them with high-status clothing and branded goods. They regard buying things for their children as an unequivocal sign of 'good parenting', and do not express moral qualms about the quantity of possessions their children have. However, due to the cyclical and insecure nature of low-wage employment, their ability to provide for their children is more intermittent: periods of constraint alternate with periods of 'symbolic indulgence' or 'windfall childrearing'. It was not the case that the children of low-income parents asked for things because they were subjected to commercial pressures. Rather, they wanted particular commodities in order to be able to join in conversations at school. It was for these reasons that low-income parents were prepared to go without things themselves in order to buy things for their children (as reported in the Saga and Netsmum, 2010, research). Even when they are under financial constraints, families prioritize spending that will help their children to feel 'normal' within their peer groups (Pugh, 2010).

A study of lunch-box choices of low-income British school children provides support for these analyses. Roper and La Niece (2009) interviewed 30 7-, 11- and 14 year olds and found that peers become more influential in children's consumption decisions as they got older and that there is a shift from understanding of products as functional to understanding them as material symbols of identity so that brands become crucially important by 11 years for these fast moving consumer goods.

Alcohol advertising and young people

There is a vast literature, including research and research reviews on different kinds of alcohol advertising and its impact on young people and, occasionally, on children.

The background to this attention partly relates to what appears to be a well-documented change in young people's pattern of drinking. Specifically, many young

people now drink to get drunk, rather than becoming drunk as a by-product of drinking. While this shift is widely acknowledged in the literature, it is harder to establish that alcohol consumption is higher now than it was, given that sales of taxable alcoholic products have increased as fewer people have made their own alcohol since the 1950s. There are also difficulties in reconciling different accounts of alcohol consumption, particularly since some measures focus on numbers of people who consume alcohol, while some focus on frequency of consumption and/or consumption to excessive levels (Gunter, Hansen and Touri, 2010). There is concern, however, that the earlier young people start drinking, the more likely they are to experience alcohol-related problems later in life (Jernigan, 2009) and even in their teenage years. Strandheim and colleagues analysed questionnaires from 8,983 young people (all 13-19 year olds attending schools in one county in Norway) and found that 80% of the young people reported having tried alcohol and 29% reported more than 10 previous intoxications. The young people's perceptions of ill health were related to the frequency of their alcohol intoxication.

Some literature suggests that, while there has been a slight drop in numbers of young people consuming alcohol, that more drink excessively or engage in 'binge drinking' (which is variously defined to range from drinking for days at a time to consumption of more than five alcoholic drinks or eight units in one session) (Cullen, 2010; Griffin et al., 2010). Martinic and Measham (2008) suggest that 'extreme drinking' would be more accurate than 'binge drinking' since it acknowledges that this is a social and cultural distinction between acceptable and unacceptable levels of alcohol consumption. A further complication is that surveys within and across countries, frequently focus on young people of different ages. While, therefore, there are data on 11-24 year olds, different studies are not necessarily comparable (Gunter et al., 2010). Excessive drinking may be a phase that successive generations of young people pass through in many societies. However, some young people pose dangers to themselves and to other people when drinking excessively. Self-report evidence over time indicates that 'binge drinking' is more prevalent among the under 24s, than the over 24s.

Impact of alcohol advertising on young people

A substantial body of research agrees that 'there is a relationship between exposure to advertising or promotion and subsequent alcohol consumption' (Templeton, 2009: 31). There are numerous reviews of the influence of advertising of alcohol on young people. Two systematic reviews focusing on longitudinal data were published in 2009, one in Smith and Foxcroft (n.d.; 2009) and in Smith (n.d.) was funded by the Alcohol Education and Research Council and the other by Anderson et al. (2009). The Smith and Foxcroft systematic review aimed 'to evaluate the likelihood that exposure to alcohol advertising, marketing and portrayal of alcohol increases self-reported alcohol use' as a substantive outcome, rather than brand awareness or attitudes or intention towards drinking. They included only prospective (longitudinal) studies in young people, with a view to gaining an understanding of causation and not just association. Smith and Foxcroft screened 915 potentially relevant articles and found nine, reporting seven studies that fitted their criteria. Five studies were conducted in the USA, one in Belgium and one in New Zealand. Two studies fitting

the criteria were published after the review began and showed the same findings but were not included post hoc. The age ranges were mixed and covered a range from 11 to 26 years. Five studies included only two data-collection points. The measures for exposure to alcohol advertising were disparate, but all were self-report measures. Over 13,000 young people were participants in the seven studies. The findings indicate that there is some evidence for an association between prior exposure to advertising and marketing of alcohol and subsequent drinking in young people. This is the case for both direct advertising (broadcast and print) and promotions and product placement. The Smith and Foxcroft review is based on only seven out of hundreds of possible studies and, even though it is a systematic review, it cannot disentangle possibly confounding factors such as family and peer influences and past experiences. It also cannot explain the processes by which the influence occurs. In the New Zealand study they include, for example, there was some reliance on retrospective memory for advertisements as well as prospective liking of alcohol advertising. It is also important to note that one of the authors of the review declared previous funding from the alcohol industry (Diageo).

The Anderson et al., (2009) systematic review aimed to assess the impact of alcohol advertising and media exposure on future adolescent alcohol use. It reviewed longitudinal studies that assessed the exposure of young people aged 18 years or less to commercial communications and media and alcohol drinking behaviour at baseline, and assessed alcohol drinking behaviour at follow-up. It selected thirteen longitudinal studies from an initial trawl of 810 titles. These followed up a total of over 38,000 young people and, as with the Smith and Foxcroft review, measured exposure to advertising and promotion in a variety of ways, including estimates of the volume of media and advertising exposure, ownership of branded merchandise, recall and receptivity, and, in one study, expenditure on advertisements. The young people included in the 13 studies ranged in age from 10 to 21 years at baseline and some of the studies (in the United States, Belgium and New Zealand) were the same as those examined in the Smith and Foxcroft review. In addition one study was included from Germany and there were ten studies from the USA. The period of longitudinal follow-up ranged from eight to 96 months and the points at which follow up occurred varied. As in the Smith and Foxcroft study, there was variation in the strength of association, and the degree to which potential confounders were controlled for. One study tested the impact of outdoor advertising placed near schools and failed to detect an impact on alcohol use, but found an impact on intentions to use. However, there was a consistent suggestion that exposure to media and commercial communications on alcohol is associated with the likelihood that adolescents will start to drink alcohol, and with increased drinking if they are already using alcohol.

While these reviews offer strong support for the influence of advertising, such systematic reviews are limited both by the few studies that fit systematic review criteria and by problems such as attrition in the individual studies as well as incommensurability in, for example, ages studied, the different mixes of ethnic groups or type of advertising and media explored and the fact that the baseline data for the seven studies in the Smith and Foxcroft (2009) review were collected at different points over the 13 years from 1990 to 2003 and in the Anderson et al.,

study, this was 18 years (from 1990 to 2008). It is, in addition, important to recognise that correlation is sometimes assumed to connote causality, when the evidence base does not warrant a conclusion in either direction.

A careful review of recent literature was conducted by Gordon, Hastings and Moodie (2010) to update the literature since they previously conducted a review in 2005 and to consider whether the marketing of alcohol to young people should be regulated. The 2005 review (Hastings et al., 2005) argued that, while econometric studies (that examine links between advertising expenditure and the sales of alcoholic beverages) have shown little effect of advertising on young people's drinking, more focused consumer studies do. Yet, it is difficult categorically to demonstrate causality and effect, and more research is needed on the cumulative effects of marketing. In the 2010 update Gordon and his colleagues consider literature that is econometric, consumer studies (that focus on the individual) and other marketing channels such as exposure to alcohol in films, willingness to use alcohol-branded promotional items and the effects of price and point of sale. They review large-scale studies, some of which are longitudinal, mostly in the USA, but also in the UK (Gunter et al., 2009). They conclude that recent studies if well designed show evidence that alcohol marketing is having an effect on youth alcohol consumption akin to the effects of advertising on sales of tobacco and particular food items. They advocate further, longitudinal research in this area, but point to the EU AMPHORA project that started in 2009, targeting Germany, Italy, Poland and the Netherlands and longitudinal research in the UK (Gordon and Harris) as potentially helpful in strengthening the evidence base. They also advocate further research on 'below line marketing channels used by the alcohol industry such as sponsorship, social networking sites, experiential marketing, Short Message Service (SMS) and viral marketing' and of the 'cumulative effect that all forms of alcohol marketing, as opposed to just one or two, have on youth drinking behaviour' (p. 97). While they are committed to regulation, their conclusions on regulating alcohol marketing leave open the options available in different countries, but argue that no one policy (in terms of bans, state regulation and self regulation) will be sufficient in itself:

Whether governments decide to embrace advertising bans such as in Norway, continue with self-regulatory systems such as in the UK, impose statutory regulation such as a ban on advertising products over 2.5% ABV, as in Sweden, or indeed follow plans to introduce minimum pricing, as proposed in Scotland, none of these options in isolation will effectively curb youth drinking. A multifaceted, long-term and comprehensive package of interventions is required to attempt to tackle the problem. No measure can act as a definitive measure to tackle young people's drinking, and regulation should be complemented with other policy levers and interventions, and given adequate time to have an effect.

Key facets of any regulatory system will be independent monitoring to assess the effectiveness of the system and record new marketing techniques and their potential effect. Moreover to prevent any breaches of the rules as much as possible, pre-vetting and copy advice should be available. The involvement of increased numbers of independent lay people on adjudication juries to rule on any breaches of regulation would be sensible.

Further, stronger and more robust penalties for non-compliance, such as bans on marketing products for a specific time period, may prove to be suitable deterrents. Finally, clearer guidance for the public concerning regulatory rules and the complaints procedures would allow for a more balanced assessment of whether regulation works, or indeed bans are necessitated. (p. 96)

The empirical (rather than review) literature published in the last three years provides insights into the ways in which advertising and marketing have an impact on young people. One way is in producing intention to drink by making alcohol part of young people's social imaginary. The Gordon and Harris longitudinal study (cited above) is not yet complete, but a cross-sectional analysis of 920 second-year pupils (12-14 years) in Scotland, examining 15 kinds of alcohol marketing, including in new media, has been published (Gordon et al., 2010). They conclude that awareness of, and involvement with, marketing of alcohol increases young people's intention to drink and actual drinking behaviour. They argue for the limiting of young people's exposure to alcohol marketing. In terms of actual behaviour, Engels et al., (2009) conducted an experiment in a naturalistic setting (a bar lab) where young adult pairs were randomly assigned to one of four conditions for watching alcohol portrayals and/or alcohol commercials. They found that those who were given exposure or commercials drank more than those who did not see alcohol portrayed (1.5 glasses more on average over an hour).

There are also numerous articles that focus on different forms of advertising and marketing. In the USA, for example, various studies have been done on the effect of movie exposure (i.e. product placement) on young people's drinking. Wills et al., 2010 conducted a telephone interview with 6522 randomly selected 10-14 year olds in 2003 in the USA, on media exposure, alcohol use and other issues. The young people were asked if they had seen particular popular films. These were viewed by the researchers, who recorded the number of seconds of alcohol use in each film as a measure of exposure. Three follow-up-interviews were conducted at eight month intervals, ending with a sample of 4,574 at Time 4. These investigated the participants' alcohol use, and that of their friends and parents together with their expectations of alcohol use. They were then given questionnaires about alcohol problems and consequences. The researchers used longitudinal structural modelling to test whether exposure to alcohol cues is prospectively related to alcohol problems. The analyses indicate a significant effect that was related to an increase over time in the participants' alcohol use and increase in their friends' alcohol use, which led to problems associated with alcohol-linked rebelliousness. Parental warmth and responsiveness had a protective effect, as did good school performance at Time 1. In the multiple publications from the study (e.g. Cin et al., 2008; 2010), the researchers recognise that cognitions, in terms of prototypes and expectancies as well as alcohol norms are all important. However, while such findings seem compelling, it is important to remember that they are based on very brief contacts with young people (about 20 minutes at each time point) and for a period in the life course earlier than the most marked drinking might be expected. They have also not focused on gendered, socioeconomic or ethnicised differences amongst their large

sample. In addition, the independent variable (viewing alcohol use in films) is arguably much less important than the other, everyday activities and interactions 10-14-year-old children are likely to have and to experience as important.

Other studies in this area show that, although manufacturers deny that they market to underage young people, they are more likely to advertise alcohol considered likely to be drunk by young people in magazines for young people (12-20 year olds) than in magazines for older people (King et al., 2009). In a study of 12 hours of output from six radio stations targeting youth audiences in England, Daykin et al., (2009) found that, over the Christmas period in 2007, there were 703 comments made on alcohol, 244 of which involved the presenters. These mostly connected drinking with partying, socializing and having a good time. The researchers argue that broadcasting conventions make it difficult to challenge discourses of excessive drinking so that young people are exposed to taken-for-granted ideas that this is usual and acceptable. The research did not, however, include young people's viewpoints and experiences.

Young people's perspectives

The literature on young people, advertising and alcohol use also consists of studies that focus on young people's perspectives. An Australian study, for example, focused on Alcohol Energy drinks, which are pre-mixed alcohol with energy drinks that have been available in Australia since 2000. Previous studies have shown that these reduce perceptions of alcohol intoxication. Jones and Barrie (2009) conducted four focus groups with 21 students aged 18-25 at a regional university. The young people spontaneously mentioned that they consumed Jäger bombs and Red Bull and vodka Alcohol Energy Drinks in groups of friends and used them as group bonding experiences to heighten the night's overall level of fun. They were thus a social drink choice that was consumed in clubs and bars and drunk to dangerous levels when drunk in home settings. They were important for young people's 'image'.

That alcohol is important to young people's identities is important to understanding why excess drinking has become popular, including with groups of young women (Cullen, 2010; Griffin et al., 2010). Qualitative research shows that 13-15 year olds have sophisticated levels of awareness of alcohol marketing and of cost, availability and Alcohol by Volume (ABV) (Gordon et al., 2010). Thus, the 64 young people in eight focus groups interviewed by Gordon et al., talked about sports sponsorship, internet pop ups and the image of drinks like WKD, Bacardi Breezer and Buckfast. The young people's understanding of both marketing and image may be why the ten marketing practitioners interviewed by Gordon et al., (2010) talked about advertisers pushing the rules to target young people and recognised that the industry may experience a crackdown a consequence of sustained binge drinking.

'It is a realistic scenario to say that in five years time alcohol advertising will be banned . . . everyone has got to behave as an industry pretty impeccably to stop that process speeding up'. (Male, Marketing Account Manager, Scotland). (Gordon et al., 2010: 269).

Younger children were interviewed in six friendship pairs (three girls and three boys) of 10-12 year olds in Australia and asked about the place of sport and watching sport in their lives (Jones et al., 2010). During the interviews, the children were shown photographs from advertisements broadcast during the One Day cricket finals that did not have product shots or brand names included to check their memories. There was considerable variability in children's recall of the advertisements, but they consistently recognised VB (beer) and the Bundaberg (rum) advertisements. They confirmed the findings of previous research that there is an association between liking advertisements and features such as humour, music and mascots. The children were aware of celebrity endorsement of products and some preferred products endorsed in these ways. Overall, alcohol was identified as a product preferred by males, young people, people who were funny and men who play sport. In terms of the advertisements themselves, Jones and her colleagues suggest that some of the content of alcohol advertisements shown during sporting broadcasts appeared to be at odds with the Australian self-regulatory code. Although not technically in breach of the specific clause in the ABAC (2004), they showed 'strategic ambiguity'.

...although the alcohol advertisements coded for this study do not show evidence of the use of children or adolescent models (which is prohibited in the ABAC), the presence of other features known to be appealing to children such as humour, mascots (e.g. Bundy Bear) or cartoon-like characters (e.g. the Boony doll3) are certainly ambiguous in relation to their 'strong or evident appeal to children or adolescents'. We note that alcohol advertisements broadcast during the cricket, which had major alcohol sponsors) were twice as likely to use human models and humour as those broadcast during the tennis (with no major alcohol sponsors). Such results also prompt the need for a review of the current ABAC, and specifically the inclusion of clearly stated clauses which prohibit or limit the use of features that have been shown in research to have evident appeal to a younger audience. (Jones et al., 2010: 71).

The three studies above investigate children and young people's perspectives in small-scale qualitative research. Nash, Pine and Messer (2009) conducted a quantitative study to investigate 7-10 year old British children's implicit knowledge of alcohol advertisements. They found that the children liked alcohol advertisements on television and have complex knowledge that they cannot articulate, but that can be tapped using methods designed to test implicit knowledge. These involved computer presentations of simple questions and smiley faces. As in the Jones et al., (2010) study, the children liked best simple advertisements that included humour and cartoons as well as the inclusion of an animal or character. The children felt they would like to try those alcohol products for which they liked the advertisements. This study is important in both taking seriously the perspective of younger children, and demonstrating that young children already have perspectives on alcohol, long before they try it, and in showing differences between children' in their responses to alcohol advertising. Boys, for example, were found to like alcohol advertisements, and particularly beer advertisements, more than girls do. Perhaps surprisingly, older children were less likely to say that they wanted to try an alcoholic product. However, Nash et al., suggest that this may be because the older children are

cognitively more able to separate feelings about the advert from feelings about the product and to offer more morally 'correct' responses.

The impact of alcohol advertising on young people's drinking

Although the bulk of the research available finds that young people are directly influenced by advertising and other forms of marketing, there is no easy unanimity about this. For example, Gunter et al., (2009; 2010) report the findings of a UK questionnaire-based survey of 17-21 year olds that questioned them about their alcohol consumption habits, the alcohol they consume and parental and peer-group behaviour related to drinking over their lifetimes, the past year and past month. They found no impact of advertising on general alcohol consumption, although there was a relationship between advertising of alcohol and consumption of cider and alcopops (which may be akin to young students' liking for Alcohol Energy Drinks in the Jones and Barrie (2009) Australian study. It is also important to recognise (as Gunter et al., 2010) point out, that there is a great deal of alcohol consumption around the world, including in places where alcohol is never advertised. Similarly, in an earlier study, Beccaria and Sande (2003) argue that the use of alcohol in 'wet and dry drinking cultures' (Italy and Norway respectively) have moved closer to each other, despite the lack of advertising of alcohol in Norway. They suggest that in local and global youth cultures, use of alcohol for intoxication has become a 'rite of passage' signalling a move away from childhood. There is a long history of studying young Norwegians' drinking games (e.g. Pederson, 1990).

Further criticism of the notion that there is a direct relationship between alcohol advertising and young people's alcohol use is provided in commentaries on the research done by Cine et al. (2008, discussed above). For example, Ray and Chugh (2008) argue for a more complicated approach to the relationship using the examples of Indian cinema. Alcohol use is argued to be increasing in India (Prasad, 2009). Although direct alcohol advertising is prohibited in India, it occurs indirectly in numerous ways in the thriving film industry, including in ways that romanticise it, that associate it with villainy and with humour, as well as in 'reality-based cinema' that shows devastating consequences. Ray and Chugh (2008) thus argue for awareness and not mere exposure and recognition that audiences are 'smart'. Overall, the European Centre for Monitoring Alcohol Marketing or EUCAM, established in 2007 by the National Foundation for Alcohol Prevention in the Netherlands with Nordic and Italian support concludes that 'the relationship between alcohol marketing and alcohol consumption is too complex for a straightforward yes or no'.

It is striking that there are some gaps in work on alcohol, advertising and marketing. In particular, there remains much to be known about the impact of alcohol advertising on different groups of young people and children. However, as Jones and Jernigan (2010) point out in the editorial to a special issue in the Journal of Public Affairs:

'there is also an urgent need for research into the nature, extent and effects of other forms of alcohol marketing; and particularly those forms of

marketing that are particularly salient to today's young people, such as digital communications (including social media, online video, mobile networks and immersive virtual reality sites), event sponsorship and point-of-sale promotions.

Even more importantly, given the increasing body of evidence demonstrating the harmful impact of alcohol marketing on young people's alcohol-related attitudes and behaviours, there is an urgent need for governments at all levels to get serious about the regulation of alcohol marketing. At the very least, policy makers need to acknowledge that the evidence from around the globe clearly demonstrates that self-regulation has failed and that there is a need for comprehensive and consistent government regulation of alcohol advertising. (p. 4).

This is a view that finds favour with a number of researchers who would like to see alcohol advertising banned or more tightly regulated (e.g. Anderson, 2009; Hastings et al., 2010a). Hastings and his colleagues (2010b) conducted an analysis of internal marketing documents from alcohol producers on behalf of the House of Commons Health Select Committee alcohol inquiry. They concluded that self regulation of UK alcohol advertising had failed and made seven proposals designed to protect children and young people from alcohol advertising:

- *Billboards and posters should not be located within 100 m of a school*
- *A 9 pm watershed should be introduced for television advertising. Cinema advertising for alcohol should be restricted to films classified as 18*
- *TV and radio advertisements for alcohol should be restricted to a maximum of 25% of total advertising and no more than two alcohol advertisements should appear in one commercial break*
- *No medium or event should be used to promote alcohol if more than 10% of its audience or readership are 10-17 years of age*
- *Alcohol promotion should not be permitted on social networking sites*
- *Age restrictions should be required on any website that includes alcohol promotion—this would cover sites of those receiving alcohol sponsorship and corporate alcohol websites*
- *Efforts should be made to limit the promotion of alcohol on university and college campuses*

The House of Commons Health Committee (2010) considered a comprehensive range of research and other evidence on alcohol and health. A year after its publication, the UK government announced a plan to introduce one policy that has been argued to be likely to have an impact on young people's drinking behaviour;

minimum pricing for alcohol. In England and Wales, this means that a can of lager would cost a minimum of 38p and a litre bottle of vodka would be at least £10.71. This has not satisfied all health campaigners, with many saying it is too low to have an impact. Such arguments may be justified since, according to a BBC report (18.1.2011), the drinks industry has described the proposals as a pragmatic solution.

While this pricing by itself is unlikely to have a marked impact on young people's drinking behaviour, it is important to remember that advertising is not the only factor identified as affecting young people's drinking. In particular, wellbeing (Phillips-Howard et al., 2010); family processes and structures (Velleman, 2009; Ward and Snow, 2010); peer influences (Velleman, 2009) and intersections of gender, social class and ethnicity (Hurcombe et al., 2010) all complicate understanding of young people's drinking behaviour. Studies that have focused on young people's drinking, rather than on the impact of alcohol advertising on their drinking behaviour highlight the social and emotional reasons that underpin young people's alcohol consumption and make it desirable (e.g. Cullen, 2010; Griffin et al., 2010; Jones and Barrie, 2009).

Extent of exposure to alcohol promotion

The literature on the extent of young people's exposure to alcohol consumption is much weaker than literature investigating evidence on impact (despite the shortcomings of that literature) and the studies on impact are often about extent of exposure as well as impact of exposure. The problem is that studies that claim to be are frequently not about exposure per se, but about advertising or promotions that might be seen by children or young people of particular ages because many are likely to be watching television, reading particular magazines, on particular websites, product placement, attending sporting events where billboards etc. advertise alcohol or instore promotions. Some studies focus on the amount spent on advertising and link this to the amount drunk. A quote from a report from a US Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth report, published in December 2010, illustrates this:

Youth exposure and overexposure (as well as "more likely to be viewed by" and other comparisons of youth and adult exposure to alcohol advertising in this report) are based on "gross rating points," which measure how much an audience segment is exposed to advertising per capita. Another way of measuring advertising exposure is "gross impressions" (the total number of times all members of a given audience are exposed to advertising). The adult population will almost always receive far more gross impressions than youth because there are far more adults in the population than youth. To calculate gross rating points, one divides gross impressions by the relevant population (e.g., persons ages 21 and over) and multiplies by 100, resulting in a more comparable per capita measurement. (p.1)

This sounds scientific and precise, but is a rather blunt proxy measure, which means that we have to be cautious about the conclusions drawn. Various studies also use target audience ratings as a measure of exposure. The US Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth analyses suggest that an increase in the advertising of distilled

spirits on cable television has led to an increase in 12-20-year-old young people's exposure to televised alcohol advertisements, an increase of 71 percent between 2001 and 2009. From this, they estimate that the 'average' television-viewing young person saw 366 alcohol ads in 2009 and that 44 percent of the exposures occurred during programming where young people were more likely than adults to be watching television (which is against the voluntary codes accepted by the alcohol marketing industry). The problem is that we do not know if young people watch all these adverts, how they watch them and what they make of them.

Similar problems beset the 2010 UK Alcohol Concern study. Alcohol Concern made a complaint to the Advertising Standards Authority that it was irresponsible to have shown alcohol advertisements during the world cup games because many children were watching the football with families and friends. They found that all the live broadcasts included alcohol advertisements and could have up to four for each match placed just before the match started, during half time and after the match finished. They asked the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) to investigate the numbers of 4–15-year-olds viewing each of the live televised World Cup games on ITV. The ASA found that the proportion of children viewing the games was sufficiently low for alcohol advertising to be permitted. However, they argue that the number of children exposed to the advertisements was in excess of 1 million in both the England vs. Algeria (1.6m) and England vs. USA games (1.4m). When England was not playing, the estimate was that over 800,000 children (mostly between 8pm and 10pm) were watching and so (could have) viewed advertisements of Stella Artois, Carling and Fosters. Overall, Alcohol Concern suggests that 'up to 5.2 million children could have been exposed to alcohol advertising during the world cup coverage on TV alone'. This is, unfortunately less precise about the viewing of adverts than about the viewing of football matches, so does require caution.

Alcohol Concern's report of its own study of 80 11 to 18-year-olds in the East Midlands, London and the north- west of England, seems more plausible. They found that children were exposed to the equivalent of four alcohol adverts in the course of one day or an average of 1,600 per year. Some children saw as many as 11 alcohol adverts in a 24-hour period, mostly on television, followed by adverts in shops, supermarkets and on billboards. Girls said they saw more spirit and wine marketing than boys and boys reported more exposure to cider and alcopops. The fact that there was a gender difference indicates that much more needs to be known about exposure than simply what is available for children and young people to see. However, this brief report on Alcohol Concern's website was not accompanied by a research report. Other studies do, however, report high levels of exposure. Winter et al (2008) and Fielder et al (2010) in the Australian context, for example, suggest that children of 12 years and under see one in three alcohol adverts that are presented on television. These figures are, however, also obtained from audience ratings.

Other ways in which researchers have attempted to get at exposure include asking people to remember what they have viewed and getting young children to name or identify brands of alcohol. Children and young people can often display sophisticated

awareness of brands and their connotations (see review) and so clearly know what marketers would like them to about alcohol brands. The problem here is that studies frequently focus on limited aspects of children's and young people's lives. It might be, for example, that children and young people see particular brands in their own and other people's homes as much as in promotions and advertisements. Exposure may, therefore, not, be the key factor, but it would help if studies were more careful in documenting exposure.

This caution extends to studies included in the systematic reviews cited in the alcohol review where a variety of methods for assessing exposure are used, but strong conclusions are drawn about the link between greater exposure and increased alcohol consumption.

Gaps in knowledge

Since the report by David Buckingham on the commercialisation of childhood was only published in 2009 (DCSF/DCMS, 2009), it is not surprising that some of the key gaps in knowledge identified there continue, despite the volume of work on consumption and young people. Of central importance is the issue of the causal relationship between commercial influences and children's wellbeing.

- There is a need for more focused studies that address these issues directly over time and treat them as complex.
- Well designed longitudinal studies (qualitative and quantitative) would be helpful here.
- There is also a need for research on how consumption fits into children's lives and cultures in their families and peer groups.
- In particular, since it is difficult for research to anticipate, or keep pace with, the rapidity of change in children's experiences of marketing, there is a pressing need for ongoing research in this area.
- In addition, while some studies have begun to illuminate the impact of living in different sorts of families, more is needed on the differential effects of low and high income on both commercialisation and of ethnicity and gender.
- Ethnicity is under-researched in this area and there is a dearth of work on boys and sexualisation.

There is also a gap in understanding of young people's pleasurable experiences of consumption and the benefits they derive (emotionally, socially and cognitively) from consumption.

- There is a particular need to extend work on children's understanding of advertising to include new sources of advertising and how they come to understand marketing they have not previously encountered.
- More studies also need to be done on how best children and young people can be helped to understand advertising and marketing, to resist pressures to consume or to 'self-sexualize' and to understand the implications of their consumption and the styles they choose.

- This point is also relevant to considerations of children, young people and alcohol, where there is a need for more research that takes a broad, socio-cultural approach to understanding children and young people's alcohol consumption.

A few pieces of research have begun to investigate parents and children as a system, and how together, they negotiate commercialisation and sexualisation as well as what remains unexplored between them because, for example, parents do not have a full picture of what their children watch on television and think they give more guidance on viewing than children believe they do (e.g. Koolstra, 2004).

- Further work of this kind would enhance understanding of this area.
- In addition, there is a lack of knowledge about which parents and children are likely to negotiate these issues in ways that are most satisfactory for children and/or for parents.

Commercialisation and sexualisation are not confined to children and childhood, but are common throughout society. Media reports indicate that some parents resist medical advice and counter pressures in order to make their very young daughters look more like stereotyped images of feminine beauty, including injecting them with botox (e.g. Pearce, 2011). Buckingham (in press) helpfully points out the ways in which children's education and leisure are increasingly being commercialised.

- There is thus scope for more work to improve understanding of the effect of societal commercialisation and sexualisation on children's and parents' acceptance, and experience, of commercialisation and sexualisation.
- For the minority of parents who are keen to have their children fit particular commercial images, it is important to learn why this is the case and the impact of this on their children.

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