# BUYING PATTERNS OF CLOTHING DURING EARLY ADOLESCENCE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

**By**

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**Declaration**


I declare that the work on which this is based, is original, except where acknowledgement indicates otherwise, and neither the whole work nor part of it has been, is being, or is to be submitted for another degree at this or any other university or tertiary education institution of examination body.



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T. Mulaudzi


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## Abstract

The study is an exploratory investigation of early adolescents' buying patterns with regards to clothing using social identity theory. Interviews were conducted with six early adolescents in Attridgeville suburb located in Tswane (then called Pretoria) in South Africa. This research was prompted by insufficient archived studies which focus on black adolescents in South Africa.

Early adolescents are conscious of the youth culture and utilities that are significant to them. The early adolescent stage construes young people as seeking an own identity both individually and within the group. Clothing apparel plays a significant role in the projection of adolescents' identity in the peer group, and they participate in consumer behaviour that is influenced through socialization. Among others, peers and family circumstances play a central role as socialisation agents for the buying patterns of clothing during adolescence.

In this study the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) was used to explore the processes involved in the buying patterns of clothing during early adolescence, particularly for black adolescents in an urban environment.  Pictures, compiled in the format of a collage, were used as a projective technique to probe respondents'

constructions of their preferred buying patterns and consumer behaviour. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis as a procedure of qualitative research. Verification of transcripts and themes by an independent third party enhanced validity and reliability of findings.

Themes indicate that early adolescents are quite involved in consumer behaviour and make decisions based on lifestyle, consumer socialisation, purchasing styles and filters. Both peers and family act as socialisation agents, and socio-structural factors such as birth order, financial aspects, attitudes, and retail outlets have an impact on the actual buying patterns of clothing.  Further study is needed to determine the effect of media and learning styles on the consumer behaviour of black adolescents in a South African context.

**AANKOOPPATRONE VAN KLERASIE TYDENS VROEë ADOLESSENSIE: 'n ONDERSOEKENDE STUDIE**

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**Samevatting**

Die studie stel ondersoek in na die aankooppatrone van klerasie deur vroeë adolessente aan die hand van sosiale identiteitsteorie.  Onderhoude is gevoer met ses adolessente van Attridgevill, 'n voorstad van Tswane (voorheen Pretoria) in Suid-Afrika.  Die noodsaak vir sodanige navorsing is beïnvloed deur die klaarblyklike gebrek aan beskikbare navorsing wat op swart adolessente in Suid-Afrika fokus.

Vroeë adolessente is 'n tydperk waarin die jeugdige bewus word van die jeugkultuur en die betekenisvolle waardes van sodanige kultuur.  Tydens vroeë adolessensie is die jong mens soekende na 'n eie identiteit beide individueel en binne die groep.  Klerasie speel 'n belangrike rol in die adolessent se projeksie van 'n identiteit binne die portuurgroep, en hulle deelname aan verbruikersgedrag word dermate deur sosialisering beïnvloed.  Die portuurgroep en gesinsomstandighede speel 'n sentrale rol as sosialiseringsagente vir koopgedrag van klerasie tydens adolessensie.

In hierdie studie is die Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) gebruik om die prosesse wat betrokke is by die koopgedrag van klerasie van spesifiek swart adolessente in 'n stedelike omgewing te ondersoek.  Prente wat in 'n collage saamgestel is, is gebruik as projektiewe tegniek om respondente se konstruksies van

hulle voorkeur koopgedrag na te vors. Data is aan die hand van tematiese analise, 'n kwalitatiwe metode, geanaliseer. Transkripsies is deur 'n onpartydige derde party geverfieer ten einde geldigheid en betroubaarheid te verseker.

Die temas dui daarop dat vroeë adolessente redelike betrokke is by verbruikersgedrag en dat keuse gemaak word aan die hand van lewenstyl, verbruikersosialisering, koopstyle en filters. Beide portuurs en die gesin dien as sosialiseringsagenge, en sosio-strukturele faktore soos geboorte orde, finansiële aspekte, houdings, en handelaars het almal 'n invloed op die koopgedrag van klerasie. Verdere navorsing is nodig om die invloed van die media en leerstyle op die verbruikersgedrag van swart adolessente in die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks te ondersoek.

**SLEUTELWOORDE**

| | |
|---|---|
| Sosiale Identiteitsteorie | Kognitiewe ontwikkeling |
| Kwalitatiewe navorsing | Sosialisering |
| Sosiale prosesse | Tematiese analise |
| Verbruikersgedrag | Verbruikersontwikkeling |
| Vroeë adolessente | Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique |

## Chapter 4: Consumer behaviour and consumer process

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## Chapter 7: Conclusion, contributions and limitations

## Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1    Background

From a very young age, a child is made aware of and exposed to the world of material goods. He or she learns what money is used for and to understand its intrinsic value. A child sees people, especially family members, going in and out of stores carrying new items. With time he or she learns to pick up toys in a store while mummy and daddy are doing shopping. At a certain age, parents allow the child to run some errands such as buying milk and bread at a nearby store. This kind of activity embeds an understanding of the value of money and how to use it intelligently to get its value. Of course, mastering certain skills can only be done experientially, i.e. we take time to really come to comprehend certain skills and activities. This is an example of how and when children begin to participate in consumer behaviour.

Consumer researchers have for decades studied consumer behaviour from different perspectives with the intention of understanding the construct more extensively. Consumer research aims to understand what a consumer buys, why she buys it, when she buys it, where she buys it, how often she buys it and how often does she use it. As scholars, we are interested in understanding and with gaining insights into why individuals act in certain consumption-related ways and with learning what internal and external influences impel consumers to act as they

do. In this study, the approach is psychological. That is, we try to describe early adolescents' buying patterns using a psychological perspective and social identity theory.

## 1.2    Aim of the study

The purpose of this research is to explore the processes involved in the buying patterns of clothing during early adolescence, particularly for black adolescents in an urban environment. Research in this topic indicates that children have become an important consumer sector because of the disposable money they have to spend on accessories. Zoll (2000) goes so far as concluding that today's children share one common thing: a growing insatiable desire for material goods. In recent research conducted by Millward Brown's Jean Doughall worldwide, (http://www.research.za.net/news.html) findings indicate that children are able to talk about brands from a very young age. Commercials and exposure to persuasive communication strategies influence children to value material goods and help shape their consumer behaviour (Zoll, 2000).

Accessories and clothing are noticed to be important items during early adolescence. The work of Kaiser (1997) documents the purpose of clothes in the identity formation of early adolescence Human developmental stages are transitional and each stage brings with it different challenges of life. The transition between the childhood and early adolescent stages, for instance, involves physical, psychosocial and cognitive challenges. These entities are constantly present during the course of adolescence. In subsequent chapters, these entities

are discussed in detail to assess their implication in the lives of adolescents and their buying patterns of clothing.

The point of view of this study is that, as clothes play such an important role in adolescents' lives, it would be interesting to study their buying patterns. The questions I pose are, why clothes are so important to young teenagers and what purpose do they serve for the social identity formation of the adolescent. My curiosity in the phenomenon is prompted by a wish to explore the personal accounts of adolescents in order to explain the purpose that clothes serve in their interactions with their peer group and whether clothes help them in anyway to obtain the goals of group identity.

As mentioned, consumer behaviour has been studied quite extensively abroad and although we have literature on local research, it is scant with regard to this phenomenon. My intention is to specifically study the buying patterns of black adolescents since limited South African research on this topic has been archived. As researchers, we cannot assume that human behaviour is similar everywhere else. Cultural differences and other dynamics can affect the way we behave within our settings, hence my reasons for studying only black adolescents' buying patterns of clothing.

## 1.3    The research framework

The method of investigation that is deemed appropriate for this study is qualitative in nature. That is, to garner respondents' personal accounts pertinent to this study's purpose. The respondents, as early adolescents, are aged between 12 and 15 years. As such, it is critical to take a number of issues, such as thinking capability and language efficiency into account in the selection of respondents. These factors must be considered because qualitative research requires expressiveness from respondents in dealing with questions directed to them.

The underlying framework is social identity theory. The theory enables me to explore the relevant issue (consumer behaviour), whilst being cognisant of the developmental stage of adolescence. Social identity theory is relevant because it tries to explain the psychosocial development of young people taking into account the nature of self-concept and collective self. It further explains how social identity functions in the everyday life of an adolescent, recognising the importance of group affiliation and social thought process. Therefore, the use of social identity theory is used as a guide during conceptualization and interpretation.

Data collection will be done according to the ZMET technique. Professor Zaltman of the Business Harvard School introduced the ZMET technique and he authorized me to use the technique in this research. This patented research tool allows respondents to understand their own thinking more fully and to share this thinking with the researcher (Pink, 1998). It uncovers basic ideas about the topic and enables the researcher to connect these ideas in a user friendly way. ZMET is built

on research from such diverse fields as cognitive neuroscience, neurobiology, art and literary criticism, visual anthropology, visual sociology, semiotics, the philosophy of mind, art therapy and psycholinguistics (Christensen & Olson, 2002). In this case, a collage created of pictures selected by respondents about clothes and other material goods that they usually buy will be used to describe their thinking pertinent to their consumer behaviour.

In order to make sense of the interview transcripts, thematic analysis will be used. Marshall and Rossman (1995) describe this type of analysis as a non-linear, qualitative approach because it is not neat and it only searches for general statements about relationships among categories of data. This method of analysis allows the data to speak for itself. In other words, themes are deduced from the text. Several steps guide thematic analytic procedure. These are organizing data, generating categories, themes and patterns, testing the emergent hypotheses, searching for alternative explanations and writing the report.

Aronson (1994) explains that themes are units derived from patterns such as conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings or folk sayings and proverbs embedded in the data. Theme identification brings together fragments of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone. Themes that emerge from the respondents' stories are pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of their collective experience. Right from the beginning, it is necessary to understand that the coherence of these ideas rest with the analyst (me as the researcher) who will have rigorously studied how different

ideas or components fit together in a meaningful way when linked together. Therefore, the interpretations will be original and based on the literature survey that I will be doing on adolescence, social identity theory and consumer behaviour.

## 1.4    Overview

This dissertation consists of seven chapters with chapter one already setting the tone as introduction. The second chapter focuses on the nature of early adolescence specifically looking at the characteristic transitional challenges of this developmental stage. The chapter also reflects on issues that an adolescent has to deal with, such as changes, adjustments and tasks. The third chapter is concerned with the social identity theory and aspects that I look at include the components of social identity, how social identity is formed and how it functions in the everyday life of an adolescent. Consumer behaviour and the consumer process are dealt with in the fourth chapter and aspects that are covered include the components of consumer behaviour, its salient factors and how social identity impacts on the consumer behaviour of adolescents.

The fifth chapter deals with the methodology chosen and the technique used to collect data, as well as the units of analysis. The findings are reported in the sixth chapter and the categories and themes are discussed as informed by the data.

Concluding remarks reflect on all the observations and deductions. Chapter seven evaluates issues such as what worked, whether the aim of the study were achieved and whether the data were appropriate to the purpose stated in the

methodology chapter. The final issue to be reviewed will be the contributions and

limitations of this study and what more can be done in future research.

# Chapter 2

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY ADOLESCENTS

## 2.1    Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss recent research in human development, particularly of adolescents when they are actively involved in the social dynamics. Developmental psychology researchers are continuously aware of and endeavour to archive any changes conspicuous in the life span of humans from infancy to old age (or death). This study is specifically interested in the social life and transitions of early adolescence. Hence, this chapter elaborates on the behaviour of early adolescents.

Understanding human development, in this case that of adolescents, is important because it directly impacts on our everyday lives as well as on the way we think about ourselves. The definition of the early adolescent stage focuses on the ages of 13 to 15 years. Santrock (2004) states this stage is accompanied by rapid physical changes, such as dramatic gains in height and weight and body contour. The definition of "development" as viewed by Reber (1995) entails a sequence of changes pertaining to growth, maintenance and regulation over the entire life span of a living being. In this study, development denotes a positive, progressive change leading to higher levels of differentiation and organization which evaluates the efficiency of function, maturity, sophistication, richness and complexity.

Development is also considered to be multidimensional, i.e., it is inclusive of physiological, moral, social, emotional and cognitive facets. This chapter focuses particularly on physical, cognitive and psychosocial (or socio-emotional) development. These phrases are useful to explicate the development of early adolescents as they inform on how their social identity is moulded. Although on the one hand, the discussion is limited to the expectations of the early adolescent stage, on the other hand, it enlightens developmental transitions that occur during the adolescent stage and how these transitions enable and contribute to this age group's consumer behaviour. Furthermore, the discussion proves relevant because consumer socialization (particularly of children as they grow up) relates to physical, cognitive and psychosocial development (Gunter & Furnham, 1998). For instance, learning is viewed as a cognitive-psychological process of adjustment to one's environment. Thus, our potential to learn new social skills is dependent upon the development and competence of certain abilities within ourselves, e.g. cognitive competency.

The following sections investigate physical, cognitive and psychosocial development to probe their significance in children's identity formation and how they translate into children's learning of consumer behaviour through socialization.

## 2.2    Physical development

The discussion focuses on the markers of the adolescent stage. Physical change is most prominent in adolescence hence the discussion illuminates how adolescents' body awareness links with the way they present themselves in the

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group. A known change experienced by adolescent girls is that of menarche at the outset of puberty. Boys experience such moments, such as genital enlargement, as well.

From a physiological perspective, adolescence can be regarded as a time of rapid skeletal and sexual maturation that mainly occurs from approximately 11 years of age. The course of adolescence is gradual and to spot either its beginning or its end is complex. Santrock (2004) specifies that the first wet dreams for boys could be marked as a specific moment for boys, although these moments may also pass without notice. The widening of girls' hips is an indication of the flood of hormones, which is carried through the body by the blood stream.

Physical development is particularly accompanied by psychological changes. Typically, when a child reaches adolescence she begins to perceive herself differently. Once people (parents and peers) begin to notice these changes, they treat the adolescent differently. A feeling of pride may overwhelm an individual, particularly when parents begin to relate to the adolescent more respectfully (no more goodnight kisses from the parents or buying adult underwear for a girl).

An obvious aspect with regards to the psychological aspects of physical change in adolescence is the preoccupation with their bodies and the development of individual images of their bodies. This preoccupation with their body image appears to be strong throughout the adolescent stage (Santrock, 2004). In some cases, discontent with their body image looms, as they grow older.

To look physically attractive and to have a positive body image seems to be associated with an overall positive self-conception. In one way or another, changes that occur in the bodies of adolescents will make them realize that they are growing up and that this will affect their lifestyle (no more playing with toys). An adolescent may begin to develop an interest in dating members of the opposite sex and may also display suggestions of sexual behaviour. The adolescent stage poses new challenges to an individual that ensue from emerging developmental changes (Hook, Watt & Cockroft, 2002). Therefore, the conceptualization of adolescence is not only limited to biological influences but also cognitive and environmental influences as well. The next section focuses on adolescent cognition as part of their development.

### 2.3    Cognitive development and formal operations

There are numerous cognitive theories that either have shared or contrasting views regarding cognitive development of humans from infancy. For instance, the Piagetian approach of cognitive development (a social constructivist approach) advocates that the social context is important for development. His work underlines the role human beings play in their own development. Cognitive development is perceived to unfurl in a similar vein for all people, irrespective of cultural background (Hook et al. 2002).

Cognition entails all mental abilities and activities and also the organization of thought (including changes in perception, memory, reasoning, creativity and language). It is concerned with how people process information at different stages

of their lives and subsequently how people behave as they pass through different stages of life. This theory assumes that schemes, also called mental structures, are ways of processing information that change as people mature. According to Piaget, there are two types of schemes, which assist with information processing, namely, sensorimotor (known as action schemes) and cognitive schemes (referred to as concepts).

These schemes already operate from infancy. For example, a ten-month-old baby knows a teddy bear is a soft object to be cuddled (Hook et al. 2002). An infant's knowledge and understanding of objects continuously transforms as he or she matures. According to Hook et al. (2002) schemes are organized into operations (always reversible mental actions), which combine to form qualitatively different stages of cognitive development. During middle childhood the mental operations and thought processes undergo particular transitions to culminate in concrete operations, and further transitions happens with regard to mental functioning in early adolescence.

The thought processes of middle childhood are referred to as the concrete operational stage. It is particularly present in children between the ages of seven to ten, at most eleven. These children are capable of performing mental operations such as, a simple mathematical calculation of adding one plus one. Dacey and Travers (1991) maintain that the logical reasoning of children at this stage substitutes intuitive thought. Children's mental operations enable them to form more complex mental actions with regards to the concrete elements of their world.

Logical thinking requires an understanding of the physical properties of the world. Children's propensity to ask why things happen manifests at this stage.

Dacey and Travers (1991) suggest that for a child to be able to answer a question about which is worth the most, a one hundred rand note or one rand coins which add up to hundred rand, is contingent on the child's mathematical capacity. When asking the child a question like "what if we had no fingers?" he or she might answer "but we have fingers". This indicates that their thinking style still requires refinement. In fact, the tools of thought used here still require the refinement that takes place in the formal operational stage. Therefore, Santrock (2004) heeds us not to expect concrete operational thinkers to be able to imagine the steps to complete an algebraic equation, which is characteristic of abstract thinking.

As children enter adolescence, they become capable of responding to questions such as "what if we had no fingers?" The thinking style of adolescents begins to shift from concrete thought to formal operations and with time expands to abstract, hypothetical and propositional thinking. Santrock (2004) suggests that a reality represented by symbols can be mentally manipulated during this stage. Adolescents' thinking enables them to make or form recommendations based on hypothetical possibilities. A question such as "what if we had no fingers?" requires a person to mentally imagine carrying out certain tasks without fingers whether it would be easy or difficult. This type of thinking allows an adolescent to arrive at numerous conclusions. Hook et al. (2002) indicate that thinking in the formal

operational stage becomes much more orderly and systematic, and this enables them to respond to puzzling questions.

Yet, developmental psychologists continually mention that cognitive developmental shifts that occur are contingent on children's direct interaction with those around them, insisting on the importance of social context. The continuous interaction between children and adults enables children to assimilate the things that culture holds in high regard and to think about these things. Dacey and Travers (1991) propose that the development of higher mental processes such as memory, attention and reasoning often take place as children absorb the inventions of society, like language, mathematical systems and memory devices. As young learners acquire these skills, others (those that are more skilled) around them continually guide them. This notion is also supported by Vygotsky research about the value of social interaction.

Vygotsky was particularly intrigued with how a child becomes intellectually competent (Clay & Cazden, 1992).  Vygotsky introduced the viewpoint of the zone of proximal development, which he describes as the distance between a child's actual developmental level (problem-solving a child can do independently) and a higher level of potential development (problem solving done with adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers) (Dacey & Travers, 1991). In other words, it is the difference between what children or adolescents can execute by themselves and what they can do with help. The zone of proximal development describes the range of learning from actual to potential. The emphasis is on

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cognitive development that has to take place within the context of social interaction where children can learn to perform tasks society prescribes or judge their intellectual prowess according to those prescriptions.

Formal operational thought assist adolescents in critical thinking as well as decision-making, although it does not function robustly at this stage. Adolescence also becomes the period during which individuals begin to make decisions about the future, particularly with regards to friends, dating, sex, drugs and so on. These decisions require critical thinking as they directly impact on the person's future. Santrock (2004) asserts that older adolescents will be more competent in decision-making than younger ones. The same applies to younger adolescents compared to children with regards to examining a situation from a variety of perspectives, anticipating the consequences of decisions and evaluating the credibility of sources. Marcia, Waterman and Wattenson (1993) assert that the transitions in decision-making are at its most prominent at approximately 11 to 12 years of age and at 15 to 16 years of age. Therefore, adolescents' decision-making is greatly facilitated by their mental processes and their interrelations with others (as Vygotsky suggested).

## 2.4    Psychosocial development and concept of the self

Psychosocial development plays a non-trivial role both in shaping self-concept and in forming the identity of young adolescents. Psychosocial development looks at the interaction between the person and the physical and social environment (Reber, 1995). In this stage a context emerges within which young adolescents

gain independence within parental homes by displaying individuation, and through their relationship with parents and friends, and through socialization, the self-image and identity develop steadily. As such, peer groups, friends and connections with significant others facilitate their identity formation in social surroundings.

### 2.4.1   Identity formation

Stets and Burke (2000) assert that self-concept is defined as the totality of thoughts and feelings that have reference to the self. It specifically deals with the image an individual has of him or herself (and perhaps also, the perception others may have of the individual). Baron and Byrne (2000) further mention that self-concept includes our motives, emotional states and abilities. Self-concept during the teenage years is critical because adolescents on the one hand reflect back on the concept they have formed of themselves during their earlier development, while on the other hand they experiment with numerous roles and identities that they draw from their surrounding cultures. As such, an adolescent who can cope effectively with these conflicting identities during adolescence is more likely to emerge with a new sense of self that is bracing and satisfactory.

Identity formation does not happen neatly and it is not something obvious to see. At minimum, it involves commitment to the self and others, an occupational path and ideological stance, and sexual curiosity. Blending identity components can be a long, drawn-out process with many contradictions and affirmations of various roles and faces. Identity also develops gradually. Although to some decisions such as who to date, whether or not to break up, whether to have intercourse or not,

whether to go to university after school or to get a job, which major subjects to choose, whether to study or to play, whether to be politically active or not, may appear unnecessary, these decisions build and prepare the adolescent for life's challenges ahead. The decisions we make as humans form the core of what an individual is all about as a person – that which is called identity (Marcia et al. 1993).

Erik Erikson, who is considered the originator of the "identity formation model", introduced the concept of identity versus role confusion, which tries to explicate the developmental course of a young person. The Canadian psychologist, called James Marcia, (his manuscripts dated 1966, 1980 and 1991) took this model further by adding another element to the formation of identity, which aligns to Erikson's model.

The developmental hypotheses, with regards to the direction and timing of identity formation, are that the transition from adolescence to adulthood involves progressive strengthening of the sense of identity (Marcia et al. 1993). Marcia et al.'s (1993) schematic presentation of the pathways of identity status formation is consistent with Erikson's theory. This presentation looks at the following themes: identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium, and identity achievement. These four modes of resolutions place a teenager at a particular point of exploration, and during the identity formation process both crisis and commitment are experienced.

Santrock (2004) defines crisis as a time of identity development during which an adolescent chooses among meaningful alternatives. Other contemporary researchers prefer "exploration" to "crisis" (Flum, 1994). Commitment is the point at which an adolescent shows a personal investment in what he or she is intending to be and do, and where he or she fits into society (Marcia et al. 1993). In order to comprehend these modes of resolution (identity statuses) better, Santrock operationalizes them further. He describes "identity diffusion" as a point at which an adolescent has not yet explored meaningful alternatives or made any commitments. "Identity foreclosure" is described as a point at which an adolescent has made a commitment but has not experienced a crisis. This most likely occurs when guardians (more often than not with an authoritarian approach) do not share with adolescents, which results in an adolescent not getting opportunities to explore various approaches, ideologies or occupations on their own. It can also happen when the adolescent has to assume responsibilities beyond his or her capacity at the particular age. "Identity moratorium" portrays an adolescent who is in the midst of exploring various ideologies and approaches of life, but commitment is either absent or imprecisely defined. Finally, "identity achievement" describes an adolescent who has experienced crisis and has committed to her choice.

According to Flum (1994), early adolescents reside either in identity diffusion or moratorium statuses. A pattern, which seems to be consciously favoured by many (identity status) researchers that probably lead to a positive identity, is "MAMA", i.e., moratorium-achievement-moratorium-achievement. According to Santrock (2004), this cyclic pattern is recurrent throughout our lives. As this cyclic course of

identity formation unfolds, socialization cannot be ignored hence I will discuss the role it plays in facilitating young adolescents' identity.

Furthermore, Marcia et al. (1993) and Santrock (2004) assert that the choice of a developmental pathway for identity formation is influenced by a variety of interlinked factors, which among others include, the degree of identification with parents, the manner in which guardians parent their children, the availability of successful idols (with attractive personalities), the social prescriptions that emerge within the family, school or peer group, the opportunity to explore and associate with a variety of identity alternatives and the degree to which young adolescent personality offers an appropriate foundation for coping with identity concerns. The effects of these factors may vary in importance and do not take place simultaneously but at different stages during development.

### 2.4.2  Family relationships

The effect and significance of family during adolescence is imperative because of its impact on an adolescent's identity. Guardians, in particular, are crucial to the youth's identity development. A number of studies, including that of Garrod, Smulyan & Kilkenny (1999) and Masten (2001) have expatiated on different parenting styles and have determined the impact that these styles have in our lifestyle.

Liberal (democratic or authoritative) parents who encourage their children to partake in family decision-making positively shape children's identity achievement,

whereas parents who impose their will and are controlling (authoritarian) can force their children into displaying submissive tendencies and being afraid of expressing their opinions, which can subsequently lead to identity foreclosure. Parents who offer insufficient guidance (uninvolved or indulgent) to their children promote identity diffusion when the child does not make meaningful explorations because of lack of parental guidance. Therefore, the influence parents have on their children is crucial as they form the basis of the child's well being.

Parents who recognize the importance of individuation (in a child) and connectedness in a child's life are more likely to positively foster that child's identity (Marcia et al. 1993). On the one hand, individuation has two vital features: self-assertion and separateness. Self-assertion focuses on the person's capability to communicate his or her opinion (liberal parents can foster this better), whilst separateness encapsulates the communication patterns the child uses to express how he or she is different from others. On the other hand, connectedness takes into consideration mutuality, sensitivity to and respect for others' opinions and permeability and openness to others' views. The family provides the context in which the adolescent can simultaneously strive for a sense of emancipation and detachment, and maintain a form of connectedness in a safe and secure environment (Owens, 2002). In general, thus, identity formation is enhanced by family relationships that both encourage adolescents to develop their own point of views, and provide a secure base from which to explore the widening social world of adolescence.

### 2.4.3  Peers

Unlike the parent-child relationship, peer relationships are symmetrical, i.e., both partners have an equivalent amount of social power (Denham, 1998). Relationships with peers such as classmates are mostly spontaneous and often not close, in the sense that peers share intimate thoughts and activities with each other. However, peers usually have pervasive influence in each other's developmental transitions.

Children of the same age group may argue on the same socio-cognitive and moral level, face the same transactions and (normative) life events and share identical roles, which contributes greatly to their development (Denham, 1998). These similarities help improve their understanding of their peer's social situations. Groups, which peers always form, allow them to grow emotionally. Being in a group of like-minded peers deepens some of teenager's experiences, such as fun over games, glee over a certain dress-style or clothing label, and the validation of opinions or innovations by contemporaries (Denham, 1998). Already in childhood, children are wary about their appearance and they know the feeling of being ridiculed by friends and peers. Therefore, to avoid such social rejections they try to follow and somehow conform to the norms of the group. Consequently, if these norms include clothing and other material goods, they have to value it.

### 2.4.4  Friendship

Denham (1998) indicates that it is usually not until early adolescence, that friendships are differentiated from relationships with "ordinary peers". Friendships now attain a new quality of intimacy. The likeness of children in their relationships (with same age mates) is that they make decisions in the interest of their lifestyles and needs satisfaction such as what kind of friend would fit their personal profile.

Early adolescent friendships thrive on the exploration of appraisals and shared experiences, which may deal with various changes of early adolescents, such as uncertainties associated to assuming an adult identity. Close friends are thus well positioned to aid one another in sorting out which of their feelings are "appropriate" (i.e., which are shared and valued) and which are purely idiosyncratic. Friendships also challenge early adolescents to be accepting and accommodating, or to being hostile to or blaming them when they don't fit the group norm. Furthermore, friendship inspires adolescents to become skilled in supporting one another, being helpful to a friend in need rather than ignoring, even when the friend is often in a bad mood or when support means foregoing more attractive leisure time options (Denham, 1998).

### 2.5    In conclusion

In summary, the cognitive, psychosocial and physical aspects of adolescent development are crucial for growth, maintenance and regulation of the life of an adolescent.  Although, these aspects are discussed independently, they are not categorized but interwoven in our lives. Each aspect functions within the "whole",

and as with all periods of human development, these processes work together to facilitate and construct "who" we are. The chapter intended to illuminate what early adolescence means in order to integrate the transitions with social identity theory. The next chapter endeavours to explain how human beings come to realize their "being or self".

**Chapter 3**

**SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY**

**3.1     Introduction**

As human beings, our development is contingent upon our social structures, implying that individual behaviour is strongly influenced by social contexts and many salient factors. This chapter is aimed at broadening our understanding of adolescents' identity formation within the context of social associations and for comprehending adolescents' lifestyle decisions. Social identity theory provides a base to understand how early adolescents become actively concerned with who they are and how they use the group as a sounding board to develop new ideas for personal identity formation. It also deals with the structure and function of different processes in the decision-making process, particularly as it relates to material goods that establish group membership.

**3.2     Definition of social identity**

The processes of thinking and self-evaluation are inevitably human activities. Interrelated with physical, cognitive and psychological development, humans are also inevitably social beings who live within certain social settings in which we learn through processes of identification and modelling (Bandura in Santrock, 2004).  As we move into adolescence the social settings extend beyond the home and friendship relations to other contexts that include also the broader society. Social identity incorporates aspects such as personal attributes and attributes we

share with others such as gender and race in order to define a person and who he or she is. Jake (1999) defines social identity as part of an individual's self-concept, which derives from his or her knowledge of his or her membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership.

The definition of social identity is grounded on the principle that people seek out others like themselves because it conspicuously boosts their self-esteem. Through an evaluative description of the self in terms of group-defining attributes a link is formed between the collective phenomena and the individual (Hogg & Ridgeway, 2003). Hogg, Terry and White (1995) state that a social category (affiliation to a group) to which an individual belongs also describes one's individual space in terms of the descriptive traits of that category. Jake (1999) and Hogg et al. (1995) suggest that the definitions have one common connotation: the behaviour of an individual is prescribed by the social structure(s) one belongs to.

Individuals are born into an already structured society, and once in a society people develop identities or a sense of self according to the social categories to which they tie themselves. Every individual over the course of his or her personal history is a product of a unique combination of social groupings and thus, the set of social identities making up a person's self-concept is unique (Stets & Burke, 2000).

Furthermore, social identity consists of related components: self-concept and social self. Self-concept includes subjective, objective and symbolic self-

awareness. The social self, however, recognizes an individual's association with others. Evaluation of the self in relation to the group also brings to the fore the role of mental processes.  In this chapter, I further discuss how mental processes facilitate the interplay between affect and cognition, and how our feelings model thought and how thought shapes feelings through mechanisms such as heuristics and automatic processing (Baron & Byrne, 2000).

## 3.3  Components of social identity

### 3.3.1  Self-concept

The self depends to a large extent on the manner in which individuals think about themselves, the image an individual has of him or herself, the talents an individual has, and what an individual regards as his or her weak and strong points. Self-concept can be defined as the entirety of thoughts and feelings that have reference to the self (Stets & Burke, 2000).  Baron and Byrne (2000) have extended this term to define it as a framework that determines how we process information about ourselves and our surroundings, including our motives, emotional states, self-evaluations and abilities. By extension, the definition includes body and mind, clothes and house, friends and family, reputation and possession. These elements all play an important role in one's sense of well-being and self-worth (Stets & Burke, 2000).

The experience of self-concept (also called self-awareness) is part of social experience in that our personal identities are critically reliant upon our interpersonal contact with other people. Sedikides (in Baron & Byrne, 1997) points

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out that the nature of self-concept evolves as an adaptive characteristic pioneered by several aspects, while self-awareness exists whenever an individual turns his or her attention inwards to focus on the contents of the self. Humans need to understand themselves and be familiar with their personal standards, values and goals, and this can be done through interaction within social groups.

- ***Subjective self-awareness***

Subjective self-awareness has to do with an individual's ability to differentiate him or herself from the physical and social environment in order to obtain an acknowledgement of being your own self. The subjective sense of the self advocates that the fundamental nature of an event can only be experienced by an individual internally, privately and the experience cannot be overtly known but only referred to, for instance, moods, perceptions and feelings (Brigham, 1991). As children grow they begin to realize that they are individuals in their own right and also become more aware of their inner self.

- ***Objective self-awareness***

Brigham (1991) regards objective self-awareness as the individual's capacity to be the object of his or her own attention. It is the awareness of one's state of mind, and the ability to know as well as to remember one's own experiences. The ability to think about one's own thoughts and an awareness of one's self as separate from others become preconditions for affiliating to a group.  The individual has to realise his or her own faculty to think for him or herself, and this becomes more possible as the young person enters adolescence.

The subjective and objective self-awareness attributes are instinctive to human beings. During development of the self-concept this self-awareness is integrated into a self-schema based on past experiences, detailed knowledge about what he or she likes, and expectancies about the changes he or she will undergo in the future. This has significance in guiding a person's behaviour, for instance, the intention to affiliate with a certain group, and even to dress in a particular style probably as a personal preference but as the consequence of group influence (Baron  & Byrne, 2003).

- ***Symbolic self-awareness***

The third element is called the symbolic self-awareness (Baron & Byrne, 2000). Symbolic self-awareness enables human beings to build an abstract mental representation of the self through language. Acknowledging the importance of language for representation of the self within a group also entails that members of the group should understand each other when they use this language to communicate. People initiate relationships through language and the representation permits people to interact and to share views and opinion.

Furthermore, people are able to define themselves through language and can communicate with one another in different contexts to influence and modify the contents and elements that describe their personal and social identities. Miller (1999) argues that through symbolic awareness an individual can negotiate a sense of self within and across different sites at different points in time. It is through language that an individual gains access to or is denied access to powerful

social networks that give peers the opportunity to speak to each other. Language is also found in a form of cultural or sub-cultural symbolism that relates to lifestyle and the tendency to do similar things such as favouring a similar dress style.

The self-concept that people acquire as they grow is circumscribed to the micro-level (e.g., family). Yet, human beings are unique in their own right as the subjective and objective self-awareness concepts operate in different contexts. Operario and Fiske (1998) maintain that individuals do not exist in isolation. They emphasize the importance of the social environment in which people define and redefine themselves. Through symbolic awareness the individual fits in with the expectations of the age group and can thus gain a social identity.

### 3.3.2  The collective self

The viewpoint of Operario and Fiske (1998) introduces another element, which plays a vital role in our social identity process, namely the collective self. The collective self exists between people. It is part of who we are and how we think as members of a group, a culture or a particular sub-culture (Brigham, 1991). We are therefore individual beings who use our associations or relational propensities to conceptualize and describe our behaviours and actions. An individual, in this case an adolescent, does not function in an individualistic vacuum but in a social context that influences his or her thoughts, feelings and action (Schwarz, 1998). As adolescents proceed on the developmental pathway, they fit into their social worlds by actively and selectively using what is available to them to shape their own

realities, to express themselves verbally and visually, and to join their actions with those of others in everyday life.

Reber (1995) defines the collective self as those aspects of the self that are largely determined by the need to belong and by societal values and social influences that determine our belongingness. The implications of collective self differ from culture to culture, which directly and indirectly impacts on the individual's belongingness. Individuals in certain cultures learn, for example, that everyday life presents recurring opportunities for self-enhancement, whereas other cultures perceive everyday life as presenting opportunities for self-criticism and thus self-improvement (a societal prescription). Inexorably, the collective self brings a unique context into play. For example, when I'm wearing clothes of a particular design (with an admired label) I look 'cool' or feel comfortable around my buddies this enhances the sense of self and contribute to self-improvement.

The social context takes into account the associations between people, which result into the formation of certain categories and a shared self when the person is categorised with a particular group. In a study conducted by Byrne and Shavelson (in Baron & Byrne, 2003) three groups (pre-adolescents, early adolescents and late adolescents) are compared regarding their social interactions to specific categories (with their teachers and classmates, siblings and friends). The findings show that the social self-concept becomes increasingly differentiated and better defined with age, and that different societal structures that define us at different levels, have a great impact on perceptions of the shared self.  For example, a child

raised in a strict (corporal punishment) family may differ from a child raised by communicative parents. Hence, each person's family background and self-concept comprise of several different components that provide schemas for specific aspects of one's life in a social context.

The collective self is also reflexive in that it can take itself as an object and can sort, classify or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications. As people, in one way or another we find ourselves belong to certain groups. In the group, people (of all ages) compare themselves against each other and against other groups. Trames (2001) highlights that people tend to categorize themselves as group members, and that they use groups for self-assessment and social comparison. As a result, they need to and usually do think positively of the group that they belong to. Social identity relies on the fact that the individual cannot be understood in isolation but that he or she becomes known through interaction in different social categories. Groups are also continuously compared to other groups for different reasons.

Harwood (1999) highlights that people split their social world and classify themselves into groups. The crux of the matter is that positive social identity is derived from positively comparing one's in-groups with relevant out-groups. Groups usually compare differing positive traits, which allow the members of the particular group to improve their self-esteem. Every member who wants to preserve his or her positive identity and positive self-assessment tries to maximize the differences between the group to which he or she belongs and other groups,

relying on certain dimensions of comparison (Trames, 2001). For example, young people may gain self-esteem through positively contrasting their youthfulness with negative impressions of older adults. Or they compare themselves against another group of their age in terms of fashionable appearance. Individuals are creative in the ways that they achieve this, actively seeking productive dimensions on which to make the comparisons. They might consider themselves as fashion-conscious and think they are more informed about labels than others. The clothing self-schemas impact on the individual's self-awareness as part of the group, as well as on self-esteem through group comparison.

Forming groups is typical among youth. During adolescence, clothing becomes a symbol of belonging to certain peer groups (Kaiser, 1997). When a new person (particularly an adolescent) enters a peer group, he or she chooses a group that either matches existing categories or adapt (compromise) to the expected categories of the group. Thus the adolescent may be accepted or rejected because of the manner of dress, general looks, and to a lesser extent, the way they conduct themselves. It is regarded as a youth sub-culture and respected by its members (Gunter & Furnham, 1998).

## 3.4    Social identity formation

The basis of social identity formation aligns to social groups. Those individuals, who hold a common social identification or perceive themselves, as members of the same social category tend to associate with greater ease than individuals who do not fit the expected social category. The role of social categories is recognized

by Stets and Burke (2000) who endorse that during the social comparison process individuals who perceive themselves as similar in some way define their category as an in-group. Persons who differ from the self are categorized as the out-group.

Self-categorization and the social comparison process play an important role in social identity formation. Self-categorization is a model that illustrates the functioning of the categorization process as a basis of group behaviour. According to Hogg et al. (1995) categorization brings out both supposed similarities between stimuli of belonging to the same category and perceived differences between stimuli belonging to different categories. The existence of similarities (with the in-group) and differences (from other out-groups) can be made visible through the attitudes, beliefs and values, affective reactions, behavioural norms and styles of speech, as well as clothing.

In-group individuals particularly search for discrepancies to compare themselves with others in order to feel slightly better (Stets & Harrod, 2004). The social comparison process has a stake in identity formation. It specifically has to do with the selective application of the accentuation effect, largely to those dimensions that ensues in self-enhancing outcomes of the self. A person's confidence can be improved by evaluating the in-group and the out-group on dimensions that lead the in-group to be judged positively and the out-group to be judged negatively (Stets & Burke, 2000). The social categories people place themselves into are part of an ordered society and exist only in relation to other contrasting categories each has more or less power, prestige, status and so on.

### 3.4.1  The activation of identity salience

In social identity theory, salience relates to the situational activation of an identity at a particular level and under certain conditions. A particular identity becomes activated due to the interaction between the characteristics of the perceiver (accessibility) and of the situation (fit). Stets and Burke (2000) describe accessibility as the readiness of a given category to become activated in the person. For instance, group distinctiveness enables its members to define their niche, which can be a category that may lead to bonding among its members. Fit is the analogy between the stored category specifications and perceptions of the situation.

A social category has both comparative and prototypical (normative) aspects. With the former, a social category has comparative fit when an individual perceives in-group differences to be less than out-group differences (similarities vs. differences). With normative fit an individual perceives that the content of the category is defined along stereotypical, normative lines, as in various cultures and sub-cultures. Different identities also become active as the situation changes and as relevant stimuli for self-categorization change (Stets & Harrod, 2004).

Categories can be formed in different context for different reasons. For example, an individual may see herself as member of a particular racial group, whilst she comes from another community. Furthermore, she can participate in some extramural activities that put her in another social category. She can also wear certain garments to harness her appearance when invited to special events, which

puts her yet in another social category (e.g., VIP people expected to dress differently). Thus, individuals identify with group categories to accomplish particular personal and group objectives. Hence, salience is not only tied to the cognitive-perceptual feature, but is also tied to the social requirements of the situation and results from an interaction between individual and situational characteristics. The activation of identity in a situation also enables an individual to accomplish both personal and social goals (Stets & Burke, 2000).

### 3.4.2  Cognitive and motivational processes

The central cognitive process in social identity formation is depersonalization or seeing the self as an embodiment of the in-group prototype rather than as a separate individual. This entails a cognitive representation of the social category containing the meanings and norms that the person associates with the social category. In this sense, the person perceives normative aspects of group membership in the prototype and then acts in accordance to the norms. Depersonalization is the basic process underlying group phenomena such as stereotyping, conformity, group cohesiveness, ethnocentrism, co-operation and altruism, emotional contagion and collective action. When we identify with the social categories that structure our society, and when we behave according to the expectations tied to our identification, we are acting in the context of, referring to and reaffirming that social structure. In this way, social identity recognizes 'the self' as existing within society, and is influenced by society, because socially defined shared meanings are incorporated into one's prototype.

With regards to the motivational underpinnings of social identity, it furthermore accepts that when a group identity is activated, people behave so as to enhance the evaluation of the in-group relative to the out-group and thereby to enhance their own self-evaluation as group members. This both maintains and enhances self-esteem. Some theorists argue that the self-esteem motive was initially the basis of in-group favouritism and ethnocentrism and of hostility toward the out-group (stets & Burke, 2000). Group members act to match their behaviour to the standards relevant to the social identity to confirm and enhance their social identification with the group.

The increase in self-worth endorsed by group-based identity, however, may not only come from the act of identifying with the group, but also from the group's acceptance of the individual as a member. Through depersonalization, self-categorization effectively brings self-perception and behaviour in line with the contextuality relevant in-group prototype and thus transforms individuals into group members and individuality into group behaviour.

### 3.4.3  Factors affecting social identity

Groups that members belong to, particularly during adolescence, usually become a reference for assessment and acceptance of themselves. A pertinent example is the significance of clothing as it influences the sense of self and of belonging to a particular group. Clothing gives the adolescent a particular look or appearance that is more conspicuous and that affects his or her group affiliation and public image.

When we belong to groups, our identities are subjected to the group prototypes that precipitate affiliation or exemption. If an adolescent receives discouraging feedback from his or her friends about a certain dress style, this may bring about a change to his or her attire. However, this may also be contingent on whether the person has resources to acquire stated prescriptive demands of the group (Baron & Byrne, 2003).

An important aspect that people use in their interaction with others and when they assess their behaviour in relation to the group is self-monitoring. Baron and Byrne (2003) indicate that this refers to the inclination to regulate one's behaviour on the basis of external or internal cues. External cues refer to one's behaviour as greatly determined by others and internal cues are based on the individual's beliefs and attitudes. Literature on adolescent development especially Owens (2002) indicates that early adolescents are group-oriented, and thus, external cues play a role in their behaviour because the groups they belong to become a reference point for various aspects of the identity exploration.  In the group the adolescent gains new experiences, receives feedback, and obtains information through observations in the social surroundings. Role models and significant others can also motivate young people to generate hopes and achievements with respect to their goals and aspirations.

Self-efficacy is another aspect used by members of a group. By definition, self-efficacy refers to the person's ability to complete a task, accomplish a goal or overcome an obstacle (Baron & Byrne, 2003). Early adolescents are group-

oriented and much of their tasks are performed to gain recognition or enhance their positional status within the group. Consequently, the group perceives group members as competent and useful, which enhances self-efficacy.  Collective self-efficacy develops as a shared belief by members of a group that collective action is more likely to produce desired effects. A common understanding among members of the group regarding certain tasks is an indication of collective self-efficacy propagated by members' commitment (Reber, 1995).

## 3.5    Cognitive-social processes

Amid of self-concept, social self and the formation of social identity is the functioning of our mental processes. The central cognitive process in social identity formation is perceptions of the self as an embodiment of the in-group prototype. This is a cognitive representation of the social category containing the meanings and norms that the person associates with the category (Stets & Burke, 2000). Schwarz (1998) suggests that humans do much of their thinking in a social context, and social cognition recognizes the interplay between feelings and human thinking in social judgments, stereotypes and persuasions.

Social cognition accentuates the influence of the immediate social context on individual's decision-making strategies. It also refers to the way in which people interpret, analyze, remember and utilize information about their social environment in order to establish their group membership and social identity (Baron & Byrne, 2003). Therefore, we could say that social cognition involves, among others, dimensions such as mental frameworks used by people when organizing and using

social information, heuristics and automatic processing in the interplay between affect and cognition.

### 3.5.1  Mental frameworks for organizing and using social information

The mental frameworks are schemas that aid us in organising social information and guide the processing of it for future reference. During early adolescence mental frameworks evolve regarding clothing, that indicate their attitude towards the value of appearance and clothing in their personal identity and group identity formation. Clothing self-schemas, for instance, develop that are cognitive representations of the public aspect of self.

According to Baron and Byrne (2003), schemas influence our social thought in terms of three basic processes, namely attention, encoding and retrieval. Regarding attention (what information people notice), schemas assume a filtering function. When the information is consistent or associated with our behaviour it is likely to be noticed and permeates our consciousness. Adolescents, for example, notice information relevant to their appearance in the group and unrelated information is ignored. Baron and Byrne further highlight that the information that is noticed is entered into our memory and gets stored through the process of encoding. However, information that is least associated with our schemas is typically encoded into a separate memory location, thus given a unique 'mark'. This information is for secondary use.

The last process is called retrieval, which refers to the process through which people recover information from their memory for use in particular situations. For example, in an interaction with peers when we converse about certain issues, retrieving information from previous experiences becomes relevant. Baron and Byrne (2003) insist that people tend to remember and use information that is consistent with their schemas more often than information that is not consistent. This is not to say inconsistent information cannot be remembered, rather consistent information is remembered better. This further illuminates the effect of schemas in our social cognition and the processes of social identity formation.

Bagozzi, Gurham-Cancli and Priester (2002) perceive schemas also as cognitive structures that represent organized knowledge about different categories such as self, other people, events and objects. Adolescents as members of a particular group have schemas about behaviour, values, attitudes, and clothing that may include product categories such as fashion in general, expensive labels, the price of such labels, the texture of clothing and the occasions that suit such clothes, as well as what is fitting for the social group they belong to.

## 3.5.2  Heuristics and automatic processing

- **Heuristics**

Bagozzi et al. (2002) highlight that in the process of persuasion people are more likely to change their attitudes or schemas due to thorough conceptualization of messages intended to them. When individuals possess motivation and ability, they are more likely to be persuaded by thoughtful elaboration. However, Bagozzi et al.

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(2002) indicate that processes that do not necessarily include the thoughtful consideration of issue-relevant information can also mediate a change in attitude. This means that human beings are likely to rely on less effortful scrutiny of issue-relevant information and inference processes. In fact, under less thoughtful conditions processes such as classical conditioning, mere exposure and heuristic shortcuts can change attitude. These processes are perceived to be more likely to guide adolescents' judgments in social situations.

Early adolescents have their own unique cognitive responses for utilizing heuristics. Heuristics refer to simple rules for making complex decisions or drawing inferences in a quick and seemingly effortless manner (Baron & Byrne, 1997). People make judgments based on simple rules, suggesting that humans sometimes put less effort in thinking about actions they intend to take. When an individual share common values with members of a given group, he or she can make decisions based on the interest of the group rather than personal preference. Given that dress-style or clothing helps define identity and is more auspicious, adolescents tend to rely on physical and clothing attributes to make judgments about themselves and others.

Baron and Byrne (2003) state that the inclination of belonging to a group impact on the way individuals perceive and judge their own and each other's behaviour. The presence of heuristics in our cognition enables us to make hasty decisions and judgments based on surface characteristics. This is possible because heuristics involves decision-making tactics that use specific information that can easily be

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brought to mind to make judgments. The easier it is to bring information to mind, the easier it can be to make judgment based on this information. Therefore, adolescents may construe the fact that someone is dressed in a particular way, as an indication of a certain category of behaviour. Wearing a jogging suit, for example, may be perceived as exercise gear, and as fit for a person belonging to the category of athletes. This judgment is simply based on what is seen at the time – they make associations between the information gathered simplistically. However, this type of thought process can lead us to overrate the likelihood of events sometimes leading to incorrect predictions (Baron & Byrne, 2003).

- **Automatic processing**

Schwarz (1998) regards automatic processing as an unconscious process. Automatic processing requires extensive experience with a task or type of information. Repetitious exposure to certain information, however, allows us to reach a threshold or a point at which we can process information automatically and effortlessly. Bagozzi et al. (2002) mention that during automatic processing consumers, for example, are likely to buy a certain brand as a result of unconscious or pre-attentive processing even though they did not have any memory of the brand.

Perceptual fluency as part of automatic processing suggests that exposure leads to a memory trace for the perceptual features of the stimulus, e.g., shape and brightness, and consequently the features of the stimulus are more easily processed on a subsequent occasion. Priming or exposure may facilitate pre-

attentive processing (Bagozzi et al. 2002). From a social identity and group formation viewpoint, automatic processing allows adolescents to minimize the time and energy spent on mundane decisions. This thought process allows them to save their real effort for important decisions requiring careful scrutiny.

## 3.6    Interplay of affect and cognition

Social cognition researchers have continuously recommended the emphasis of 'cold cognition', which is part of the information-processing paradigm by investigating the interplay between feeling and thinking and how the two influence each other (Schwarz, 1998). According to Schwarz (1998), emotions on the one hand, have a specific referent (e.g., we are angry about something) and usually draw attention to the eliciting events. On the other hand, moods that lack a specific referent (e.g., we are in a happy or a sad mood) are more diffuse and less intense and usually do not capture individuals' attention. Therefore, Schwarz insists that moods operate on the periphery of other activities influencing a variety of cognitive processes and overt behaviour.

### 3.6.1   The influence of affect on cognition

Schwarz (1998) indicates that people evaluate nearly everything, from the groups they fit into to the quality of their lives, more positively when in a good mood. According to Baron and Byrne (2003) our moods strongly affect our cognition in reaction to stimuli we encounter for the first time. Furthermore, affect has influence on our memory.  In fact, Schwarz highlights that individuals are more likely to recall positive material from memory when they are in a happy rather than a sad mood. A

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study conducted by Isen et al. (1978, in Bagozzi et al. 2002) whereby subjects had to study positive, negative and neutral words, found that subjects in a positive mood condition retrieved more positive words compared to neutral or negative words. This indicates that people are likely to recall material acquired in a particular mood when they are in the same mood.

Therefore, moods are thought to function as central nodes in an associative network that connect related ideas, events and expressive patterns. When new material is encountered, it is associated with the nodes that are active at that point, and material acquired while in a particular mood is linked to the respective mood node. Therefore, when an individual finds herself in the same mood later on, activation spreads from the mood node along the pathway, elevating the activation of other nodes, which represents the related material. When the activation exceeds a certain level or threshold, the represented material comes into consciousness (Schwarz, 1998).

Mood-congruent recall, referring to material likely to be retrieved when its affective tone matches the individual's mood at the time of recall, is most likely to be used for self-referenced material (Schwarz, 1998). When something good or bad happens to us, it puts us in a positive or negative emotional state.  We subsequently recall such events when we are again in a similar emotional state. An adolescent whose parents buy him or her new clothes every New Year will definitely experience a good affective state every time that time of year is approaching.  Schwarz's argument is that when people are asked how satisfied

they are with their life, they recall information from memory and positive or negative material is more likely to come to mind when we are in a happy or a sad mood, resulting in a mood-congruent judgement.

### 3.6.2  The influence of cognition on affect

Another aspect that is associated with the interplay between affect and cognition is the two-factor model that suggests that human beings do not unswervingly know their feelings or attitudes and we are unsure about our feelings in a particular situation (Baron & Byrne, 2003). We tend to make inferences based on situations in which we experience these feelings. Cognition impacts on affect by means of activating schemas containing strong affective components. Salience thus operates on perception and behaviour in order to increase activation of social identity and group membership.  Furthermore, people use cognitive mechanisms to regulate their moods and emotions.

According to Baron and Byrne (2003), people have the tendency to use counterfactual thinking by simply adjusting their thoughts in the event of negative experience. This kind of adjustment allows them to perceive certain situations as either encouraging or as discouraging. Prior adjustment enables them to feel less distressed when negative events unfold. This indicates that counterfactual thinking lowers the bitterness of disappointments we are yet to face by mentally reducing the odds of success. People convince themselves that they have no chance and this becomes a means to regulate or control their affective conditions.

At a different level, people engage in activities that are congruent with their affect. Such activity engagement usually makes them feel much better afterwards. This reaction is not an automatic behaviour or a weak point but is a cognitive strategy used to reduce negative affect. Baron and Byrne (2003) indicate that such actions represent a strategic and conscious choice intended to reduce negative feelings of distress.

Interplay between cognition and affect has great significance for people's behaviour. Coley and Burgess (2003) state that affect and cognition influence, for example, consumers' decision-making, and they argue that as the affective state overcomes cognition, impulsive behaviour becomes more likely. Impulsive behaviour is closely tied to reflexes or responses stemming from external or environmental stimuli, rather than to specific decision-making principles. Mostly, however, the action or reaction to stimuli is processed affectively, cognitively, or by a combination of the two.

## 3.7    Functioning of social identity in adolescence

Social identity in young adolescents functions in their affiliation to social groups and cliques, decision-making competency, perceptions and evaluative functioning. Adolescents' inclination to form cliques transpires when their social dependence or connectedness to their caregivers diminish. An adolescent's peers usually become significant intermediaries between the developing individual and the immediate community. In humans, the task of establishing a firm identity needs to happen primarily through social affiliation. Hook et al. (2002) indicate that adolescents are

a sounding board to each other's development. They assist each other temporarily by forming clusters and stereotyping themselves, their ideals and their enemies and to test new ideas. An adolescent becomes part of social interaction unit, which through interrelations reinforces his or her knowledge, sexuality, moral behaviour and various ideological conceptualisations.

Adolescents' social identity functioning further draws on their position during in- and out-group identification. As an adolescent grows up, he or she arrives at a definition of his or her identity by projecting diffused ego images on others and seeing it reflected and gradually clarified. According to Hook et al. (2002) simple, cruel and totalitarian styles often interest the youths of societies and classes that are in the process of losing their more traditional group identities. An adolescent's thinking is construed as ideological, geared for affirmation and to be confirmed by social rituals, beliefs and programmes which describe the inimical, along with what is socially valued, prized, and idealized.

The stability of identity is primarily secured through consistency in the way an individual is understood, received and perceived by others. The likelihood is that these children are particularly sensitive to and conscious of the perceptions others hold. Being viewed by the social world, the peers can also complicate identity formation. Hence, the process of distinguishing oneself as different from the rest of the social world can be difficult and is preferably avoided.

The social identity formation consists of the selection of the signs of the in-group and the out-group. It is very likely that young adolescents will be extremely unfriendly to those in the out-group and more likely to be different from them in some way, e.g. in tastes, in dress and gestures, although some differences are inherited, such as race or cultural background. The intolerance displayed by youths towards out-group members is to a large extent part of a defence against their own sense of identity confusion (Santrock, 2004).

The social thought process of adolescence could further delineate adolescents' relational capabilities. Their decision-making is already sufficiently advanced to involve increased abstract thinking hence the use of meta-cognitive skills characterizes early adolescence. Thus, formal operational thought enables adolescents to think systematically, and to plan in advance. Hook et al. (2002) uphold this point by stating that this age group can combine factors in order to arrive at a conclusion. Hence, their mental ability enables them to evaluate various options in the group that can impact on their lifestyle.

### 3.8    Concluding remarks

In conclusion, this discussion of social identity and group affiliation explicates the complex patterns involved in the adolescent transitional phase and the reliance by the teenager on the suggestions of friends to find an own identity, values, attitudes, feelings, self-evaluations and self-acceptance, and other behaviour patterns. Adolescents begin to form groups with friends and these groups put prescriptions on their behaviour patterns and lifestyle. The next chapter looks at the consumer

process of adolescents, particularly at the factors that have significance in their buying patterns. The groups we belong to play an important role in our consumer behaviour. I will also discuss how the adolescent becomes an active consumer and how adolescents acquire skill in their purchasing behaviour.

**Chapter 4**

**CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR AND CONSUMER PROCESS**


**4.1     Introduction**

In Chapter 3 I discussed social identity theory, which expounds on the way we come to define ourselves in relation to the group. Consumer behaviour is another concept in this study that needs to be explored. This will assist in understanding how children or adolescents get involved in consumer behaviour, and how consumers' attitudes and behaviours patterns develop. I will examine consumer behaviour from the viewpoint of behavioural and social science, focusing on how consumer behaviour is developed. Numerous studies attribute consumer behaviour and learning to the socialization process. Some of Francis and Burns' findings (1992) are in line with the principles of social identity. The proposition is that young people acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers through contact with friends, peers, parents or famous people.


**4.2     Definition of consumer behaviour**

The consumer behaviour of adolescents implicates that adolescents are more involved with social trends than probably any other age group. Santrock (2004) asserts that they not only set trends for one another, but are also the trendsetters in the communities within their social environment. Prominent trends for youths involve clothing and music, especially when other teens perceive an idea or brand

(item bought) as interesting and 'cool'. Bush, Smith and Martin (1999) state that adolescents may regard a brand as 'cool' because of the opinion of people in their age group, advertising and because peers use it and idols like it.

Bagozzi et al.'s (2002) definition of consumer behaviour consists of psychological and social processes that consumers undergo in the acquisition, use and disposal of products, services, ideas and practices. Du Plessis, Rousseau & Blem (1990) and Cronje, Du Toit and Motlatla's (2000) incorporate the importance of the decision-making units (i.e., families or individuals' opinions) that are directly involved in the purchase and use of products. In general, consumer behaviour takes into account a person's purchasing and use of products including the mental and social processes that precede and follow the actions.

Concepts that are used interchangeably include consumer behaviour and buying patterns. The concept of 'pattern' looks at the manner in which behaviour is modelled from other people, particularly children emulating experienced people. Consumer behaviour comprises of numerous components, and among others includes affect and cognition, behaviour, environment and marketing strategy. This brief review will not focus on the latter component (marketing strategy) but will use the first three to explain their functioning or role in adolescents' consumer behaviour.

Consumer behaviour involves the functioning of our affect and cognitive systems that are active in every environment. This internal activity may occur consciously or

unconsciously. It is normal for a consumer to pay attention to certain aspects while shopping and concomitantly ignore other aspects. Therefore, either way a consumer is flooded with vast information that requires mental interpretation. This may range from signs and brand names to price tags and labels. Obviously, this requires decisions about items needed for our daily lives. Furthermore, there is information availability that involves, among others, exposure that people get when they visit various market settings such as malls. When people walk through different stores or shopping malls, they get to look at products displayed and pick up desired items for perusal and subsequent buying. Information also comes from informal conversations with companions about material things that we want.

Insignificant as it may appear, information and behaviours that impact on our affect, our cognition and eventually our purchasing behaviour are interrelated to our socio-cultural settings and the level of influence exerted on us by different sub-cultures. Some parents prefer to involve and expose their children to consumer behaviour from as early as the toddler stage, teaching them the value of money and how to spend it wisely (McNeal, 1992). The role of the environment also illuminates how consumer behaviour emerges in the lives of young people. Findings in McNeal (1992) reflect that children get socialized to consumer behaviour before they begin to walk when parents carry them in shopping carts and allow them to pick up items from the shelves or buy them sweets to stop them whining. Harbaugh, Krause and Liday (2000), however, show that consumer behaviour changes substantially with age and insist that culture is pivotal in our buying patterns.

Consumer behaviour neither occur in a vacuum nor in isolation, instead there factors, which precipitate the behaviour. This includes decision-making styles, purchase criteria and social structures that have direct influences in our consumer behaviour. The function of social cognition is obviously important to humans as they engage in any activity, including consumer behaviour. According to Coley and Burgess (2003), the functioning of cognition enables consumers to make rational purchase decisions rather than impulse purchases. This may entail assessing information resulting from comparison-shopping, or reference group recommendations.

## 4.3    Decision-making principles

Both affect and cognition have significance in consumer behaviour, particularly for decision-making and buying patterns. These two features function as a psychological response in an interconnected and reciprocal manner. Each aspect influences the other. Affect is something people feel (for instance, anger, good mood, boredom, etc.) and we experience it physically and emotionally. From a consumer behaviour viewpoint, the positive buying emotion refers to positive mood states generated from self-gratifying motivations provided by impulse buying. The desire is instant, persistent and so compelling that it is hard for the consumer to resist (Coley & Burgess, 2003).  Cognition has to do with mental functions (thought processes, ideas, attitudes, motivation, beliefs). For instance, Shirley may believe or think, her appearance makes her look attractive in jeans (cognition) but, John

feels uncomfortable in the shirt he is wearing (affect). Therefore, cognitive and affective processes have to do with consumer decision-making.

The consumer decision-making process involves several steps. These include acknowledgement of the problem (as one perceives a need), information search, evaluation of presented alternatives, decision to purchase and post-purchase behaviour. According to Van Staden (2002) the recognition of need comes about when a discrepancy between a desired state and an ideal state is noticed. Possible available alternatives that could satisfy the need usually assist consumers to make choices. It can be as simple as noticing the need to add extra items to one's clothing collection or wardrobe. The alternative behaviours that consumers consider in the decision-solving process are called choice alternatives. For purchase decisions, the alternatives may be different products, brands or models. Consumer needs may produce images for an individual to carefully evaluate a set of products, brands or services and subsequently selecting the option that best solves the recognized need. In reality, although consumers make decisions in this manner, they also make decisions that involve little conscious effort (such as heuristics). The decision-making process does not always involve rational, functional thoughts about actual or imagined needs, but may involve feelings or emotions associated with acquiring a product or service.

The basis of Information search is both the internal and external. The internal search clarifies the options the consumer has and involves examining one's thoughts and memory to recall previous experiences with products or brands. The

experience we acquire through socializing and frequent purchasing of products expands our understanding of the value of a product. Insufficient knowledge and experience among children may increase the probability of incorrect purchases. Experience becomes the source of both information and knowledge for future purchase. The external search includes the use of personal sources such as friends and family. Today's youth have the opportunity to seek out many sources when evaluating items they are interested in buying. There are fashion magazines, the Internet, television and so on. When the consumer has garnered all this information prior to making a purchase, assessment becomes necessary.

Alternative evaluation illuminates the consumer problem by suggesting criteria for the purchase. Alternative evaluation provides the consumer with brand names that might meet the criteria and requirements for a specific product. A consumer's evaluative criteria represent the objective attributes of a brand, such as understanding the quality of an item, and subjective factors regarding the individual's needs and how he or she will feel (affective) after acquiring it. The criteria also involve consideration about what would be regarded as acceptable brands and how the other people or the group to which an individual belongs will evaluate this.

The actual purchase decision allows the consumer to consider aspects such as terms of sales, past experience of the seller, and emotional association of previous or current shopping experiences. After buying a product, the consumer compares it with expectations and is either satisfied or dissatisfied. Dissatisfaction with the

purchase can result in cognitive dissonance, and post-purchase psychological tension emerges when there is inconsistency between expectations and poor product.

The decision-making process is not categorically strict. Consumers may at times skip one or more steps in the purchase decision process depending on the level of involvement. If it is a high-involvement purchase, the consumer will look at the price of the item, at the personal consequences of acquiring the item and the impression it could have on his or her social image. Thus, a brand may not necessarily be selected because of its physical attributes (such as price or functionality) but because of the feelings associated with it (e.g., it makes the consumer feel good).

## 4.4    Purchasing style

Purchasing style is the consumer's mental orientation to choosing between products in a shop. These styles are part of the decision-making process. More often than not, when an adolescent plans to buy an item or a product, consultation with others takes place. Meyer and Anderson (2000) suggest that this influence is also prominent during the process of buying. In the study conducted by Meyer and Anderson, findings show that young adolescents preferred style and quality, and that they looked for price, brand name, style and quality in an item or product they wished to purchase. The findings further indicate that young women rate quality as the most important aspect. These findings correspond with MacGillivray and Wilson's view (1997) that females are primarily concerned with their appearance

and physical attractiveness, and that this helps young girls cope with their own developmental changes and the demands of the social environment. On the other hand, males seem to rate style and quality as equally important. MacGillivray and Wilson conclude that, although there may be some difference between what girls and boys look for, the fact remains that both genders generally conform to the clothing mode of peers.

Purchasing style develops through a process of consumer socialization (see also 4.4). In the family children acquire the necessary skills, knowledge and attitude with regards to necessity of identifying and buying quality products and this will guide their consumer behaviour (Francis & Burns, 1992). In their study on adolescents' definition of clothing quality, Meyer and Anderson (2000) conclude that adolescents prefer clothing that do not tear and whose zippers do not break, and that has durability. Furthermore, adolescents felt that what they get should correspond equally with what they pay.

Shim and Koh (1997) assert that our purchasing styles and buying patterns are concomitant with decision-making about product value and conscious or impulsive choice. They identify eight different purchasing styles:

(a)   High-Quality Consciousness – the extent to which a consumer searches for the best quality in a product.

(b)   Price-equals-quality – brand-consciousness suggests an inclination towards buying well-known brands, believing that the higher price equals better quality.

(c)   Fashion-consciousness – a decision-making style that takes into account a consumer's enjoyment of having innovative products and the excitement gained from seeking out new and fashionable things.

(d)   Hedonistic shopping consciousness – consumers' interest in the act of shopping, irrespective of whether there is a need or not.

(e)   Value-for-money consciousness – a decision-making style that aligns with the view that a consumer is conscious of the price of a product and that his or her money must equal the product in terms of the economical value of a purchased product.

(f)   Carelessness – when consumers buy on the spur of the moment or impulsively and pay little attention to the amount spent on items.

(g)   Confusion-by-over-choice – a purchasing style that suggests that consumers are saturated and overwhelmed by too many brands and stores from which to choose, and the impact this has on the consumer's judgment and the likelihood of feelings of discontent after the purchase has been made.

(h)   Brand loyal consciousness – consumers who remain loyal to the brands they have known since childhood and have formed an emotional bond with, and their repeated choice to visit stores that specialize or sell those brands.

As consumers, our buying patterns are guided by any of these styles, and Shim and Koh (1997) assert that the styles do not necessarily function in isolation. For instance, adolescent consumers with a perfectionist, high quality, hedonistic, novelty fashion and price-for-money consciousness have a propensity to shop systematically and carefully or by comparison. These consumers simultaneously

seek novelty and fashion in products and gain excitement and pleasure from seeking out new things. However, seeking excitement and fashion does not derail them from being concerned with value for money. This tendency corroborates the view that modern day teens are concerned with value and fashion. Adolescents who have a brand, price-equals-quality, impulsive, brand loyal shopping, and confused consciousness are more likely to buy expensive, well-known products without being concerned with the price. They are less likely to plan their shopping. This consciousness is more likely to result in dissatisfaction due to impulsiveness and too many brands to choose from (confusion).

For the most part, however, the purchasing styles are determined by the way we are socialized. Adolescents are not only influenced by the family, but also by a variety of outside interests while experimenting with their own image, lifestyle and consumption patterns. They learn certain skills for indirect contact with others, and Francis and Burns (1992) state that the skills are already acquired at an early age when children shop jointly with adult family members either when purchasing household products or when purchasing clothes. The act of buying is instilled and sustained, as they grow older.

To better understand the buying patterns of early adolescents, we will further explore the role and functioning of socialization of children with regards to their buying patterns. Prior discussing the socialization process, we will look at social structural factors because of their contribution to the forming of consumer behaviour.

## 4.5　　Social structural factors

Social-structural factors are antecedent factors that in some way play a role in the consumer socialization process. Social structural factors include aspects such as gender, financial status, birth order and number of siblings in the family (Shim & Koh, 1997).  For instance, research shows that girls seem to be more aware of and interested in clothing than boys, which signifies a gender variation among adolescents (MacGillivray & Wilson, 1997). Fox, Bartholomae and Gutter (2000) suggest that birth order has some influence, suggesting that first-borns and adolescents with fewer siblings are more likely to acquire better consumer skills than their counterparts. It seems that families with fewer children have better dialogue or good communication patterns between family members and that this also impacts on purchasing styles and buying patterns of individual family members including young ones (Shim & Koh, 1997).

Fox et al. (2000) further state that in higher social classes there is frequent interaction between children and parents, which leads to children collating consumer information better. Financial knowledge directly impact on children's purchasing style and buying patterns, hence parents who teach their children financial skills from early in life impart knowledge that will benefit them later, when they independently participate in consumer behaviour. Teenagers who earn some wages are able to afford certain items without consulting or getting approval from their parents. Other than having part-time jobs, teens often receive an allowance from their parents, which enables them to participate in consumer affairs. Naturally,

the divide between families with good socio-economic status compared to families with relatively poor socio-economic status also impacts on children.

## 4.6    Consumer socialization process

As discussed before, social identity theory acknowledges the influence of a structured society on individuals, particularly in how the individuals' sense of self is derived from the social categories to which she or he belongs (Stets & Burke, 2000). The social structures give people the opportunity to acquire knowledge on different aspects of their personal and social lives. Through the process of socialisation in different social structures people learn from those around them, and this also applies to consumer behaviour.

Consumer socialization refers to the process by which young consumers acquire the aggregate of consumption-related styles, skills and orientations while going through the changes of childhood and adolescence (Shim & Koh, 1997). Cram and Ng (1999) emphasises that children have to acquire appropriate consumer-related skills, behaviour orientations, knowledge and attitudes at an early age in order to participate effectively in the marketplace of adults. Therefore, their buying patterns are not only determined by the role of social-structural and developmental variables, but socialization agents such parents, peers and the media contribute significantly to shaping their buying patterns (Shim & Koh, 1997). Young adolescents' socialization through these agents enables them to adopt their image, lifestyle and consumption patterns.

## 4.7    Socialization agents

Starting with the role of parents, Bush et al. (1999) indicate that the family influence on consumption patterns and attitudes surpasses any other form of influence. Both parents have more influence on their children than any other group, including peers, teachers and others such as idols. Parents influence the development of children's consumption skills by providing purposive training, implicitly interacting with children about consumption and giving them opportunities to learn. Parental teaching incorporates traits such as responsibility, credibility and relevance. The fact that parents control children's money enables them to advise their children on how and when to spend money wisely (Carlson, Grossbart & Walsh, 1990).

Learning about consumer behaviour is also determined by the nature of the family communication patterns. The frequency, type as well as the quality of communication within the family impact on these, two distinct dimensions of social orientation and concept orientation of the child (Carlson et al. (1990). Parental messages constituted by the social- orientation promote deference to parents and advocate monitoring and controlling children's consumption activities. While, messages characterized by concept- orientation nurture development of children's consumer skills and competencies.

Carlson et al. (1990) mention that consensual parenting is more advantageous for the development of both orientations. Consensual parenting enables children to simultaneously develop autonomous viewpoints (concept orientation) and expects

children to adhere to parental control (social orientation). Liberal thinking parents encourage their children to explore and develop their own views (concept orientation) without prescribing how the child proceeds in this endeavour. On the other hand, protective parents may be more social oriented in their consumer behaviour. Through promoting deference to parents and family order and constantly monitoring and controlling children's consumer activities, these parents have little concern for developing children's consumer autonomy. Consensual parenting, however, promotes more liberal thinking and value independence so that children gain good consumer behaviour and purchasing styles when raised in such a family.

### 4.7.1  Peer influence

As children grow up, a shift inevitably occur away from parental influence to that of the peers. However, peer influence does not necessarily substitute parents' views. Rather, peer influence contributes to the development of adolescents' views in some areas but not in others. A number of research studies, particularly in clothing, attend to adolescents' consumer behaviour and try to explain how members of this age group influence each other's consumer attitude.

According to Kaiser (1997), peer acceptance is vital to adolescents' socialization, self-esteem and body image. Clothing that is similar to one's peers is considered important for acceptance, and the inability to buy clothing and clothing deprivation affect the social competence and participation of adolescents in the peer group (Francis & Browne, 1992; Sontag & Lee, 1997). The definition of high clothing

deprivation for teenagers refers to 'not dressed right', whereas low clothing deprivation implies being 'best dressed'. The notion that, someone has trendy and nice clothes may be perceived as 'cool'. Norms set by the cliques encourage members to value clothes and to buy certain brands because of the association with esteem received from others.

### 4.7.2  Media

This study is not particularly concerned with the role of media and marketing. However, it is relevant to acknowledge that exposure to media enables young people to learn more about consumer behaviour and which labels or brands are preferred by idols. Sontag and Lee (1997) state that young consumers have access to unique and multiple information channels previous generations did not have. These media platforms contribute to shaping adolescents' consumer behaviour and influence their purchasing styles and buying patterns.

### 4.8     Impact of social identity in adolescents' consumer behaviour

Finally I would like to draw attention to some aspects of social identity that impact on adolescents' consumer behaviour. More specifically, I look at the role of social reference points and social cognition in the process of consumer decision-making and buying patterns of adolescents.

With regard to the group as social reference point, research indicates that consumers are often influenced in their purchasing decisions by whether or not they believe that a particular purchase will lead to social acceptance. A reference

group provides a context in which one or more people are used as a basis for comparison or point of reference to form affective and cognitive responses and behaviours. Solomon (1996) concludes that specialists in marketing pay close attention to the reference group of their target market when they want to improve sales. In all likelihood, adolescents care deeply about what their reference group thinks about a particular purchase or product as the reference group exerts significant influence on an individual's evaluations, aspirations and behaviour. Schiffman and Kanuk (1997) indicate that consumers do not necessarily have to identify with tangible groups but that the reference groups might be symbolic in the form of successful businessmen, celebrities or successful sportsmen and women or idols. Adolescents are more likely to use their presumed perspectives and values as a basis for current behaviour and future purchasing decisions as they are experimenting with different roles and goals preparing for adulthood.

The presumed perspective and values for current and future behaviour can result in either normative or comparative referencing. Van Staden (2002) describes normative referencing as general or broadly defined values. An example, during adolescence, could be of a boy or girl whose normative reference group is his or her parents because they have greater impact on his or her world influencing also the child's understanding of finances and value for money. In terms of comparative referencing, the appealing family lifestyle of a neighbour may be used as a source of comparison for that which is admirable and worthy of imitation.

Groups also have influence in our lives and particularly on our consumer behaviour. Meyer and Anderson (2000) state that, in order to fit in and be accepted, members of a group try to conform to the expectations of the group. Conformity is the product of social influences, when members remain loyal to peers and to the group by complying with the standards and norms of the group. All individuals in the course of their social life observe and respond to the actions of others in their reference groups, particularly those individuals who appear to have attractive characteristics. The group then becomes a reference point for the development of consumer behaviour, particularly during the teenage years when independence from the family is actively investigated.
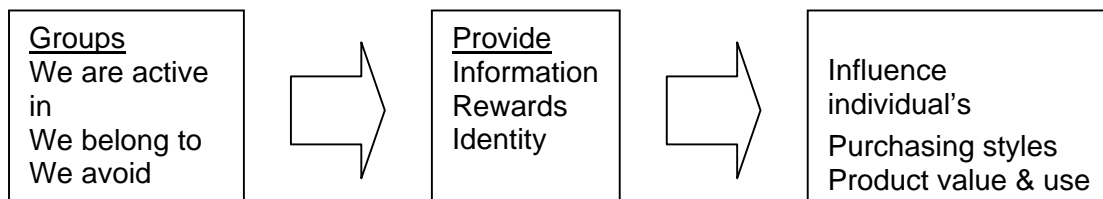


**Figure 4-1:**   Group influence

The group reference point is quite significant in the development of individual consumer behaviour (Fig. 4-1). As members of a group, we become actively involved in the group due to feelings of a need for belonging. The rewards of the group include information and knowledge, as well as advice prior to making personal decisions. In establishing a social identity, early adolescents are usually willing to conform to a peer group to fit in and gain security and encouragement from others in the group for experimenting with different roles and identities. Meyer and Anderson (2000) state that clothing is one of the most visible ways of fitting in

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with others, and early adolescents may attempt to fit in by wearing clothing similar to those in the actual or desired reference group.

In Table 4-1 three types of influence on adolescent consumer behaviour are outlined.  As a reference point the group provides social influences that include normative compliance, value expressiveness and informational influence. These three types of influences indicate that reference groups directly or indirectly impact on the individual's evaluation, aspirations and behaviour when purchasing products.

**Table 4-1**     The unique functioning of different types of social influence

| Type of influence | Purpose served in adolescents' consumer behaviour |
|---|---|
| Informational influence | Information is gained from: <br> • Professionals who work with the product <br> • Observations of what friends and family do <br> • Independent experts |
| Utilitarian influence | Purchases are based on: <br> • Satisfying work associates or family <br> • Satisfy expectations others hold of the individual <br> • Preferences of friends |
| Value-expressive influence | Leads to feelings of: <br> • Enhanced image others might hold <br> • Who the individual would like to be <br> • Admiration and respect |

When an adolescent consumer is engaged in the process of product (clothing) purchasing, normative social influence may be used, which is usually accomplished through the process of compliance or identification with others. In this regard an individual is motivated and influenced by the behaviour and opinions of others. In a study conducted by Midley, Dowling and Morrison (1989) in Meyer & Anderson (2000) the normative social influence on the clothing choice of peers are investigated, and findings indicate that clothing styles preferred by admired peers in the social reference group are considered highly favoured styles by others around them.

Among adolescents, informational influence is also useful.  An adolescent may use information as a means to acquire knowledge about the product. Meyer and Anderson (2000) say that informational influence works twofold. Firstly, an individual may try to seek information from opinion leaders or from a group seen as possessing expertise with regards to the product of interest. Secondly, an individual can acquire information through observing the behaviours of others who are important in their lives, for example, celebrities, sportspeople or even older siblings. Normative and informational influences do not only impact on consumers in terms of *what* they purchase but also have influence on *how* they make purchases. For instance, thinking of the clothing style that contemporaries prefer and what seems to be the preferred style in the youth culture, as well as where such purchases will be made.

According to Van Staden (2002) value expressive influence occurs when individuals use the perceived values and norms of the group as a guide for their own attitudes and values. Members of the group assess or evaluate themselves against the norms of their group, and during early adolescence the group is used as a particular reference point to clarify important attitudes and values. The group thus has a significant impact on consumer decision-making and purchasing style during this period of life.

In terms of the mental processes involved in purchasing styles and buying patterns, social cognition seems to have a particular impact on adolescents' consumer behaviour. Research in consumer behaviour indicates that a consumer's cognitive state has a huge impact on his or her behaviour in the marketplace. According to Bagozzi et al. (2002), there are cognitive processes that assist during the course of buying, and these include both systematic and heuristic processing. Foxall and Goldsmith (1994) indicate that human beings are by no means completely rational in making decisions, and that there is not a proper, sequential and flawless way that guides all consumers when making purchase decisions. A completely rational individual would carefully evaluate a product and its features and all the features of every other substitute for each product before coming to a purchase decision. This is not possible because individuals have limited mental resources and limited free time to follow such extraneous mental procedures.

As mentioned we use systematic and heuristic processing to make a decision. In systematic processing, Stets and Burke (2000) postulate that it encapsulates an in-

depth analysis and scrutiny of all stimuli in the environment prior to making a decision. This approach will most likely culminate in what Shim and Koh (1997) refer to as a perfectionist, high quality consciousness, hedonistic, novelty fashion and price-for-money consciousness. These consumers have the tendency to shop systematically, carefully or by comparison. They are most likely to be concerned about money. Heuristic processing, on the other hand, involves taking mental shortcuts or using rules of thumb to come to a decision (Stets & Harrod, 2004). In this case consumer behaviour is much more influenced by social reference points, and consumers select products that are associated with famous persons. For example, a well-renown former basketball player Michael Jordan is associated with the Nike brand of sport shoes.

The conclusion is that cognitive processes are pivotal to consumer behaviour but that these are strongly influenced by social reference points. It appears that both systematic and heuristic processing involves some degree of attention to external stimuli provided by the group. According to Bagozzi et al. (2002), the level of attention plays a vital role in terms of how it enables consumers to concentrate their mental activity on the stimulus. Individuals are more likely to concentrate on the stimulus if it is personally relevant and interesting, and during the teenage years when the young person is experimenting with his or her identity, persons that stand out by behaving in an unexpected way or by looking salient are more likely to draw attention (e.g., an esteemed idol or pop star).

## 4.9    Concluding remarks

In brief, the extent to which consumers use their cognitive processes (systematic and heuristic) is greatly informed by their schemas developed within their social reference groups. Development of consumer behaviour and purchasing styles is a complex and multi-dimensional process that involves many aspects regarding these schemas and social reference points. However, it is not the purpose of this study to expand on these. Rather, I will focus on the social processes operating within the peer group of young adolescents to observe the influences prevalent in the peer group.

This and previous chapters have focused on the review of literature with regard to early adolescents, the role of social identity theory and details of consumer behaviour and consumer processes. The next two chapters will focus on the method employed for this study and a discussion of the themes that emerged from the investigation.

## Chapter 5

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 5.1    Introduction

In this chapter the focus is on the aim of the study and the methods employed to achieve the objectives. I will also elaborate on the interpretive framework and research approach (qualitative), and explicate how they fit in with the purpose of the study.

Consumer behaviour is a well-researched phenomenon in social science. Researchers have explored the many processes involved in developing consumer behaviour, as well as factors impacting on different purchasing styles (e.g., Sontag & Lee, 1997; Kaiser, 1997; MacGillivray & Wilson, 1997; McNeal, 1992; Meyer & Anderson, 2000; Shim & Koh, 1997). However, research material in the South African context that focuses on black teenagers is almost non-existent. Generalisation of existing findings across on the basis of age equivalence should be done with caution, particularly pertaining to aspects such as culture that could influence consumer behaviour of black adolescents.

My particular interest is the relationship between young adolescents' lifestyle and their clothing and the social influences prevalent in adolescents' buying patterns of clothing. Clothing during early adolescence functions as a communicator, a tool for establishing the self. It enables adolescents to project their identity explorations

while playing to an imaginary audience who continuously assess their behaviour and appearance. I am thus specifically interested in what precedes their buying patterns, if anything at all. Hence, I propose to pursue the following objectives for my study:

- To understand the impact that social processes in the peer group have in adolescents' consumer behaviour.

- To understand adolescents' thoughts, feelings and perceptions with regards to clothing and the role that clothing fulfils in their age group of 13 to 15 years of age.

The definition of social processes provided by Santrock (2004) involves the changes in the individual's emotions and relationships with other people. Social processes are interwoven with cognitive and physiological changes, and as we grow older, these also impact on lifestyle. Naturally, as children enter the early adolescent stage, they begin to explore their identity and this is also facilitated by their relationships with others. In order to understand thoughts, feelings and perceptions with regard to clothing, a qualitative research approach seems to be most appropriate. The main purpose of this study is therefore to determine if any particular patterns can be identified that accompany this age group's consumer behaviour and their buying patterns of clothing.

Social identity theory (see chapter 3) illustrates issues of social identity and the course of identity formation. As adolescents' develop cognitively, physically and psychosocially, their development also involves transitions pertaining to their self-

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concept and social self. An adolescent comes to understand him or herself through his or her relationships with others, and their behaviours are subject to the influences exerted on them by groups to which they belong. Social identity evolves from the individual's enthusiasm to act within the group and from his or her evaluation of the action and social pressure exerted on him or her by significant others and peers (Stets & Burke, 2000). As eventual members of these groups, a need for compliance is tested and exposed and their loyalty propels them to maintain positive, self-defining relationships with others.

In the context of the group, the emotional dependence on and compliance with peers in regard define the value of clothing to them. Clothing may function both as a protective shield and as a statement of group identity. Furthermore, role models or significant others in the group, can inspire individuals to generate extravagant hopes and achievements with respect to their future selves (Baron & Byrne, 2003). I assume, therefore, that the buying patterns of early adolescents are to certain extent contingent on social influences exerted by the groups they belong to.

## 5.2   Qualitative research approach

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) assert that a qualitative approach is preferred when doing an exploratory study. Qualitative research allows the researcher to take a multi-method standpoint, which involves an interpretative naturalistic approach. The phenomenon of buying patterns of clothing can thus be studied in its natural context to elucidate and interpret it in terms of the meanings participants talk

about. It also enables the researcher to examine the phenomenon independently, holistically and with flexibility.

Furthermore, in a qualitative approach a variety of techniques, including focus groups, interviews, case studies, personal experience, vignettes, life histories and photographs can be used to collect data on human thoughts, feelings, perceptions and behaviour (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). These techniques have a reputation of collecting profound, rich and context-bound descriptions relevant to an exploratory study (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Silverman, 1993). It can thus be accepted that a qualitative approach will provide in-depth verbal accounts that could explain why early adolescents buy the clothes that they buy, and the extent to which youths value their friends' opinions on style and the clothes they buy (Stenbacka, 2001).

A case-study design will be used for this study. Case study design refers to an exploratory study with the aim of creating and testing stated assumptions (McBurney, 1994). The case study design is a valid means for exploring a phenomenon for which there is little to base one's assumptions on and to generate hypotheses for further investigation. Bless and Higson-Smith (1995) indicates that semi-structured interviews within the case study design are ideal for exploratory studies, as they establish possible answers for the questions, while respondents still have freedom to express their views broadly and also give more information that what the questions necessarily elicit. Case studies are, however, context specific and the outcomes cannot be generalised to other groups either of the same age or in a different locality.

Getting participants' to talk about their interest in clothes and their buying patterns of such clothing through the use of a semi-structured interview will enable me to examine the phenomenon in a way that will satisfy the study objectives (Stenbacka, 2001). The ZMET as a qualitative technique that uses semi-structured in-depth interviews, and that has been used within marketing to understand customers' thoughts, feelings and emotions in relation to a specific product.  As this study is concerned with early adolescents, it is essential to consider a method that would assist respondents to better verbalize anything related to the topic. Respondents may not be as eloquent as hoped, and as such the ZMET can be used to facilitate the discussion better (see 5.3 below).

## 5.3　　Recruitment of participants

The focus of this study is on the early adolescent life stage. Individual interviews will therefore be conducted with six young, black adolescents in the age group of 13 to 15 years old. Purposive selection will be used to identify participants. Bless and Higson-Smith (1995) state the purposive selection of participants is based on the researcher's judgment of what he or she considers to be an average subject to participate in the study.

Black participants are selected, because of the dearth of empirical data pertaining to this population group in South Africa. Since I, as the researcher, is fluent in the indigenous languages of South Africa, selecting black adolescents is also possible because they will be granted the opportunity to express themselves in their native language or in a language they are proficient in. In the local community targeted for

this study, the languages mostly spoken are SeTswana and IsiZulu, in which I am equally competent and personally prefer. Both male and female adolescents will be included in this study, even though the purpose is not to compare the genders but merely to elicit rich data on the topic.

Participants will be recruited at a Youth Community Centre in Attridgeville, a western suburb of Pretoria in Gauteng. During the recruitment process I will evaluate adolescents' suitability by also paying attention to their general familiarity and interest in clothing so as to ensure rich data and so that conversations can be easily moderated.

As stated, only six male and female participants will be recruited, which complies with the size suggested by the ZMET. In fact, Thomson (1997) states that validation studies of ZMET applications indicate that four to five in-depth interviews that are focused at identifying and understanding core themes can provide up to 90% of the potential information available from a larger set of interviews. However, if the obtained data is insufficient for interpretation, the researcher will go back to the population to include more participants until the data is saturated.

## 5.4    The Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique

The Zaltman Metaphoric Elicitation Technique (ZMET) will be used as a method for data collection. The ZMET functions as a projective technique and the researcher encourages or asks respondents to build a collage (made up of pictures) as visual stimulus of the way they relate to the topic under discussion. During the data

collection phase respondents use the collage they have created before the time and are thus more comfortable to talk about the pictures they will have chosen themselves. Professor Zaltman, who designed this technique to fill a gap that other techniques could not address, believes that the technique can probe deeper into respondents' thinking to discover new knowledge or information that could not be accessed through other methods.

Pink (1998), Zaltman (2000) and Van Staden (2002) discuss the underlying assumptions of the ZMET fairly extensively. These assumptions relate to the viability of this projective technique for eliciting rich information in qualitative research. The assumptions are also clearly implicated in the different stages of the technique as will be discussed below.

- ***Most social communication is non-verbal***

According to Pink (1998) there is a common understanding among social science researchers that human beings share meaning both verbally and nonverbally. In the ZMET it is accepted that much of the meaning of verbal language comes from nonverbal cues, such as touch, symbols, pictures and paralanguage. We visualize much of what we think about, for example, when a teenager visualizes her appearance if she could buy a Nike T-shirt. Hence, ZMET complements verbocentric methodologies (interviews) by accepting nonverbal expressions of perception, learning and thought through the use of sensory images (Zaltman, 1997).

- ***Images influence thought***

Although this assumption is quite a contentious within the realm of cognitive psychology (certain psychologists believe we think in terms of verbal representations), here it is conceptualised that human beings often use images as visuals in their verbal language. The view reiterated by Zaltman (in Van Staden, 2002) is that images take various forms including auditory, olfactory and tactile to represent thoughts and feelings. Zaltman (2000) believes that two-thirds of all stimuli around us reach the brain through the visual system. The process that will be followed to collect data requires respondents to collect pictures that relate to their consumer behaviour. These pictures will then serve as representations of their perceptions about clothes and facilitate the interviews process where thoughts, feelings and emotions about clothing will be elicited.

- ***Metaphors are central to cognition***

According to Reber (in the *Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*, 1995, p.456) metaphors refer "to linguistic devices whereby abstract concepts are expressed by means of analogy". The definition encapsulates the role of language as it carries or conveys a meaning of an object or a thing. The understanding behind metaphors as Zaltman puts it is that, they infuse everyday life and are used to generate meaning in order to understand and make deductions about our world. During a ZMET interview, the researcher collects verbal descriptions of the thoughts and feelings represented or facilitated by images to help him understand respondents'

behavioural acts better.  Strong evidence exists that these verbal descriptions are far more complete because they are stimulated particularly by analogous images (Zaltman, 1997).

According to Catchings-Castello (2000, in Van Staden, 2002) some of the tenets inherent in metaphors emanate from the interactions of the physical world with the social world and that are thus grounded in experience. This tenet is vital because the theoretical framework of this study advocates that mental processes continuously relate to processes evident in social situations, and that social cognition involves mental frameworks used for organising and using social information.  Metaphors also shape thought and action, and therefore, they have the potential to create new realities. Thus, they serve as a functional and useful purpose in everyday life. The words we utter resemble the metaphors that shape our thinking and our expressions.

- ***Reason, thought, experience and emotion are inter-connected***

This assumption relates to the second objective of the study, i.e., to understand respondents' thoughts, feelings and emotions regarding clothes. According to Shim and Koh (1997) and Zaltman (2000), purchasing styles may not always involve rational, functional thoughts but they always involve feelings or emotions associated with the opted product or service. Bagozzi et al. (2002) indicate that emotions are said to have a specific referent (e.g., an adolescent is pleased when new clothes impress friends), and further highlight that appraisal models maintain that critical judgment and interpretation arising from comparing an actual state to a

desired state. Emotions have the potential to model consumers' metaphoric process of reasoning, where past experience is used as a metaphor to channel present and future behaviour.

## 5.5 The ZMET interview process

According to Maree, Wagner and Cassimjee (2001), the ZMET allows respondents to comprehend their own thinking more fully and to share this thinking with researchers in a user-friendly way by commenting on basic constructs and the connections among them. The technique is generally used on a smaller scale, which means any knowledge acquired only holds for the chosen group and their context. In this study the ZMET will provide the researcher with vivid and detailed descriptions of the meanings that participants give to and their perceptions and feelings pertaining to their clothing buying patterns.

The Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) for one-on-one interviewing consists of six phases and runs for approximately two hours (Zaltman, 2000). Several steps are followed during the enquiry as a process of illuminating respondents' thoughts and feelings. A minimum of two contact sessions is arranged with each respondent. During the first contact session the respondents are briefed about the procedures and with regards to what they are supposed to do in preparation of their individual interviews with the researcher. All verbal components of the interviews will be recorded for transcription and interpretation purposes, and the collages are kept for further referencing if necessary (see Appendices for collages collected during this study).

The ZMET works by eliciting verbal accounts from respondents' visual representations that they bring with them to the interview. During a briefing session, respondents are asked to reflect upon an open-ended question: "what are your thoughts, feelings and emotions about clothing?" and to spend 12 days thinking about how they would visually represent their experiences of their buying patterns. After receiving instructions on the topic, respondents are requested to collect a minimum of 12 pictures from magazines, photo albums or newspapers that best describe their thoughts and feelings of the topic. Respondents are made aware that this question is open-ended and has no right or wrong answer. All they have to do is honestly and creatively answer the question, and that they are freed to reflect on the question as openly and creatively as possible.

After allowing respondents to spend 12 days building a collage of their perceptions regarding their buying patterns of clothing, I will conduct the interviews using the following steps of the ZMET.

- *Story telling phase*

The respondent is asked to describe the images and pictures used to complete the collage. The researcher will mainly focus on the reasons for selecting the images as well as the meanings behind the selected images.

- *Missing image phase*

In this phase I ask the respondent if there were any images or pictures which he or she would have liked to include, but could not find. This is important due to the fact

that certain pictures and images are not widely available, although the respondent may have wanted to use such an image. Descriptions attached to missing images also enable the respondent to expand on his or her thoughts and feelings as though the missing images are available. Story telling gets elaborated in this phase (Van Staden, 2002).

- ***Triad comparison phase***

During this phase I select three images and ask the respondent how any two of the images are similar yet different from the third with regards to his or her impressions of clothing. These three images are usually images most focused on by the participant during story telling, and the purpose is to take the respondent's conceptualization of the topic and to expand the story telling phase even further.

- ***Metaphor probe or Expanding frame phase***

The respondent is allowed an opportunity to offer new thoughts and feelings after manipulating pictures differently (Zaltman, 1997). The process involves asking participants to extend the frame of images in his or her mind's eye and to give descriptions that consequently reinforce the original idea. Conversely, the interviewer also asks the participant if he or she would like to be in the collage and if so, where he or she would place him or herself. The participant can also be asked if he or she would like to include another person in the collage and the reasons for selecting that person. This projection technique enables the researcher to see if the participant will project him or herself into the context of the collage, revisit the important images, and to elicit more constructs.

- ***Digital imaging phase***

The pictures are scanned into a computer and during this phase the respondent has the opportunity to redesign, resize and change the images to his or her liking. This concludes the interview process and individual protocols can now be transcribed for purpose of analysis and interpretation.

## 5.6    Data analysis and interpretation

The analytic procedure purported for this study is thematic analysis. Marshall and Rossman (1995) describe it as a non-linear qualitative approach. This means it is not neat and that it only searches for general statements about relationships among categories of data for the purpose of building a grounded theory.  Thematic analysis allows data to speak for itself and themes emerge from the text rather than as pre-determined categories (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Ragin, 1994; Silverman, 1993).  Several steps guide thematic analysis including organizing data, generating categories, themes and patterns, testing the emergent hypotheses, searching for alternative explanations and writing the report.

- ***Data transcription***

After the data has been collected a verbatim transcription is done for the purpose of a thematic analysis and to interpret the individual protocols. In this case, transcription will first be done in the native language of the interviewee (SeTswana and IsiZulu) and then translated in English. The researcher will do the transcription and translation and a second person that is competent in both languages will be asked to validate the transcripts.

During the transcription process the researcher already familiarizes himself with the data and gets immersed in the data. This is a good way of gaining a holistic grasp of the data and according to Silverman (1993) can lead to insights, which in turn shapes the analysis. Potter (1996) suggests that qualitative researchers should try to listen to meanings conveyed through data (listen to what data says). This can be achieved by transcribing, reading and re-reading the generated texts and to notes ideas related to text.

- ***Generating categories, themes and patterns***

Assigning categories includes selecting, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data. According to Marshall and Rossman (1995), salient themes, recurring ideas and patterns that link people and settings together get generated whilst analysing data. It is the most crucial and challenging task of data analysis. It is actually done through questioning the data and reflecting on the conceptual framework with which the study is aligned. Marshall and Rossman insist that categories should emerge from the data rather than coercing the data into preconceived categories. This process allows the researcher to explore the relationships and processes within and between categories. The categories of coded texts are read repeatedly until the similarities, differences and contradictions surface that can result in the identification of sub-themes.

- ***Testing the emergent hypotheses***

Marshall and Rossman (1995) indicate that testing emergent hypotheses involves a critique of categories during which the researcher searches for alternative patterns and linkages in the data. I will continuously challenge the categories and patterns that become apparent as the analysis progresses and appraise the plausibility or authenticity of these themes against the data. During this step I will also probe for negative instances of the patterns and includes these patterns to enlarge the constructs already identified (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

- ***Searching for alternative explanations***

The emphasis in this phase is a search for alternate, plausible explanations for the data and the connections between them. Wherever possible, theoretical understandings and similar or contrasting research findings relative to the categories are presented in the report. The presentation of this information is done to highlight differences in opinions of various authors (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

- ***Interpretation and report writing***

The last step is to write the report, in which the already analysed data is collated and interpreted. In the report, the different trends in the data are noted and explained, integrating also findings from other work in the same field.

**5.7    Reflection of the research process**

Reflexivity plays a vital role in qualitative research so it is obviously included in this project. Silverman (1993) states that reflections on the research process increase the understanding of the context in which the analysis is based. Qualitative research emphasizes the interconnectedness and the holistic nature of the phenomenon it studies, but it also urges for an attitude of personal involvement. Reflexivity will be based on the researcher's experiences and thoughts (to be kept in a diary) throughout the research process. It includes paradigmatic decisions and reflections of his feelings during the process.

## Chapter 6

## PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Adolescents' buying patterns or consumer behaviour is informed by numerous factors. The analysis of the ZMET interviews offered insight into this complex phenomenon. The in-depth analysis of data had been informed by stage three of thematic analysis, namely generating themes, categorisation, and pattern identification (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Furthermore, initial and focused coding was guided by Lofland and Lofland (1995), and data were shaped by means of Memoing (i.e., elemental, sorting and integrating).

### 6.1     Preliminary notes on the procedures for this study

I met and recruited the respondents at a local community centre. Being a young black male with fervour and a keenness for education helped me to gain access to the community. I was perceived as an ideal example among the youth (not only to those who participated), particularly when I explained my own background and the purpose of the project. Furthermore, my ability to speak the local languages (particularly IsiZulu and SeTswana) also added value.

In selecting suitable respondents, I considered a number of important aspects outlined in Chapter 5. Prospective respondents from the Attridgeville community between the ages of 13 and 15 years who were asked to volunteer, showed great interest and eagerness to participate, particularly when asked to compile the

collage. It was thus easy to find respondents for the intended interviews. However, they brought with them unequal or different educational levels and different socio-economic backgrounds. Although this was not stated as precondition for inclusion, I had to consider the impact of these factors on the project. An adolescent's family of origin and economic background could have a definite impact on his or her responses, and I had to decide whether these factors could be accommodated by the present study or not. Given the limitations of this study and the use of the ZMET as interview technique, I therefore first had to determine each respondent's background, and the nature of and extent to which his or her family members participated in consumer behaviour. These factors were added to the selection criteria to ensure that I would interview information-rich adolescents.

Two further aspects that became evident during the recruitment process were the adolescents' capability for cognitive abstraction and their appreciation of clothing. Having voluntary participation in a project of this nature was considered important because working with adolescents who were interested certainly would make the task easier. However, I had to consider the important factor that the early adolescents' level of cognitive abstraction might not be sufficient for the expectations of the ZMET, and therefore had to adapt selection criteria further by including only adolescents who could be eloquent and articulate in response to the interview process. Finally it was necessary to discern the extent to which respondents understood and appreciated clothing and actually participated in purchasing of clothing in order for them to participate in the study. The need was to have respondents that could tap in on their experiences and learning of clothing.

The initial selection criteria were thus adapted and six youths identified that were compatible with the objectives of this study:

- Black male and female adolescents between the ages of 13 to 15 years.

- Fluency in either IsiZulu or SeTswana (or English) and the ability to articulate their thoughts, feelings and perceptions with regard to buying patterns of clothing.

- Similarity in socio-economic background and general family participation in consumer behaviour patterns.

After the respondents had been identified, I requested to meet with them individually to brief them in detail about the purpose of the study and what was expected of them. This helped to eliminate any misunderstandings, and to avoid shifting of responsibilities among respondents. The individual meetings allowed respondents to ask questions if they did not understand or were confused. During these individual meetings with respondents, I explained to them how to build a collage, and each respondent were given a white cardboard on which to paste the pictures for his or her collage. A written brief was also given to each respondent to use as a reference during preparation (see Appendices). Small incentives were given to each respondent to thank them for their participation. These incentives were considered appropriate given that the respondents were young people and also to make the process fun and less serious whilst still achieving the actual objective, i.e., obtaining relevant information about teenagers' consumer behaviour.

Respondents were given twelve days to prepare themselves. Individual arrangements were made with each respondent taking into account the time that suited him or her best. These interviews were conducted at the community centre and none of the appointments were postponed. As indicated above, the interviews were conducted in the language of the respondent and the preferred languages were IsiZulu and SeTswana.

Although the collages were used as stimuli to elicit free-flowing conversations with the adolescents with regard to the topic, the collages themselves were not analysed for purposes of this study. Only the actual audio-taped interview with each of the respondents were transcribed and translated in order to obtain textual data for analysis. The purpose of transcription and translation were to maintain as much as possible of the actual content of the interview and to keep meanings as close to the original as possible. However, since languages per se were not the key to analysis, plausible translations were considered sufficient (Lofland & Lofland, 1995).

## 6.2    Themes and categories

Young consumers understood clothing as a holistic concept of all aspects of dress that involved the individual as a whole. This implicated the person's body shape, hair and any other aspects that added to individual appearance. They perceived it as vital to maintain a good appearance at all times but especially when around others. For instance, one respondent mentioned that when she bought clothes it was always important to consider what was already available in her clothing

collection, and that her appearance mattered because she wanted to look presentable around others.

The diagram (Fig 6-1) maps the identified themes as they were clustered into various categories. Four major categories emerged that could explain how young black adolescents thought, felt and perceived their buying patterns of clothes.

**PSYCHOSOCIAL development**
- Personal (self-awareness, confidence, esteem, independence)
- Social identity (conformity, peers, family, relationships etc.)

**EARLY - ADOLESCENT**

**COGNITIVE development**
- Decision-making, possibility thinking etc
- Value judgment (about Retailers, clothes)
Conscious of parent-child relationships

**CONTEXT**
- Dress code (seasonal, place etc)
- Lifestyle (stereotypes, trends, idols, labels etc)
- Township styles

**PHYSICAL development**
- Body awareness
- Clothes as a basic human need

**BUYING PATTERNS AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR OF ADOLESCENTS**
- Lifestyle (entertainment, socialization, social acceptance by society, i.e., peers, friends, idols and others)
- Consumer socialization (modelling of consumer behaviour by family members and friends)
- Purchasing styles and filters
- Socialization agents and socio-structural factors (birth order, financial aspects, attitudes, selection criteria, retailers etc)
- Media and other sources of information
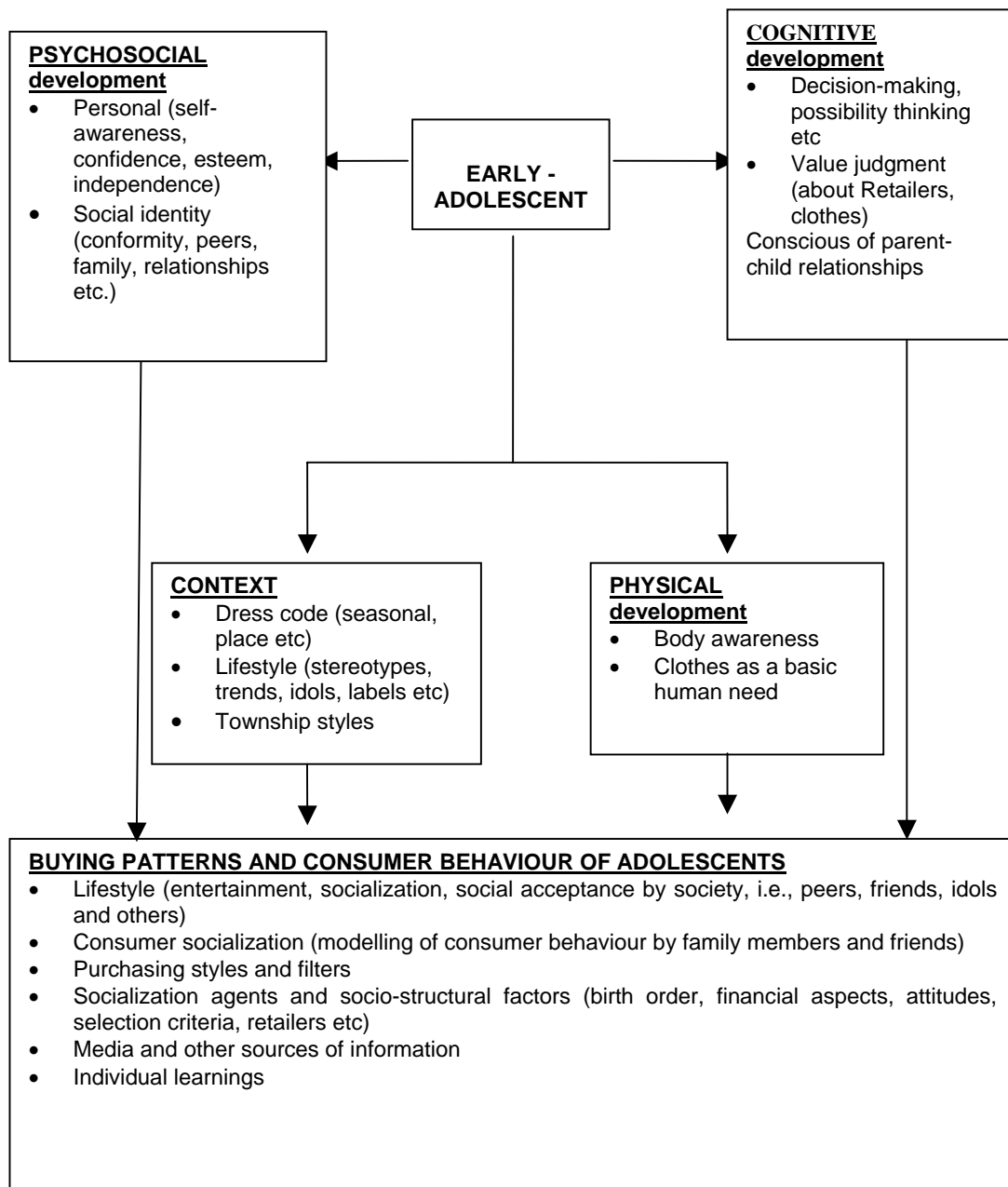- Individual learnings

**Figure 6-1** Diagrammatic representations of identified themes and categories

The first category related to the psychosocial development of the adolescent, which illustrated accordance between adolescents' self-awareness and how clothes enabled them to adjust and cope with the expectations of the age group. The second category implicated their cognitive development and illustrated the manner in which respondents arrived at their decisions to buy the clothes. These two categories were interrelated with categories three and four. The third category was physical development and considered respondents' perception regarding clothes as a basic human need. The last category was context, which related to aspects such as dress-style and a variety of lifestyles that adolescents were exposed to. These categories were not only integrally part of the adolescents' development process, but also played a big role in their consumer behaviour. Each category will now be discussed separately with regard to its functioning in black adolescent's consumer behaviour.

### 6.2.1  Early adolescent psychosocial development and consumer behaviour

Respondents in this study mentioned that clothes played a useful role in their relations with others. Although the influence of others on their decision-making was not acceptable, they did find it desirable that their clothing choices should appeal to others as well as to themselves. There was a tendency among adolescents to buy certain clothing labels in order to be noticed as a "fashion guru".

They also mentioned that clothes carried certain messages or connotations that marked an individual, and the way somebody dressed said something about that person. Accounts such as "remembering that when you are a guy you don't only dress to satisfy yourself, you are dressed to be assessed and judged", indicated

social adjustments in order to adhere to youth standards as a challenge during this stage. Their choice of clothing indicated that they had a certain measure of self-awareness and were conscious of the way they looked and were concerned about what others thought of their appearance. Peers always have something to say about another's appearance.

Furthermore, the respondents mentioned that they would not dress clumsily because clothes described them as a person as well as projected a sense of respect and a sense of self. The fact that appearance was conspicuous made them aware of the fact that they were continuously being assessed and evaluated by those around them and that good appearance usually resulted in good impression. Hence, apart from confidence gained clothes also had emotional benefits. One respondent mentioned that "one thing I know is that when you buy clothes you just don't buy, you look at what's on fashion and what seems to be admired by others of the same group. This would give you confidence".

They indicated that clothes could gain them recognition and helped them to be noticed by others. It is through such responses from others that these teenager gained esteem within the group, and it showed that adolescents often thought about themselves and of the perceptions that others might hold about them (Stets & Burke, 2000).

In terms of their social identity, the respondents mentioned the importance of uniformity with others. Although individual satisfaction was considered the main

driving force in selecting and purchasing of clothing, they mentioned that a person had to take care not to look different from others. There were certain clothes that young teens bought or preferred because they shared a similar style with peers. This "fitting in" with others was considered quite important because in certain situations one would not want to feel alienated because of your appearance. As mentioned in various sources about adolescent development, they shied away from situations in which they appeared totally different from others because it made them feel uncomfortable. A response such as: "well, what appeals to my friends get appreciation from me too. I mean as friends we give each other advices", corroborated this viewpoint. It appeared to be a feedback process that rubberstamped a sense commonality amongst peers. For instance, "my friends and I always dress casually and we sort of have a similar dress style. It represents a common aspect among us". Clothing was also regarded as the basis for group forming among the youth, as expressed in utterances such as: "I choose friends by the manner in which you dress too and that's where one becomes selective in terms of who can be part of the group".

The respondents moreover described themselves as people with a proclivity to mock each other, especially if the other person appeared to be 'out of touch with others' in the manner of his or her appearance. One adolescent insisted by saying: "so that I can look the same as other children and my friends will see that I am wearing nice and appealing clothes". Hence, in terms of their social identity it seemed that these adolescents were fully aware of the ways in which people sought out others like themselves because it boosted their self-esteem (Hogg et

al., 1995). The group was used as the basis for self-evaluation as well as a source for learning about different aspects of life. During early adolescence clothing became an important symbol of belonging to certain peer groups (Kaiser, 1997), and a new person who intended joining a group would be accepted or rejected on the basis of his or her general looks and clothing apparel.

Clothes were also described as a tool that showed adolescents' developmental progression, that they were now like other young adults, and to portray themselves different from earlier stages (in particular from young children). It was suggested by some that, as young people grew older, they changed their behaviour especially with regards to the way they looked after themselves and the manner in which they related to others.

Some respondents also highlighted that family members played a crucial role in their consumer behaviour and knew more about different styles of dress than their peers. Family members' influence and communication patterns played a stake in the consumer knowledge. This emphasised the notion that an adolescent could get fashion tips from the home environment, as one respondent emphasised: "my elder sister at home she loves fashion clothes. She plays a vital role in my knowledge about clothes and fashion". Such knowledge was indicated as useful in the way they dressed and appeared around others.

In terms of their psychosocial development, it thus seemed that peers and family was key people that played a role in the adolescents' identity formation and

purchasing behaviour when they were buying clothes. Contacts (direct or indirect) with others and exposure to different clothing styles assisted the adolescent to understand themselves better and to find a group in which to pursue their social identity.

### 6.2.2  Early adolescent cognitive development and consumer behaviour

The themes identified suggested that adolescents were already utilising cognitive processes of formal operational thinking (Hook et al., 2002; Santrock, 2004) in their decision about buying of clothes. Adolescents' exposure to a variety of clothing trends informed their decisions about what appealed to them and what not, and enabled them to conceptualise or evaluate their own individual styles. One respondent mentioned that, "when I buy clothes there are many things which influence me such as the seasonal change, fashion magazines, personal interest, friends, celebrities and friends as well".

Thinking about the self and taking control of one's own decisions was considered important to define their individuality, and they mentioned that they preferred to make their decisions about clothing independently. "My mother gives me money to purchase clothes by myself. This gives me the chance to select clothing items I want without interference from others, especially family members". In this regard it emphasised their search for autonomous decision-making, and although consultation with others was deemed important, the final decision had to remain with the individual.

Respondents alluded to the fact that although group influence had a great impact on their consumer behaviour or purchase decision, it was extremely important to them to make certain choices, particularly with regard to clothing, independently and not being imposed upon by anybody. "Usually when I buy clothes I go with my brother to town and when we get there I'll choose all clothing items I want, he doesn't interfere with my selection. Because I want control over selection and his duty is to pay at the cashier only".

Clothes thus became a means through which the adolescent's striving towards autonomy could be expressed, because it provided for individuality, allowed him or her to make decisions independently, and ensured that individual choices could be executed in spite of other external influences. In spite of this striving toward autonomous decision-making when buying clothes, it seemed that parents still exerted a significant influence on adolescents' decision-making styles and consumer behaviour. The fact that parents financed the teenagers' purchases meant that their suggestions needed to be treated with respect and taken as valid position concerning buying of clothes. Two respondents mentioned that they did not always make independent purchases and that they would either go shopping with an elder person or older sibling. Another respondent indicated that "I once asked my mom to buy me one, but she said she will when I get to grade twelve". This accentuated the adolescent's financial dependence on his or her parents and the impact such constraints had on their personal wishes. Nonetheless, respondents indicated that buying of clothing provided them with a valued

opportunity to exert their independence and autonomous decision-making because in spite of these constraints the actual selection still rested with them.

Another aspect that became apparent from the analysis was that adolescents were conscious of various factors that determined their consumer behaviour. Their personal judgement did not only relate to certain clothing labels but also the patronage they gave to retail stores renowned for their good reputations. Pertinent quotes that corroborated this consciousness were found in, for example, "if I've got money to buy clothes but cannot find what I wanted I'd rather wait until such a retail store orders another stock. I would not go substitute". This also indicated that respondents' value judgement about retailers and clothing brands they sell were developing or, in some cases, already developed.

The economic status of the family was mentioned as an important issue to be taken into account when making purchasing decisions. Adolescents thought it inappropriate to hassle their parents for money only to satisfy their individual needs. They indicated that it was important for them to be conscious of their family situation and that they had to resist needless peer pressure. One respondent even mentioned that he would rather discontinue the friendship if it were purely based on doing what the other person said without considering his family situation or the context. An adolescent who acknowledged this, commented that, "your parents cannot afford a certain clothing labels for you, positive guidance is good for us as friends. Eventually forcing your parents to get or buy you a label that will take them out of budget".

In this regard, a certain level of maturity in cognitive decision-making processes became apparent that indicated that an adolescent could also consider his or her family's financial situation in terms of affordable purchases. The responses suggested a degree of mental maturity among young adolescents in terms of how they thought and evaluated their choices and conducted consumer behaviour, and the ways in which certain aspects of their lives affected their decision-making. They also displayed competency in their cognitive abilities with regards to conversations they normally would have with friends about youth lifestyles and how they fitted into these cultures. For example, they mentioned that although clothes were important, one could not buy every latest design. It appeared that even though they considered clothes as useful for fitting in with others, these teenagers were conscious and wary of indulgence and money wasting. This type of cognitive engagement could be described as critical thinking in consumer decision-making and the ability to evaluate the value of the relationships they had with family and friends and the contribution their friends could make to their consumer behaviour.

### 6.2.3  Early adolescent physical development and consumer behaviour

Physical development relates directly to individual's body awareness and how an individual presents him or herself in different contexts. Respondents in this study indicated that clothes were a basic human need, and therefore, clothes completed a human being. They also emphasised a compelling need to relinquish childhood behavioural acts and this could be expressed auspiciously by changing one's clothing. Their physical changes also propelled the adolescents to adjust their

clothing accordingly and they considered how their partners (boyfriends or girlfriends) would react to their physical appearance and dress styles.

In early adolescence physical development became intermingled with psychological aspects and included a preoccupation with their bodies. They strived to look physically attractive as well as having a positive body image. This was particularly relevant when they wanted to impress members of the opposite sex. Perhaps as part of dealing with the challenges of this developmental stage, respondents stated that "as a person you need to think of how your boyfriend or girlfriend will react when she sees you dressed in a certain way, so you have to dress in such a way that you do not disappoint the other person".

Amid these psycho-physical changes existed an inclination to compete with one another for the attention of others (particularly the opposite sex). Boys, for example, competed with each other specifically with clothing labels, while girls used dress-style and an awareness of attractiveness for competitive purposes. Girls did not compete by buying very expensive designs, but since their clothes were supposedly less expensive, they could frequently change their outfits. One respondent commented that "their clothes are quite affordable. That explains why girls change clothes more often than boys". The perception that girls pursued physical attractiveness while boys did not regard their physical appears as highly (MacGillivray & Wilson, 1997) seemed to be emphasised by these respondents. They did, however, state that although it was not always possible to buy the latest

clothing designs it was still important to maintain a smart and presentable image through fitting clothing.


The respondents furthermore indicated that physical attraction was the reason they wanted to impress others, and indicated that clothes enabled them to look physically presentable. In their view, clothing provided the exterior physique that made it more likely to be noticed and liked or perceived as a potentially ideal intimate friend. They indicated that it would definitely disappoint them if others were to make fun of them or if they could not attract someone from the opposite sex on the basis of their dress-style and physical appearance.


## 6.2.4  Context and consumer behaviour

Reber (1995) described context as the specific circumstances or events and processes (physical and mental) that characterized a particular situation and impacted on an individual's behaviour. Clothing and dress-style are ways of acknowledging the expectations and prescriptions of a situation or context. The respondents in this study commented on how they might change their clothing depending on the situation.  For example, they considered a particular relationship between seasonal patterns, associated seasonal activities, and clothing style when deciding on clothing purchases. During summer people spent most of their time outdoors and as such, they needed to adjust their clothing accordingly. An outdoor lifestyle also meant spending more time with friends and they were compelled to appear presentable by being colourful. One respondent mentioned that "clothes

are communicative, because you can see it is winter or summer and your dress-style should correspond with that as well".

Other situations such as social invitations also dictated their styles of dress according to the social dynamics of the environment and demands with regard to clothing trends, stereotypes and exposure to idols. Cultural stereotypes played a specific role in determining various styles of dress. For example, the 'Pantsula' style originated decades ago from Sophiatown (an area of Johannesburg) and became part of the township dress code. "I feel that I can dress like this, even guys in the township will notice that I am a Pantsula, I love clothing that resembles my identity as a Pantsula".

Depending on the immediate lifestyle and individual personality, dress styles were factored into buying of clothes and provided the kind of identity that was relevant in the context. Furthermore, the respondents mentioned that there were a variety of lifestyles globally, and that the South African youth was familiar with different global trends. These kinds of influences ensued due to exposure to the media and famous faces used to promote certain brands. Idols, either local or international, were used as a kind of indirect reference group for adolescents when making purchasing decisions. The idols were also used as standard to evaluate one's own attitudes or behaviour (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1997), as well with regard to clothing and purchasing of clothes.

**6.3     Early adolescent consumer behaviour and buying patterns of clothes**

The themes and categories identified in the interviews indicated that early adolescents were actively involved in consumer behaviour and that clothes played an important role in their lives, especially in their relationships with others and for their identity formation. Socialization agents were identified as critical in their consumer socialisation and actual behaviour. Respondents mentioned that they had acquired their skills from parents or family members, friends, peers and idols. Some of the respondents even mentioned that acquiring knowledge from family members (especially older siblings) gave them an edge in looking presentable and eye-catching. Media was also seen as a socialization agent as it functioned as a window onto different cultures and lifestyles, while bringing them closer to their role models or idols.

The respondents in this study also indicated an awareness of the social-structural factors that contributed to their consumer behaviour. These included parents' income, occupational and income aspirations, gender, age and household circumstances. Some of the respondents indicated that parents were careful and did not allow their children to make independent purchases. Instead, an older sibling was urged to escort or accompany the adolescent. However, the adolescent made the final selections of what to buy themselves, which added to their sense of autonomy in purchasing decision-making. Furthermore, themes emerged that showed respondents' took their family situation into consideration when making purchasing decisions and spending their parents' money. They felt adolescents

must not always push their parents for more money or use all their savings to buy clothes.

Other themes that emerged in terms of social-structural factors, depicted respondents continuous evaluation of the value of friendship and the pressures presented by such a friendship for purchasing behaviour that they could not comply with. In this regard, it appeared that the respondents had very set values and did not allow peer pressure to overrule the family values, particularly in terms of consumer behaviour. Respondents' accounts with regards to their engagement with consumer behaviour confirmed the purchasing styles indicated by Shim and Koh (1997). Adolescents' consumer behaviour and the decision-making involved in the actual purchasing process, revealed cognitive maturity. More often than not, when these adolescents planned to buy an item or a product, they would first consult with others. They would also consider price, brand name, style and quality of an item or product (Meyer & Anderson, 2000), which to these adolescents were attributes considered useful to harnessing both their individual and group identity.

## 6.4    Conclusion

In this chapter the findings of this study were discussed. Adolescent consumer behaviour with regards to buying patterns of clothing was considered in terms of how a group of young black adolescents from a local community learnt about products and services from their family, friends and the environment and how they used this information to direct their consumer behaviour. Different themes emerged that referred to the psychosocial, physical and cognitive functioning of the

adolescent, as well as to the impact of contextual and social-structural issues on the consumer behaviour of adolescents when they were purchasing clothing. Overall it appeared that the adolescents interviewed for this project complied with expected patterns as explained in the literature. However, it seemed that the group also presented with a certain measure of maturity that was not considered in previous studies on the topic. New insights thus emerged that could add to the understanding of some of the tendencies prevalent amongst South African teenagers' when buying clothing.

Finally, as individuals who were exposed to what their counterparts did in their respective contexts both locally and globally, the adolescents manifested with their own styles.  Some of these were emulations of what others did, especially those specifics relevant to them and their age group. They also valued cultural trends, especially those appealing to them, thus expressing a group identity that stretched beyond the peer group.

**Chapter 7**

**CONCLUSIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS AND LIMITATIONS**

**7.1    Reflexivity**

As part of rounding off this thesis, I would like to reflect on reflexivity as part of the process for establishing plausibility in my research project. Reflexivity is an important part of qualitative research and formed an integral part of the planning, data collection and analysis. It also indicated my personal interests and values when conducting this project. For example, my personal involvement with the project included the reason for choosing this particular topic to investigate, the choice of qualitative research as a method of investigation, as well as the Zaltman Metaphoric Elicitation Technique as the specific tool for uncovering the themes and patterns of adolescent consumer behaviour for buying of clothing.

Reflecting on the research for this project, I reviewed how my personal values and interests shaped processes involved. I chose the Attridgeville Community Centre as context for this project because it was more accessible to me, and because I had previously worked on several academic projects in this community. This gave me confidence to recruit participants from this community and to ensure that I could get information rich data.  Moreover, in this community I was able to use the local vernacular that added suppleness and allowed prospective respondents to perceive me as one of the community members. Respondents were also very interested in me as a person and my occupation, and several times asked me how

I juggled between academic work and other life challenges. In this regard, I could therefore convert their curiosity into a desire for participation while I also played a role in their aspirations for the future. It made the process of sensitization of respondents prior to conducting the interviews easier and allowed me to emphasize to potential respondents the importance of their involvement in order to comprehend the concepts that underpinned early adolescents' consumer behaviour. Through my involvement I came to understand that adolescents' had a realization of their age group and that expectations of things that were important to them were embedded in their reflection of both self-awareness and collective realization - an awareness of who one is, what one stands for, and what one needs.

When setting up the dates for the interviews, I chose to allocate a separate day for each of the six respondents because I felt that each respondent required specific time and attention. An interview session also had unique features that informed the planning for the next day. In this regard, I applied an action research approach, in the sense that I not only reviewed the textual materials after each interview but also the moods of respondents in order to pre-empt foreseeable problems. Qualitative method and the use of semi-structured interview schedules gave me the latitude to rephrase some of the questions that I felt respondents might have difficulty comprehending and to ensure that I got rich data for analysis purposes. I did, however, made sure that the flow of the process was consistent with what was prescribed by the ZMET.

Language is a crucial tool for communication, and I believe that people usually feel more positive when spoken to or speaking in their native language. In this regard, using SeTswana and IsiZulu, both languages with which I am familiar, helped the respondents to express themselves better and to tap into issues related to the research topic. I did the translation of all the interviews myself and verified the transcripts with an objective outsider who was also competent in both languages (i.e., SeTswana and IsiZulu). The transcription process enabled me to immerse myself with the data prior the analysis process, and helped me to gain a holistic understanding that led to insights that shaped the analysis (Silverman, 1993).

For analysis, a thematic technique was useful. Thematic analysis started with transcription and ended with report writing. The critical part of analysis was the generating of categories, themes and patterns and testing emergent hypotheses. Criteria proposed by Lofland and Lofland (1995), Ragin (1994) and Silverman (1993) guided me in this part of the analysis, and encouraged me to read and re-read the transcripts until I was sure that the data could speak for itself. The analysis was context-bound and I conceptualised what respondents alluded to as pertinently as possible so as to allow their voices to be heard. Throughout the analysis process I paid attention to processes and the direction of themes drawing on categories that the respondents presented and focusing on explicating implicit belief systems (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The thematic analysis allowed me, therefore, to gain particular insight into the ways in which the adolescents in this project perceived clothing as part of their sub-culture for establishing social relationships and how this influenced their consumer behaviour.

The theoretical framework of social identity theory and the literature review, allowed me to define and describe key concepts such as early adolescence, consumer behaviour, human development, and the psychosocial processes involved with group identity. Social identity theory provided sufficient underpinning knowledge for concepts such as self-concept, why the opinions of others were important, and how the group influenced purchasing patterns for consumer behaviour. It also allowed me to explore unique human behaviour in this study, and to explain the utterances of the respondents who participated in the study in terms of the four keys categories that impacted on the adolescents' buying patterns of clothing.

Finally, reflecting on the research process allowed me to explore the "truth value" of the outcomes for this project by looking at four criteria of judging qualitative research, namely, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. In ensuring credibility it was important for me to refer data back to respondents to check if this adequately captures their interests as per interview accounts. Hence respondents had to peruse this work to since they are the only ones who can legitimately judge the credibility of the findings herein.

In terms of transferability, I thoroughly described the context of this study taking into account the lifestyle of young people including South African adolescents. The study also looked at lifestage of respondents in terms of expectations to this age group. Therefore, this process of contextualization allowed me to selectively choose literature that was relevant. My emphasis to other researchers is to take

into cognisance of the context of this study when similar projects are to be pursued.

The being of this study relied on the belief that the consumer behaviour of adolescents cannot be similar across cultures. Hence with the emphasis of dependability, study acknowledged the ever-changing contexts we find ourselves in. the intention here was by no means to test any hypothesis quantitatively, but to explore the consumer behaviour of black adolescents in South Africa, to see if we could pick up any new or different behaviours.

And last, confirmability, which I used one of my colleagues to check the data, starting with transcripts as translation was done from IsiZulu and SeTswana to English. I did not want to loose the essence of verbal accounts on translation hence second opinion was needed. I also had to check and recheck the data throughout this study.

## 7.2    Review of key categories

The primary aim of this study was to explore the buying patterns of adolescents specifically with regards to clothing. I wanted to explore the impact of social processes upon the early adolescents' consumer behaviour with regard to purchasing of clothes, focusing my attention on the black youth in South Africa. This was done against the theoretical background of social identity theory and existing research in consumer psychology pertaining to consumer decision-making processes and consumer socialization. A thematic analysis of the textual data

collected for this study revealed that early adolescents' buying patterns of clothing were closely related to the major areas of their developmental transition during this period of life and were context-bound with regard to the influences of family and peers. Four categories emerged that were perceived critical in adolescents' consumer behaviour and functioned concomitantly:

- Psychosocial awareness of the self and others

- Cognitive processes for decision-making

- Physical challenges

- Contextual factors.

Pertinent to the psychosocial category respondents emphasized the necessity of interpersonal contact with others. Their relationship with others, especially peers and family members, played an important role in the mastering of consumers participation skills. During early adolescence the peer group became an important reference group essential for self-evaluation and competition, and the adolescents that were interviewed for this project strived to appear presentable based on the group norms. Although respondents did not compare the contribution of peers and family members, it appeared that peers were mostly used as social reference group and self-evaluation. Approval from people of same age meant an individual was not perceived as different from others in terms of styles and trends, and this contributed to the adolescent sense of esteem within the group. Clothing apparels similar to one's friends affected social competence and participation, and were considered important for acceptance in the peer group. Interaction between adolescents furthermore resulted in norms used for monitoring and encouraging

peer members to buy trendy clothing brands because it contributed to individual confidences.

Family consumer behaviour indicated the influence of parents on adolescent expenditure posing on the one hand financial controls and advocating wise spending of money, while on the other hand fostering autonomy and independent decision-making. Although, respondents had high regard for the views and opinions of their peers, they also indicated the indispensable role that family members played in shaping their consumer behaviour. Parents and older siblings were their first social reference base and considered as a valued point of departure.

With regard to cognitive competence, it appeared that the respondents were critical of factors influencing their buying patterns and clothing selection. Their decision-making abilities involved scrutinizing resources at their disposal (i.e., parental suggestions, evaluation of family context and financial situation, etc.), and evaluate cognitively the products they intended to buy and use. Consistent with the literature on consumer behaviour (Cram & NG, 1999), the respondents purchasing patterns of clothing consisted of psychological and social processes and these processes were facilitative in the acquisition, use and disposal of products, services, ideas and practices. In the early adolescent stage it seemed, however, that the respondents hinged between independent decision-making and consulting with others. The themes suggested that they enjoyed the independent space to make

their own decisions, but appreciated and valued the information gleaned from the socialization agents, particularly those who they regard highly.

Respondents' decision-making processes also revealed a certain level of maturity about product quality, brand attributes, and subjective factors such as need satisfaction that reflected high-involvement in their purchasing process. Their "brand-consciousness" and consideration of quality and price indicated the development of specific purchasing styles when deciding which products to buy (Shim & Koh, 1997). Despite their conscious awareness about their appearance and the perception others held of them, the respondents indicated that they preferred clothing that were durable (i.e., should not tear, zippers should not break easily), which complied with the outcomes of Meyer and Anderson's (2000) study.

The role of physical development on purchasing patterns of clothing also became apparent in respondents' comments. They were aware that the physical changes experienced during early adolescence set them apart from earlier stages and that this impacted on how they should present themselves in their age group and in public. The specific markers of pubertal changes affected the manner in which others observed the young teenager, and also contributed towards a preoccupation with their body image (Santrock, 2004). The adolescents interviewed for this project confirmed the importance of attractiveness and a positive body image associated with overall positive self-conception, and the realisation that clothing played a crucial role in expressing one's level of developmental progress and change in behaviour.

Context and specific situations added another consideration to respondents' purchases and impacted on their consumer behaviour in general. Social invitations, lifestyle and social surroundings, and dressing styles as determined by seasonal change, were indicated as part of the many factors that influenced of early adolescents' buying patterns of clothing. The adolescents were aware of expectations of dress-style that was considered appropriate to certain social events and their local surroundings, and had specific thoughts of how they should project themselves in these settings. They also commented on the variety of dress-styles and styles that were conspicuous within their culture. Depending on the immediate lifestyle and individual personality, these styles were factored into process of buying and provided the kind of structure and identity relevant to the context in which these adolescents' functioned (Jake, 1999; Stets & Burke, 2000).

Finally, the analysis indicated the young people interviewed for this project had an abundance of resource to their disposal and were conscious of global trends. There were even certain styles, like 1980s dress-style, that young people still found appealing indicating a inter-generational sensitivity amongst the group. Although I interviewed both females and males, this was not intended as a comparative study but merely an exploration that involved both genders. The fact that I specifically selected black adolescents was primarily because of the gap in empirical research for this group within the Southern African context. Their enthusiasm to participate and articulate their views in their native language emphasized the need to explore this context.

Based on the thematic analysis and the categories outlined above, I concluded that the aims and objectives for this study had been achieved. The project provided insight into the buying patterns of adolescents specifically with regards to clothing, and unveiled the social processes that impacted on the early adolescents' consumer behaviour. The outcome of this study was primarily local, focusing on the responses of a small group of black youths and presenting an in-depth account of how this group conducted the purchasing of their clothing. The results can therefore not be generalised.  However, that was not the aim of this project.

## 7.3     Contributions

In this project I chose to the use a qualitative approach and the ZMET for interviewing adolescents between the ages 13 and 15 years. The technique proved to be highly effective and do justice to this study.  Respondents were able to talk about their behaviour and in particular their buying patterns based on the stimulus provided by the collage they made prior to the interview session. Interviewing adolescents can, in some cases, be fraught with difficulties, particularly when the young person had to express his or her thoughts and feelings about a specific topic.  However, it appeared that the ZMET was appropriate for data collection with adolescents since it compelled respondents to be creative and think of how they would talk about their consumer behaviour prior to actually expressing their viewpoints. The semi-structured interview schedule of the ZMET also linked well with strategies for in-depth interviewing eliciting rich conversations. It therefore seemed that this project and the methods employed added a perspective to

psychological research that allowed for an understand of consumer behaviour of young people.

## 7.4    Limitations

The project did, however, have some limitations. Firstly, the ZMET is a time-consuming technique that did not allow for a more extensive sample to be interviewed. Secondly, in order to ensure that the respondents could provide rich data, they had to be carefully selected, and many others were excluded that could have presented alternative viewpoints currently not considered. Although it was not the purpose of this study to generalise findings, a more representative sample, also including teenagers from lower socio-economic groups and those allegedly less capable of verbal articulation, might have provided a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon than what had been presented in this report.

Thirdly, the technique relied on pictures that respondents brought along in the format of a collage to the interview session. The use of magazine pictures could be considered as limitation in the sense that if participants preferred a particular magazine, their accounts would have been more likely to be subjected to only such stimuli as provided in the resource (proclivity to exclusion of other sources). However, as Christensen and Olson (2002) indicated, the use of specific pictures should not be seen as a substitute for creative thinking about visuals or other images that could have had a greater impact on triggering consumers' thoughts and feelings.

Finally, the projects was very much context specific. The respondents were selected from one particular suburb in Tswane and the views of this group could not be considered representative of all early adolescents or of specifically black adolescents. It is therefore suggested that a bigger project should be considered that could result in findings that could be more readily generalised on a larger scale. A larger scale project could investigate the progression of young consumers' buying patterns, and differences and similarities between early and late adolescence and the extent to which consumer behaviour changes by age. Given the major changes of the South African context in recent years, a larger scale project could also consider the direct and indirect impact of intermingled lifestyles, exposure to different cultural values and expectations, economic status, and communication patterns within the family on the consumer behaviour of adolescents buying patterns of clothing.

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**Interview schedule**

(The interview starts by requesting the respondents' permission to audiotape what will be said. At this stage, the respondent is also assured that the contents of the interview will be treated as confidential.)

1. Tell me the story behind every picture on this collage. How do these pictures represent your thoughts, perceptions and experiences with regards to clothing? Do clothing advertisements influence your buying patterns? Questions that might follow (will be contingent to responses and choice of words or adjectives) might include:

Why is. …………important to you?

How does……….help you?

Why is………..something that appeals to you?

What happens if…………is not available or obtainable?

2.  If this picture could be enlarged, what would also be included? (choose any picture of interest).

3. What would pictures look like if it were to precede or follow this picture? (choose any picture of interest).

4. Did you look for pictures or images specifically that could not be found? If so, what were you looking for?

5. If you could put yourself anywhere on this collage, where would it be? What would you be thinking or doing there?

6. If you could invite anybody to join you in this collage, whom would it be and why?

7. Select three pictures randomly: how are these two images similar, yet different from the third in terms of thoughts and perceptions?

8. If you were to provide this collage with a slogan consisting of one descriptive word, what would it be? How does the slogan relate to the overall theme of your collage?

**Cover letter**

Dear_____

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As we have already discussed, you are requested to make a collage of pictures that you would associate apparel advertising. These pictures should convey what you think, your experiences and perceptions pertaining clothing. The following may provide some guidelines as to exactly what you need to do:

- Use a minimum of 12 pictures for your collage.
- These pictures may be taken from any source, particularly youth magazines, newspapers or even photographs.
- Paste the pictures randomly on the white cardboard that is provided. Here you can be as creative as possible. There is no right or wrong way in which to organize the pictures. Feel free to arrange them in any way according to your own taste.

Completing the collage should take between seven and ten days, after which I will contact you to arrange a suitable time to conduct the interview. The interview will not take up more than two hours of your time and will be conducted at a time that is most suitable to you. The aim of the interview is to provide you with the opportunity to talk about your collage and share thoughts, perceptions and experiences on the topic.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you need any more assistance.

Kind regards

Tshifhiwa Mulaudzi
083 671 1141