Constructing identities in children's cultures of consumption

Samleikagerð í nýtslumentanini hjá børnum

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Úrtak

Børn í vesturheiminum, eisini í føroyum, gerast meira og meira framkomin og vand sum brúkarar. Kortini er vitanin um, hvussu børn sjálv uppliva og samskifta um nýtslu í teirra mentanum, sera avmarkað. Hetta er fyrst og fremst orsakað av, at tað er sjónarhornið hjá teimum vaksnu, sum er grundarlagið, tá ið børn verða granskað. Í hesari grein verður tískil roynt at lýsa úr sjónarhorninum hjá børnum, hvønn leiklut nýtsla hevur, tá ið samleikin hjá børnum verður skapaður. Greinin hevur støði í einari etnografiskari kanning, sum varð gjørd í Skotlandi, og úrslitini verða nýtt til at vísa á øki sum kundi verið áhugaverd at granska í Føroyum.

Abstract

Children in the Western world, including the Faroe Islands, are increasingly sophisticated consumers. Yet, little is known about how children themselves experience and mediate consumption in their cultures. The reason for this is primarily grounded in the adult-centric approach which has traditionally been applied in research with children. Therefore, this paper attempts to understand what role consumption plays in the construction of identity among children from a child-centric perspective. The paper draws on an ethnographic study conducted in Scotland and uses these findings to map out some areas which usefully could be explored in the Faroese context.

Introduction

Considering the amount of time children in the Western world spend consuming i.e. choosing, shopping, exchanging, using, watching adverts and discussing consumer goods it is highly surprising that within the social sciences very little attention has been directed towards this important issue. Not until the past few decades have children's cultures of consumption become an increasingly critical issue for academics, marketers, social policy makers and various welfare groups. Therefore, as a major influence on daily life, consumption in childhood cannot be avoided by researchers.

Some have argued that for adults generally, market values and childhood sit uncomfortably together (Cook, 2005; Seiter, 1993), resulting in this field of research frequently being overlooked – or even avoided. This has led to a range of conflicting discourses surrounding children as consumers. Although there are variations, generally

speaking these can be categorised into two types of discourses: on one hand children are viewed as power*ful*, fickle and savvy consumers and on the other hand as power*less* victims who are manipulated and misled. However, such evasions fail to recognize that life today, for adults and children alike, is always already inextricably embedded in consumption. Therefore, although consumption may not *wholly* define children it powerfully frames their everyday lives (Humphrey, 1998) and consequently, to ignore this ubiquitous aspect of childhood presents significant gaps in our understanding of children as consumers.

This paper argues that such inconsistencies in academic knowledge, public debates and general opinion are mainly centred on one explanation: research and academic discourse in this field is grounded in fundamentally *adult-centric* ideas of what it means to be a child consumer. Adult-centrism means that children and childhood have been researched and interpreted through adult frameworks applying adult concerns without attempting to gain adequate insight into the meanings that children themselves attribute to consumption.

Consumption and everyday life of children

Prior to defining children's cultures of consumption it is worth briefly examining the key concepts of this paper. The term culture is endlessly complex, however, for the purpose of this paper it refers to micro culture i.e. child to child/adult relations. Drawing on a range of definitions culture is here understood to be the values, activities, habits and concerns through which people interpret and construct their worlds. Consumption as another key concept includes the processes through which consumer goods and services are created, produced, purchased and used (McCracken, 1988). Thus consumption is seen as a wide-ranging practice reaching beyond the actual use of a product. In this sense social processes are present in consumption and vice versa (Solomon, 1983); consequently, culture and consumption are inextricably linked. On the basis of these key concepts, children's cultures of consumption are defined as: *The processes by which the values, behaviour, concerns and attitudes, that children produce and share with others, are constructed through consumption.*

Nevertheless, children's cultures of consumption are not understood as something which exist independently of adult culture. Rather cultures are non-static, non-fixed dynamic entities which overlap and are interlinked. Yet, there is something particularly interesting about what goes on in children's peer groups – as we shall see throughout this paper. However, at the same time it is clear that children's lives are firmly embedded in social structures. Therefore, the question is not only what role consumption plays in children's everyday interactions with others but also how children negotiate meanings within the given structures that are a reality of their own lives.

To date, most research with children has been grounded in the scientific consumer socialization framework. Scientific consumer socialization is the process by which children learn, develop and acquire consumer

skills (Ward, 1974). Since the central concern of scientific consumer socialization theory is that of children's consumer *development*, scarcely any attention has been paid to how children *experience* and *interpret* consumption in their daily lives. Instead scientific consumer socialization has focused on examining children's (lack of) consumer knowledge, abilities, competencies and understanding of consumption issues. This has left a gap in the literature on children's consumer behaviour and a misleading view of what children "do" with consumption. Fortunately, there has proved to be a slight shift in this "oversight" more recently. Such changes are evident in a very limited number of studies examining consumption from children's own perspective in recent years (e.g. Bannister and Booth, 2005; Bartholomew and O'Donohoe, 2003; Boden *et. al.*, 2004; Martens *et. al.*, 2004; Russell and Tyler, 2002; Tufte *et. al.*, 2005).

This paper takes the standpoint that children are competent social actors worthy of study in their own right – not simply interesting to study through the process of socialization. In other words, it is not merely children's competencies, abilities and understanding which are interesting in the context of consumption. Rather, the meanings that children attribute to consumption in their cultures are of interest here – a view supported by Buckingham (2000: 155) who has argued that:

> …it may make little sense to ask whether children understand the difference between television programmes and advertisements, or whether they are able to identify the persuasive

intentions of advertising in isolation. We need to consider much broader questions about their experience of consumer culture, and their place within it.

Therefore, by examining children's lived experiences, we are able to critique perspectives that define consumption as good *or* bad, and advertising toward children as moral *or* immoral. This critique centres on the belief that such perspectives unquestioningly reproduce simplistic binary opposites whilst failing in any way to contribute to a fruitful discussion on consumption in children's lives. In contrast to such simplistic characterizations of childhood and consumption, this paper will demonstrate that consumption is an integral thread in the fabric of social life (Solomon, 1983). Therefore, consumption can be many things (good, bad, empowering, disempowering, facilitating, engendering, socially divisive to name but a few) at the same time and at different moments, with a variety of social actors and within a range of social locations.

This paper will examine consumption in childhood through one particular, and highly significant, aspect of everyday understanding of oneself and others – identity. It will examine how children use consumer goods and consumption references to tell others about who they are – or wish to be. The focus will not be on determining whether consumption is good/bad, moral/immoral – consumption is evident in children lives already. Rather the focus is on how children use consumption in the construction of their identities.

Identity in the context of consumption

Identity is a heavily used term both academically and in everyday life; however, its meanings and definitions are conflicting and various. For the purpose of this paper a more specific idea of identity is helpful. Therefore, the broad definition by Jenkins (1996: 5) explains how the term is used here:

"Social identity is our understanding of who we are and of who other people are, and, reciprocally, other people's understanding of themselves and of others…it [social identity] too is the product of agreement and disagreement… [and]… is negotiable"

This means that childhood identity is not only about children's own view of themselves but how others view them. It is about uniqueness – how children consider themselves as *different* from others and about sameness – in which ways they consider themselves as the *same/similar* to others. As Jenkins (1996) pointed out, it is a product of agreement and disagreement. This means that the development of childhood identities is a social and collective process not simply determined by each individual or imposed by others. The interesting aspect here is how consumption objects/processes can be used, displayed and enacted in the construction of identity.

As children have become an important group of consumers they have increased opportunity of using consumer goods to construct images, which are frequently based on the same consumption resources as those accessible to adults e.g. media, brands, leisure etc. (Valentine, 2000). By implication children are faced with the same high-risk choices associated with consumer society – constructing identities where they strive to gain the love or respect of others (Gabriel and Lang, 1995). Foucault argued that identities are constructed through context and situational factors and everyday environments. We also know that wider social structures such as age, class, ethnicity and gender shape identity (Marshall, 1998). This means that, when children construct their identities it is through continual encounters with various overarching structures and institutions such as the mass media, family, education system, language etc. (Kacen, 2000).

Research on consumption and identity

Turning firstly, to the literature generally (which has focused on adult consumers) on identity and consumption it has been acknowledged that material possessions play an important role in the sense of self (Belk, 1988; Dittmar, 1992; Solomon, 1983). More specifically Belk (1988) argued that possessions are regarded as part of the self or what he termed *the extended self*. This means that possessions become so heavily engrained in our worlds that they almost become a part of us. We use them to communicate to others who we are, whether it is through the clothes we wear, the car we drive, our home or even the food choices we make. Therefore, it is evident that the process of identity construction is heavily influenced by consumption. Essentially, consumption objects (both material and non-material) become symbols with which people communicate. For instance a BMW car is not merely functional – it connotes quality, wealth and success. Consequently, con-

sumption (both mundane and out of the ordinary) serves as a symbolic resource of great importance to individual and group identity construction (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998). The question is therefore, whether one can assume that this literature on identity and consumption equally applies to children as consumers.

In one study Kjeldgaard (2003: 285) found that youngsters are active in constructing their identities through consumption yet, the "…global and local structures also determine the resources and thereby the identity possibilities available". This means that when constructing their identities children cannot simply construct any identity of their pick. There are various structural aspects, such as where they live and the consumer goods available, which present them with a limited set of choices. Whilst this equally applies to adults there is no doubt that children's low power/low status position in society can present them with a whole different set of consumption limitations compared to adults.

Scientific consumer socialization

Research in scientific consumer socialization has produced a plethora of studies on issues such as children's understanding of advertising, the influence of parental communication on consumer development; shopping skills and product knowledge (see John, 1999 for a review). Whilst such studies are of value, much scientific consumer socialization research to date can be heavily criticised on a range of fronts. Firstly, because scientific consumer socialization focuses on development it becomes future-

orientated in nature paying little attention to children's consumption worlds at *present* (Archard, 1993). Secondly, whilst it is acknowledged that children are a group that may need special protection due to their low power status in society, the emphasis has been on children's *in*abilities, *in*competencies and *im*maturity (Hill and Tisdall, 1997). Thirdly, scientific consumer socialization is based on theory which considers child development to be predominantly innate – or born with. In other words, children are theorized as *standard* or predictable beings (Dittmar, 1992). Lastly, consumer development is treated as a series of pre-determined developmental stages children progress through one after the other (John, 1999). The net result of this theory is a fixed linear model which does not deal with differences between children but assumes a universal model applicable to all children in all places. As a result writers from the scientific consumer socialization perspective have consistently failed to explore what consumption means to (especially younger) children despite the fact that social psychology has long acknowledged the importance of possessions to young children in their development (Dittmar, 1992). It is evident that to address these shortcomings and further understanding of children's cultures of consumption another approach is required. One such approach which stands in contrast to scientific consumer socialization is that of childhood studies which we turn to now.

Childhood studies[1] and identity

The importance of childhood identities has been addressed by numerous writers in the

field of childhood studies (Aydt and Coraro, 2003; Davis and Machin, 2000; James, 1993; Kelle, 2001; Thorne, 1993; Valentine, 2000). Some of the key findings from these writings are that children are acutely concerned with their identity within groups. In their peer cultures children work at constructing social relationships where they define themselves in relation to others. Fitting-in is essential, yet a degree of individuality is pursued (Ridge, 2002). It follows, that children in their cultures continuously must "…manage tensions between conformity and individuality" (Valentine, 2000: 258).

Jenkins (1996) made the distinction between primary identity and secondary identity. Primary identity he argued, are those identities established early in life such as gender. These are more robust and less likely to change. Secondary identities (e.g. profession), however, are generally established later and therefore, more negotiable, less fixed and more amenable to change. From these distinctions it is conceivable that for primary identities consumption may be used to display or communicate existing identities. On the other hand, consumption may be instrumental in constructing new/existing secondary identities; e.g. that of being a footballer.

Several authors within childhood studies have presented the primary identity of gender as one of the key identities for children (e.g. Aydt and Corsaro, 2003; Corsaro, 1997; James, 1993; Thorne, 1993). In an extensive study of gender in children's cultures Thorne (1993) argued that one major problem with much of the literature on children and gender is the pre-fixed notion of girls and boys

as being separate and different. The consequence, she argued, fails to take account of the within-gender variations as well as the impact of factors such as social class and ethnicity. It follows that girls and boys are not a group of people that fall into one of two groups but have complex identities constructed through a range of factors – including consumption.

Similarly emphasis is placed on the role of age in the construction of identity (Kelle, 2001; Wærdahl, 2005). It is believed that as they grow older children gain increased autonomy and more power to make decisions in matters affecting them. Therefore, age is an important identity for children due to its signalling value. Naturally, age is a constantly changing identity, however, in the short-term it is sufficiently stable to be an important identity *vis a vis* adults as well as other children.

In an extensive discussion on children and their relationships James (1993: 104) argued that the body is a key site of identity construction for children. She stated that "…relatively little critical attention has been given to children's own experience and understanding of the body as a signifier of identity". From her research James (1993) suggested that there are five significant aspects of the body which are important in children's identity construction. These are height, shape, appearance, gender and body performance (e.g. how fast one can run). It follows that children construct identities through various physical and social dimensions of who they perceive themselves and others to be.

Ethnographic methodology and the study of children

Traditionally the methodologies employed within the scientific consumer socialization paradigm are objective (thus researcher and researched have distanced social relationships) and are quantitative in nature (surveys and experiments). Therefore, they typically result in relatively short periods of time being spent with children. This means that researchers have little time to gather rich meaningful data about children as consumers. Frequently research does not even ask for children's own input about their lives, but focuses on parents as informants (e.g. Haynes, *et. al.*, 1993), furthermore, children may be (de)selected to participate in research based on their verbal (in)abilities (e.g. Derscheid *et. al.*, 1996). The implications are that children's voices are either not heard at all or at best *selectively* heard. Therefore, it is the task of researchers to design research and adopt methodologies ensuring the voices of children are not limited to those informants that are "easier" to research.

It has been contended by several authors (e.g. James *et. al.*, 2001; Rizzo and Corsaro, 1992) that ethnography is a central qualitative methodology within the childhood studies perspective. Ethnography is essentially a methodology of which the main feature is the search for patterns within everyday life and involves "…the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in peoples' lives for an extended period of time…" watching, listening and asking questions (Hammersly and Atkinson (1995:1). Therefore, ethnography as a methodology enables researchers to adopt a child-centric approach within the setting of the child; in their world. In addition, prolonged engagement allows time and space for adult/child power relationships to be negotiated (Davis, 1998; Morrow and Richards, 1996). This means that researchers can work at reducing the power imbalance evident in child and adult relationships leading to a more open forum for children to communicate with the researcher. Furthermore, the time spent in the field presents opportunities to utilise several methods and provide different angles on the same phenomena. This is a powerful feature of ethnography which entails a process of developing or evolving over time (as the ethnography progresses) – essentially providing it with flexibility and a sense of self-correction (Eder and Corsaro, 1999).

Consent

From the childhood studies perspective children are considered competent social actors and have the right to be consulted and heard on matters that affect them (UN Convention on the rights of the child, Article 12). In this sense, consent is more than the agreement of gatekeepers to conduct research with children but about respecting children and their rights as human beings to say no (Fine and Sandstrom, 1988; Miller, 2000). Miller (2000: 1231) stated that "In order to consent or assent a person requires information shared in such a way that it is comprehensible". Therefore, the research was explained to children such that it was developmentally appropriate. Despite consent initially being provided by adults every effort was made to ensure that children un-

derstood the decision to participate in the research was theirs. Furthermore, consent was treated as an ongoing process where children could withdraw their participation at any moment throughout the research[2].

Sample

Gaining access to groups of children in their everyday lives can be difficult and therefore, schools are frequently used when conducting research with children (Thomas and O'Kane, 1998). Although much consumption takes place out with schools, it was decided that schools do, nevertheless, represent an opportunity to gather valuable data on children and consumption. The data was collected in one nursery and two primary schools. This is a form of convenience sampling, which is, according to Schensul (1999: 233), appropriate in exploratory research:

> "Studies of adolescent behavior in general, for example, could be undertaken in the high school nearest to the researcher's office – with the usual cautions that such populations may not be representative of **all** adolescents in a given society".

The study concentrates on pre-adolescent children since these have largely been ignored (Buckingham, 2000; Hill *et. al.*, 1996). Furthermore, it has been argued that particularly the middle years (from four to ten years of age) of childhood seem to have passed unnoticed to researchers (James *et. al.*, 2001). Therefore, the age groups for this study were one group of pre-school children (ages 3-5), one primary two/three (ages 6-8)[3] and one primary six (ages 10-11). For

the primary two/three and primary six age groups there were two groups from each age group. These comprised children from two areas with different socioeconomic backgrounds. Thus, in total the study involved research in three settings in total (one nursery and two schools).

Sampling whilst in the field involved purposive sampling. In other words, samples were chosen to best enable the research questions to be answered. Ethnography provides the flexibility to utilise a range of purposive sampling due to the length of time spent in the field. Upon field entry and throughout the fieldwork heterogeneous samples[4] were used to understand the key issues in children's cultures of consumption (Saunders *et. al.*, 2003).

Agar (1996) suggested adopting a funnel approach where the ethnographer upon entering the field is open to learning a wide range of issues pertaining to the research questions. After some experience in the field the ethnographer can focus on central issues of importance in the culture. Childhood studies advocates this approach to avoid research that is driven by adult-centred research questions (Davis, 1996; Morrow and Richards, 1996). Another factor of importance was to identify those cases that deviate substantially from the average and explore these to ensure that data generated is not confined to the mainstream of children.

Authors in childhood studies have been criticised for ignoring the presence of adults and their role in structuring the world of children (Handel, 1990). Therefore, significant others that can shed light on children's cul-

tures of consumption such as teachers and parents/guardians were interviewed. These adults represent important informants because of their knowledge of the children being studied.

The study was carried out in central Scotland in two small towns where children were relatively restricted in their access to large retail outlets. Sunny Nursery[5] (hereafter SN) is a privately owned nursery with children from mixed backgrounds (government vouchers[6] were accepted by the nursery). Northern Primary School[7] (hereafter NPS) with its 320 pupils, is located in a relatively deprived area in a small town. Waterside Primary school (hereafter WPS) has 220 pupils and is situated in a slightly smaller, but much more affluent village. However, both schools have a comparable distance to the large city. When comparing census data and the "Carstairs Deprivation Categories" (McLoone, 2000) with fieldwork data it was clear that the two areas represent children with relatively different socioeconomic backgrounds. The nursery on the other hand, represented children from mixed socioeconomic backgrounds – although it skewed slightly towards affluence.

Power issues in research with children

There are profound implications of the adult-child power barriers for the construction of researcher role in the field and these have been extensively debated in the childhood studies literature (e.g. Corsaro and Rizzo, 1988; Fine and Sandstrom, 1988; Graue and Walsh, 1998; James *et. al.*, 2001; Thorne, 1993). To understand the world through children's eyes requires adults to substantially reduce the asymmetrical power relationship – something which can only be achieved through careful consideration of the role the researcher adopts whilst in the field.

Adultist, supervisory and teacher-like roles, which have so often been adopted in research with children in the past, do little to reduce the social distance between adults and children. Furthermore, such roles are incompatible with the philosophy of childhood studies (Fine and Sandstrom, 1988). Rather a friend role was adopted where the researcher entered the setting and distanced herself from the authoritarian status which adults have vis-à-vis children – to the extent that it is possible for an adult. Thus the researcher did everything the children did, from sitting with them at their desks to eating lunch with them. Over time the children's trust was gained and consequently; they spoke openly and frankly with the researcher, providing important insights into their worlds.

Whilst conducting fieldwork the most valuable moments of insight into children's cultures of consumption were those away from the interference of adults. Therefore, time spent e.g. in the playground during break, eating lunch with the children and going on fieldtrips proved to be excellent opportunities for gathering data. To witness these accounts and have a valid presence during these moments the researcher played with the children, spoke with them and tried to be their friend.

Methods

The main methods used throughout the year-

long ethnographic study were observation, taped semi-structured interviews with children, parents and teachers, informal chats, gathering artefacts e.g. children's weekly diaries, going shopping, attending outings, events, classes, break and lunchtime activities and home visits to name a few. However, studying children of different ages presented the researcher with some challenges concerning the suitability of various methods for each age group. For instance, the youngest children were most comfortable expressing themselves whilst engaging in an activity such as drawing or playing – as other authors have also found (Hill *et. al.*, 1996). For instance the researcher would on occasions ask pre-school children to draw their favourite possession and ask questions about their drawings. Furthermore, listening to children's conversations during play and activities provided valuable data. The oldest group (primary six) on the other hand, could sustain longer conversations through e.g. interviews. Therefore, it was evident that methods had to be tailored to each age group. In this sense, the longitudinal nature of ethnography provided optimum opportunities for fine-tuning the methods employed.

Findings on identity in children's cultures of consumption

This section commences with an introduction to the topics used in the analysis of identity and children's cultures of consumption. The process of identifying these topics was iterative. It involved a constant evolvement and development of the topics based on what the children reported to be important to them and at the same time grounding the analysis in previous research. The categories to be discussed in the findings on identity and consumption in children's cultures can thus be summarised as follows:

• Gender
• Performance of the body (physical and mental/academic performance)
• Appearance of the body (physical e.g. height and shape as well as extra-physical e.g. grooming and clothing)
• Age (chronological age and social age)

Throughout the analysis data will be presented to highlight how consumer goods are directly used/displayed as resources in the construction of identity. Furthermore, verbal references to consumption are used to understand the significance of consumption in identity construction. It should be noted that the categories overlap; however, they have been treated separately for the purpose of clarity in the analysis.

Gender

The data revealed that even at an early age children have clear understandings of gender appropriate consumption behaviour. For instance at Sunny Nursery girls played in the home corner with dolls assuming nurturing roles – rarely with any input from the boys. Play areas in the nursery with relatively gender neutral toys (e.g. animals and jigsaws) typically had mixed groups of girls and boys whilst construction toys and cars were overwhelmingly used by boys. This said, gender is not always a significant factor for consumer behaviour. Different contexts, objects, people and places shape and influence the fluidity of gender boundaries. Further-

more, as will be discussed, not all children conform to stereotypical ideas of gender roles. However, it was clear from the data that consumer goods were important resources in the construction and communication of gender identity.

At the nursery children displayed strong views with regard to gender and toys. The children had clear ideas which toys were for girls and which were for boys. For instance they were clear which gender, toys such as Barbie, Action Man, Power Rangers and dolls were aimed at. Statements such as "*All girls like Barbies*" or "*Barbies are just for girls*" were common. Here the expressions are of girls as a group defined in relation to the other i.e. boys. These were stereotypical ideas of gender appropriate consumption; however, it was evident that some children less readily adhered to conventional gender behaviour. Girls were more likely to step outside traditional gender boundaries. For instance Maria (pre-school) liked playing with Spiderman dolls – especially changing Spiderman's clothes. Evidently, although considered a boy's toy, the Spiderman was adapted to fit in with Maria's idea of playing with dolls i.e. changing the clothes (Fieldnotes, SN, pre-school, 22/5/02).

Despite less evidence of boys transgressing gender boundaries, one boy in particular at the nursery, Mark, loved dressing up, playing in the home corner (where boys hardly ever played) and taking on female roles such as being a princess or "super-girl hero" (as Mark himself described it). This met with some resistance among the children, both girls and boys, who reminded him

that (as they said) boys, do *not* wear dresses (Fieldnotes, SN, pre-school, 24/6/02). Verbally, staff at the nursery were not found to reinforce gendered consumption behaviour. However, the layout of toys and play areas at the nursery, in many ways promoted stereotypical gender behaviour. For instance the home corner or hair dressing area was closed off and not integrated with any other play activity.

One striking feature was the intense revulsion many boys in the younger age groups, i.e. nursery and particularly P2/P3, displayed towards what they perceived to be feminine consumer goods. They tried to distance themselves from everything they considered "girly". When asked what programmes he liked Peter listed a few and then said:

> *Peter:* Everything except (mentions the name of a programme).
> *Interviewer:* What was that?
> *Peter:* It's a girlie programme.
> *Interviewer:* Why do you not like it?
> *Peter:* Cause it's a girly thing. It's got big hearts on it.
> *Tommy:* Barbie's and dolls is the most thing I hate. If I got one for Christmas I would saw the head off.
>
> Interview, NPS, P3, Male, 18/12/02

This disgust with "girly" consumer goods was mirrored at WPS where the boys also spoke of destroying Barbie dolls. Therefore, it is clear that the need for these boys to distance themselves from items perceived to be overly feminine is expressed in their dislike for consumer objects associated with girls. Nevertheless the degree of accepted behaviour changed with people and context. One

mother explained that the only children who lived nearby their home were two girls from her son's (Alex) class. When playing at home with the girls Alex, (P3, NPS) agreed to games such as skipping, which he would not normally do at school. Therefore, to some extent Alex would modify the boundaries of what types of gender play he was willing to engage in – compared to how he played at school. Similarly, many spaces in the schools and nursery involved consumer goods that were considered to be relatively gender neutral such as jigsaws, bikes and animals. These objects were played with by mixed groups of children.

In the oldest age group (P6) the boys and girls were much less extreme in their perception of boys and girls things. Gender was still a key identity at this age, however, the way children used consumer goods to define themselves as boys and girls had changed. Many consumer objects of interest to this age group were *relatively* neutral such as CDs, mobile telephones, stereos and sports clothing. Nevertheless, boys and girls displayed different musical tastes and their choice of sports clothing was quite different. At this (P6) age, the data revealed there were still some clear boundaries between the genders, however, they easily moved into consumption territories that might not have been acceptable to younger age groups. For instance girls were interested in sport and boys increasingly concerned with their appearance (discussed in more detail later).

Performance

Performance in children's cultures of consumption can be described as the way children (individuals and groups) perform or accomplish certain tasks of significance – whether they are physical or mental/academic activities. Although children are undoubtedly influenced by societal expectations of what activities are considered important, they too displayed their own criteria of what performance characteristics are valuable in the construction of identity.

The idea of performance implies a comparison of self to other. Recognizing how one is the same/different (and as in the case of performance: better/worse) compared to others is at the heart of identity theory. It was clear from the data that children start at an early age to compete with each other. At the nursery children would compete at anything and everything. E.g. who could drink the fastest? Who could jump the highest? Who had more food on their plate? Therefore, their understanding of their own unique personal strengths and weaknesses was less developed than with the P2/P3 age group who were much more selective in their choice of competitive activities.

Subsequently, by P2/P3 the children had some idea of their perceived performance abilities such as being good at football, reading or running. Furthermore, there were gender differences as it was evident the boys are more competitive at this age. Clearly, the school system contributes to identities constructed around performance abilities by emphasising which things are "good to be good at" e.g. academic activities. Furthermore, both schools divided the children into reading groups based on competency. At P3 in NPS some children were particularly proud of their reading ability. The first time

John approached me, he spoke of his reading the Harry Potter books and this was subsequently, mentioned on several occasions. Interviews with the teacher and his mother indicated that John's reading performance – and the praise he received, directly led to John perceiving himself as a "number one Harry Potter fan" (Fieldnotes, NPS, M, 13/11/02). This was reflected in the books John purchased (all the Harry Potter books), his bag and lunch bag – both which had Harry Potter symbols.

Based on interviews with parents, teachers, children and head teachers it was evident that expectations of academic performance at the two schools were different. The P6 children at WPS were more likely to have thought through what types of professions/positions they expected to hold later in life (which is likely to have implications on consumption patterns and resources). The head teacher at WPS had previously worked as a teacher at NPS and emphasised the difference in the children's background as far as academic performance is concerned – where WPS was more affluent and more academically advanced. However, the pressures of academic performance did not go unquestioned by some children as the following extract shows:

Andrew: All mums and dads say you should be like, a lawyer or a doctor.
David: I know they always say lawyer.
Andrew: Or a doctor.
Neil: Cause you get paid a lot.
Andrew: Or a vet or something like that. Someone that saves people.
Neil: Or be an orthodontist.
Andrew: But then I say like, if you're a lawyer

someone could think you would get the wrong decision and someone would get out of jail (sentence) and they might mug you or something and if you're a doctor and don't save someone then they can like sue you.

Interview, WPS, P6, Male, 10/6/03

In the above quote the children are discussing occupations, which highlights some of the ambitions parents have for their children. As Neil notes these ambitions are frequently related to financial resources. However, interestingly the children are questioning some of these occupations and able to identify drawbacks – they are displaying critical thought processes and not passively accepting parental ambitions.

In relation to physical performance, sport was of great importance to the children, especially the P6 age group. The children spent much time talking about sport, performing sport, admiring sport personalities and so on. The consumption implications were clear – those children who considered themselves "sporty" were much more likely to wear sports clothing. Interestingly, for girls being sporty was sometimes defined as a contrast to being feminine as the two examples indicate:

Mrs Cunningham: Mary is not girlie at all. She's into sports and she likes reading and all these kind of things.

Parent interview, WPS, P2, Female, 21/06/03

Katrina: Nearly everyone has sports bag for rucksack. We're really into sports. We're all tomboys.

Interview, NPS, P6, Female, 13/12/02

It was evident from the data that sports goods were significant as a resource in the

construction of identity. Yet, being "sporty" as the children described themselves was not confined to performing well physically but was sometimes referred to as a style of consuming clothes, bags and the like. In other words, some children identified with sports as a lifestyle, rather than necessarily being especially active in sports. However, when choosing sportswear; their contribution to sporting performance was of importance to the boys and girls. In the following example the girls were discussing just this:

Madeline: Yeah, like you need comfy trainers to be able to do sport.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Madeline: Cause if you have like…like I can't do sport in these cause they're just, you know they're not too comfy.
Ester: And I can't do sport in these at all. I met this man in Sport Soccer when I was choosing my trainers ehmm, I can't remember, it was one shop when I was choosing trainers. The man said that it needs to be flexible at the toes and firm at the heel.

Interview, WPS, P6, Female, 17/6/03

Therefore, children not only consider consumer goods as important in confirming their performance but in some cases, as being instrumental in assisting performance. Despite the importance of sports, especially in the P6 age groups, it was clear that not all children were interested in sport as a style or an activity – at least their interest lay not with the most popular sports such as football, dancing, golf etc. Gregory's identity for instance, was much more strongly linked to his ability to build things, most particularly Knex (a construction toy). He spoke of it many times and how he had been interested

in Knex for many years as in this extract:

Gregory: I've been doing Knex since I was two. I've done over 50 models with no instructions.
Interviewer: Just from your head?
Gregory: Yeah. And if people found Knex in a shop[which I had forgotten] they'd know it was mine.

Fieldnotes, P6, WPS, Male, 7/5/03

For Gregory his links with Knex are so great that people would know the Knex were his – even in his absence. This, along with the other examples, gives some indication of how children use consumer goods to illustrate how they perform, physically and mentally.

Appearance

The appearance of the body is a key characteristic of children's identity since it is, in material terms, the most visible. The appearance of the body is here taken to refer to both physical and extra-physical[8] appearance. The former refers to height, shape (build) and other bodily features whilst the latter refers to the dressing up of the body e.g. through grooming and clothing. Throughout childhood and adolescence children's bodies experience dramatic changes; therefore the data reflects the importance of the appearance of the body in identity construction.

At nursery age children are very preoccupied with their height and frequently compared themselves to friends – discussing who was the tallest. This is closely linked to the fact that children are constantly reminded that they are little people – physically, and in terms of age. It is conceivable

that for children, becoming taller has great significance because of the natural link with getting older and therefore, becoming more independent. In the following example Mark, one of the younger preschool children, was due to get his turn to go swimming the *following* school term:

> Mark was unhappy that he could not go swimming with the nursery. Janice, the teacher, said that when he is a little bigger he'd get to go, but for now he could go swimming with his mummy and daddy.
> *Mark:* But I am as big as my Star Wars sword.
>
> Fieldnotes, SN, Male, 26/8/02

As the extract shows, children do not always measure their height in comparison to other children but may use material objects – in this case a large Star Wars sword – to measure how much they have grown. Older children too (both P2/P3 and P6), were preoccupied with height and compared themselves to each other. However, at the P2/P3 age the children started to become more preoccupied with other aspects of physical appearance. By P6 the children paid much attention to body shape and facial features. For instance, during conversations P2/P3 children, girls in particular, described other girls as having "nice hair" and a "nice face". Furthermore, body shape had already become an issue for some girls at P2/P3 age as the following example demonstrates:

> *Charlotte:* Yes but sometimes when you see, you know at the Treader (shopping centre) and you see these people, these model people wearing these clothes in that big shop thing?
> …
> *Charlotte:* They always look ehmm, very not fat

when you see them and if you're quite fat then you think: Oh I'll look the same as that and when you get them (the clothes) then you don't look anything like it.

> Interview, WPS, P2, Female, 19/5/03

In the above extract Charlotte is referring to how thin models look and how other bodies may look entirely different upon wearing the same clothing. This means that already at a young age children come to recognize that people can look very different despite wearing the same clothing. Furthermore the importance placed on being thin in many consumer societies is heavily marketed and which the children soon learn.

Extra-physical appearance (e.g. clothing and grooming) were highly significant for children in the P6 age group, and to some extent in the P2/P3 and nursery age group. Younger children had preferences for what they liked to wear. They often wanted to wear clothing with symbols that were meaningful to them. These symbols very often reinforced gender identities. Similarly, the boys in P6 at both schools were greatly concerned with appearance. This was especially manifested in their use of hair grooming products and deodorants. They displayed no shyness about discussing hair grooming etc. with statements such as the following:

> *Richard:* Normally we spike hair up.
> *Matthew:* Yeah put gel in.
>
> Interview, NPS, P6, Male, 19/12/03

> *Andrew:* I've not had my hair down in school for like four years or something so I'm not gonna put it down now. I just hate it down.
> *Interviewer:* So what is it that you like about

having it up? Cause all three of you have got it/
Andrew: It's cool.
David: It's cool yeah.

<div align="right">Interview, WPS, P6, Male, 10/6/03</div>

Therefore, it is evident that constructing cool identities was partially dependent on grooming. Clothing proved to be equally as significant as grooming. The P6 boys frequently spoke about various clothing styles such as "sweaty", "goth" and "baggies"[9]. The type of clothing deemed appropriate depended on the context with in which it was worn. The boys (from both schools) clearly distinguished between what they considered to be appropriate clothing for different occasions. They explained that for parties they dressed up, for school they wore uniforms, for skateboarding they put on baggy trousers and for golf they wore chinos trousers (playing golf was an activity the boys from WPS engaged in – a possible indication of the greater affluence of their socioeconomic background). There were other differences between the schools e.g. the boys from NPS were less likely to speak of specific clothing for various occasions (except for parties for which they wore designer brands). Furthermore, the boys from NPS were more likely than those from WPS to have jewellery (rings, necklaces etc.) signifying symbols of their favourite football teams.

Interestingly the girls generally, had a tendency to downplay the issue of 'looks'. They frequently indicated that looks were not important and made statements such as "going to school is not a fashion show" (Interview, NPS, F, P6, 10/12/02). Yet the girl's statements did not seem to correlate with their actions. They clearly did make an ef-

fort with clothes and hair. This was confirmed in interviews with parents (Parent interview, P6, NPS, F, 10/1/03) whilst other girls told the researcher directly.

Interviewer: But do looks matter for school?
Kathleen: Yeah they do their hair for school and put hairspray in.

<div align="right">Interview, P6, NPS, Female, 7/1/03</div>

Kathleen: Most of the girls in our class: looks are everything.
Interviewer: What makes you say that?
Kathleen: When there's parties they come in all sorts of dresses

<div align="right">Interview, P6, NPS, Female, 7/1/03</div>

Therefore, the data along with the above statements indicate that the girls were much more concerned with looks than they cared to admit. This may be linked to the girls' age. They were in primary six and therefore, on the boundary of their teenage years. It is conceivable that the girls had not quite reached an age where it was acceptable in the peer group to openly be concerned about appearance.

Nevertheless, there were several cases of children who were simply not interested in fashion, clothing, gel or other grooming products. Therefore, not all children use clothing and grooming in the same way as a resource for identity construction. Overall, it can be concluded that appearance is of key concern to the children in general and critical in identity construction. The physical body remains central throughout childhood; however, extra-physical appearance increases in importance as children get older.

Age

In research, age is generally treated as an important demographic variable. However, for children age is a significant element of individual and group identity. Children are grouped together in similar age groups from early in life; nevertheless, the data revealed that age hierarchy within same year groups was also of great importance to the children.

Observations in the nursery and school settings indicated that children face a constant uphill struggle as far as age is concerned. As they strive to become older and are granted more freedom they are reminded of all the things they are too young to do/get. For instance, in the nursery upon transferring from the *junior room* (approximately age three) to the *pre-school room* children were reminded how big and clever they now were. Yet, on arrival (in the pre-school room) they soon realized that they were at the bottom of the age hierarchy again (in view of the older children already in the pre-school room).

Children in all settings discussed growing up in terms of taking a positive step forward: *Steven: You don't want to be in P2 forever. You need to go on to High School, then university and then you get a job.* (Fieldnotes, P2, WPS, Male, 2/6/03). Frequently, social interactions centred on age and what films, magazines, games etc. children were permitted to have. Their current age was sometimes referred to as a limitation. However, the children displayed tactics for attempting to overcome age limits on certain toys as the following example shows:

Josh: You've got to be over 8 to build them and to launch them (Beyblades).
Interviewer: But Beth's not over 8.
Josh: I'm not over 8.
Interviewer: Where does it say that you've got to be over 8?
Josh: At the top of the box.
Interviewer: So how come then you get to do it anyway?
Josh: Just cause we can do it.
Hilary: Our mum and dad let us.
Josh: They don't even know it's 8+.
Hilary: I know.
Interviewer: Do they not?
Josh: We scribble it out.

Interview, P2, WPS, Male and female, 12/5/03

In the above extract Josh describes how parents don't know that Beyblades are intended for children over the age of eight. Hilary on the other hand indicates that parents know but don't mind. However, despite the importance of chronological age, social age was in many cases more central to identity construction. Social age manifested itself in children's desire to act older such as nursery-aged girls wearing lip-gloss or chewing gum. Frequently, children displayed a desire to distance themselves from more childish states by ridiculing programmes, toys, rides etc. as being "babyish" or being embarrassed to play with toys like Barbie. Interviews with parents revealed that there are certain activities children will engage in at home, which they would prefer their friends did not know about. One mother explained that:

Sally: He (Cameron who is in P5) will still watch Winnie the Pooh things with her (Maud in P2) but, you know if his friends ever found out he would kill me.

Parent interview, P2, WPS, male and female, 24/06/02

On one hand children may attempt to construct an identity using social age as an important resource, yet privately they enjoyed the freedom of engaging in the very activities they reject in public. In conclusion, it is evident from the data that age is a significant aspect of children's identity. School-aged children displayed great awareness of the age hierarchy within the class. More importantly, children were very aware of their age identity. They perceive their age identity to be central to the degree of control they have over their lives. Therefore, although it is impossible to *be* older than one actually is, it is possible to strive to act older and increase one's social age. The data has displayed that for both types of age identity (chronological and social), consumption can play a central role.

Discussion

Overall the most important finding pertaining to identity in children's cultures of consumption was the contextual influence on identity construction. Furthermore, with relatively few possessions in the institutional context children continuously work at constructing their identity with the material goods at their disposal e.g. bringing toys or other personal items to school.

Gender

Not surprisingly, throughout the study, evidence clearly emerged of the contextual dependence (e.g. who is present and where children are situated) of identity. In other words, there were times when gender was the central identity whilst other times age identity or performance identity became more important – a view supported by other authors (Kacen, 2000). However, as Jenkins (1996) has also suggested, gender was found to be a *primary* identity (i.e. a more enduring, less changeable identity) which the current study also found as it structured much of what the children consumed.

The data presented evidence that already in nursery children displayed clear gender-based stereotyping of toys; furthermore, there was generally consensus on which toys were gender neutral. Later, in P2/P3, the boys in particular tended to demonstrate strong feelings of disgust towards dolls and other items they considered too feminine – a behaviour Thorne (1993) called rituals of pollution. Studies out with marketing (Aydt and Corsaro, 2003; Corsaro, 1997; Thorne, 1993) support this finding and go on to suggest that in neighbourhood social groups, gender is less significant than in institutional settings. Furthermore, Aydt and Corsaro (2003) have highlighted that gender segregation peaks at around 6-8 years of age – which corresponds with the present study. However, there are children who do not conform to stereotypical gender norms and prefer toys considered appropriate for the opposite sex. This behaviour, most especially when the "deviants" were boys, was subject to negative remarks by other children. In their study of social isolation among early adolescent groups Evans and Eder (1993) found one of the three factors that led children to be isolated was violating gender norms. Therefore, it is evident that gendered consumer behaviour can – already at nursery age, lead to negative reactions from others.

This means that it is important for practitioners to create an atmosphere/ethos of understanding and break down stereo-types. The institutional influences on constructing gender identity should not be underestimated as gendered spaces are frequently created by adults. For instance spaces such as "home corners" (as in SN) may contribute to constructing boundaries between genders. Furthermore, the influence of toy manufacturers and the mass media have long been blamed for promoting excessive gender stereotypes (Martin *et. al.*, 1999; Skelton and Hall, 2001). Yet, it is important not to simply blame manufacturers – children, parents, staff are all complicit in reinforcing gender stereo-types. Importantly though, children themselves do not always act in stereo-typical ways. The data demonstrated that their behaviour changes in different contexts e.g. play behaviour was more gender stereotyped in schools than in neighbourhood social groups. This suggests that there is something peculiar to schools and childcare institutions that needs to be addressed if stereo-types are to be countered.

Performance

Being as they are, less robust, identities relating to performance change to some extent between age groups and vary in importance between contexts. By the time they were older (i.e. reached P6) the children were much more aware of their strengths/weaknesses or likes/dislikes and therefore, utilised these in constructing identities. The structural influence of schools and the family entail that children learn about desirable achievements such as performing well academically or in sports. Evans and Eder (1993) too found academic achievement to be related to social inclusion. However, the children from the present study did not internalise this passively as they e.g. questioned the professions parents suggested were worth striving for.

Importantly, for some younger children (P2/P3) but especially for the P6 group, constructing a "sporty" identity did not necessarily entail performing well in sports. Sports clothing, bags and other equipment came to represent a lifestyle or image where the children enjoyed identifying with sport in general or sport celebrities in particular.

Appearance

Not unexpectedly, it emerged from the data that clothes, bags and grooming items were key consumer products in the maintenance/creation of appearance. Furthermore, there are clear links between appearance and gender since "…how we look is an extremely prominent cue for gender definition…" (Kacen, 2000). Therefore, appearance is important for children to communicate a range of meanings as well as assisting in constructing other identities such as gender, performance and so on. The reason is that appearance is highly visual which children carry with them at all times.

The most important finding pertaining to appearance is the insight this study provides into young boys and the emphasis they place on appearance. Much research on appearance or related topics tends to suggest that girls in particular are concerned with how they look. However, this study presented findings with young boys (P6) talking freely

and confidently about grooming products, clothes and similar products. Boden *et. al.* (2004) presented similar statements to this study in their research on children's fashion consumption. They argued that children (boys and girls) were aware of how peers may pass judgment on their fashion choices and therefore, chose items that were considered trendy or cool. However, as the present study further indicated, not all children are equally interested in their appearance. To some, other qualities or features are more central in identity construction e.g. performance abilities.

In their research on beauty images and advertising Boden *et. al.* (2004) suggested the norms for physical appearance are different for adolescent boys and girls. Furthermore, they argued that as a result of advertising and other agents of socialization girls are much more critical of their bodies. Whilst this may still be true the findings from the present study suggest that the norms for boys' physical appearance may be changing.

Age

In marketing studies with children, age is a demographic factor used to compare groups and their social and cognitive development. Not unexpectedly, however, as this study has shown, for children age is an important identity – also within same age groups. This finding is consistent with Kelle (2001) who found children of same age groups discuss what they perceive to be mature and childish identities. In society children are continuously reminded of their lower status and lack of power due to their age. Therefore, for many children becoming older (actual age) and acting older (social age) has, predominantly, positive connotations. Whilst the marketing profession may have some insight into the importance of social age in relation to childhood consumption, marketing academics have paid little attention to this identity.

In her ethnographic account Kelle (2001) examined children's discourses of development and found that children continuously contest the age suitability of various activities. She found that children's construction of identities was closely tied-in with age. However, age was not merely a chronological unit of identification, it was inherently social. Close parallels can therefore, be drawn from Kelle's data and the findings of this study.

In their study on children's fashion consumption Boden *et. al.* (2004) found that children evaluated clothing and symbols on clothing based on age appropriateness. This is consistent with the present study where children talked of the age suitability of different toys – such as Barbie being for younger girls or changing bedroom wallpaper to display current consumption interests (e.g. from Bob the Builder to Power Rangers). In a similar vein Davies and Machin (2000: 174) suggested the consumption choices of television to be a clear indication of social age and found that when discussing programmes children negotiated "…a sense of no longer being 'babies'". Therefore, it is clear that consumption is an essential resource in the construction of age identity. Children can thus communicate with others through consumer goods their level of maturity or development.

Research issues on children's identity construction and consumption in the Faroese context

At present the Faroe Islands can only be described as an advanced society in terms of consumption and technology. Historically though, Faroese people have had less access to the range of consumption opportunities available in many larger countries. Arguably, this is due to two main factors: Firstly, the geographical location of the Faroe Islands (situated in the middle of the North Atlantic) means it is relatively problematic and costly to transport consumer goods to the islands. Secondly, the islands comprise a very small market (around 48,000 inhabitants) which means economical viability is harder to achieve.

Yet, despite the fact that consumption powerfully frames everyday life, research on this topic is practically non-existent for the Faroe Islands[10]. Furthermore, it is clear that not even at a legislative level have these issues been addressed. For instance the lack of a marketing law is symptomatic of the fact that the significance of consumption and consumer behaviour has not been acknowledged in the Faroe Islands to date. Therefore, marketing, consumer policy, globalization and social inclusion are but a few of the issues which should be of key concern in public discussion. It is therefore, all the more confusing why children as consumers are not more prominent in such debates. These include social policy concerning children, marketing to children and not least children's rights as consumers.

Being a consumer society the lives of children are increasingly embedded in con-sumption, therefore, as a starting point it is important to understand the meanings that Faroese children attribute to consumption. Yet as the findings of this study indicated, context, not least the structural features of everyday life, is an important factor in shaping children's consumption meanings. Therefore, it stands to reason that researchers in the Faroe Islands must look to their own culture and context to gain some understanding of what consumption means to children locally. For instance are consumer goods significant resources for the construction of identity? If so, for which identities is consumption important and in which contexts? Does the nature of the Faroese market, as a more confined offering of consumption opportunities, impact on how children choose consumer goods to construct their identities?

Increasingly, the global media has become a reality for the everyday lives of children in the Faroe Islands. Many children have access to a range of television channels as well as the internet. Consequently, they find themselves watching the same programmes and the same advertising as children elsewhere. At the same time children ≠encounter retail outlets, marketing, peers, schools etc. on a local level. Therefore, of interest to explore among Faroese children is the continual interplay between the global and local consumption contexts of children's lives and how these contexts impact on the identities they construct. Even further, within the Faroe Islands it would be interesting to examine the lives of children in small rural areas with little access to consumption compared

to those in more urban areas in the Faroe Islands.

Finally, to conduct child-centric research on consumption specifically (as well as more general topics) would promote understanding of what it means to be a child growing up in the Faroe Islands. This means attempting to understand how children in the Faroe Islands relate to, understand and appropriate consumption into their worlds. By furthering understanding of children's worlds adults can start to question the taken-for-granted assumptions of children's position in the Faroese society.

Conclusion

It is clear that children are active constructors of consumption meanings, yet the meanings that children attribute to consumption are diverse. In their cultures they creatively appropriate these meanings into their worlds and use them in identity construction. Time, place and situation impacts on *whether* consumer goods or indeed *which* consumer goods are important/highly valued by the children. Furthermore, social context, age, gender and individual differences all account for the fluidity and changeability of meanings present in children's cultures of consumption. This leads us to the conclusion that there are certain identities which are more powerful than others and therefore, more likely to impact on children's consumption.

The study provided evidence that children are more competent as consumption interpreters than previous literature would suggest. Throughout the entire research process it was clear that children were by no means passive recipients of meanings conveyed or "fed" to them through advertising and other agents of socialization. However, the manner in which children of different ages used and constructed their identities through consumption varied. In other words, the significance of developmental factors cannot be ignored – rather it is obvious that children's abilities cannot be neatly categorised into stages, cognition and age.

On another note, more research is necessary which explores consumption in childhood from an ethnographic perspective – in a range of social settings and different contexts. The findings from this study have revealed that it is timely more research was conducted from a child-centred perspective – of which ethnography is an appropriate (albeit not the only) approach. Such microanalysis enables a gradual building of recurring patterns that emerge as significant in children's cultures of consumption and provides a greater understanding of the dynamics and interactions that take place amongst children.

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[1]) In response to the general lack of knowledge about children throughout the social sciences, childhood studies has emerged over the past 20 years as an alterative approach to studying children. This paradigm consists of authors from various fields such as sociology, psychology, education and anthropology. Very briefly, childhood studies criticises the traditional approach (socialization) to theorizing childhood, arguing that it treats children as incompetent, incomplete and irrational. Childhood studies seeks to explore children as active social agents who are worth of study in their own right – rather than merely as subjects "in development".

[2]) Children are taught to obey adults. Therefore, it is essential that researchers are acutely aware that children may express their reluctance to participate through other means than words e.g. through body language.

[3]) In the second school the primary three teacher was new and the school therefore, decided to grant access to primary two children instead of primary three.

[4]) Heterogeneous sampling involves collecting data that explains and describes the key themes that are observed in the research setting (Saunders *et. al.*, 2003).

[5]) The nursery school cared for children from a few months old to school-age i.e. 4/5 years old.

[6]) The UK government offers parents vouchers to assist with child care costs. These can be used in private as well as state-run nurseries.

[7]) Primary schools in the United Kingdom consist of the first seven years of schooling and are grouped from primary one to primary seven. The age range in which children are at primary school ranges from 4/5 to 12/13.

[8]) The term extra-physical is used to describe those aspects of appearance as being an extension as such to the body. Therefore, although clothing for instance, are material objects they are not in themselves part of the physical body.

[9]) These are all terms for particular clothing and consumption styles – described by the children.

[10]) Firouz Gaini is currently writing a PhD on youth culture in Tórshavn, Faroe Islands.