



## **Conspicuous Consumption and Black Youth in Emerging Markets**

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A research project submitted to the Gordon Institute of Business Science,  
University of Pretoria, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Business Administration.

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**Declaration**

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to explore a phenomenon known as *pexing* that is prevalent in South Africa's Black youth. The study aimed to explore the nature of *pexing* in relation to other conspicuous consumption behaviours and understand the drivers for this behaviour. The study interviewed a sample of 10 participants. Findings of the study indicated that *pexing* is similar to conspicuous consumption but also has aspects that are distinct to it and the researcher proposes a framework and term (destructive conspicuous consumption) for this noted consumption activity. The study also shows that although different to anti-consumption *pexing* has some anti-consumption behaviours. The study also identifies antecedents that lead to the noted behaviour and these range from a low income environment to adult modelling. Relationships and links between antecedents; coping strategies and the resultant consumption activity (Pexing) was demonstrated.

The research then concludes by making recommendation to both government and marketers in light of the findings of this research. The research also highlights some socio-economic considerations of *pexing* and also suggests other variables to be researched that are key to further understanding of *pexing*.

**Keywords**

**Conspicuous consumption**

**Postmodernity**

**Anti-consumption**

**Destructive conspicuous consumption**

**Black youth**

**Emerging Markets**

**Pexing**

***Ukukhothana***

***UkuPeksa***

***Pot latching***

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## 1. CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH PROBLEM

### 1.1. Introduction

This chapter will capture the situation that gave rise to the research problem. The research objective was to understand a phenomenon “*UkuPeksa*” that is dominant in South African youth. “*UkuPeksa*” is a colloquial term developed by youth who partake in this phenomenon and is referred to as different things based on which township this phenomenon takes place such as one “*UkuKhothana*” that takes place in Soweto (Mail & Guardian, 2011). Phonetically written as an English verb the term “*Pexing*” will be used in this study for ease of writing and understanding. For the purpose of this study and for consistency “*Pexing*” will be used as the standard term to refer to this phenomenon and not “*UkuKhothana*”. This phenomenon was juxtapositioned against other similar phenomenon (conspicuous consumption) in order better understand “*Pexing*” and to explore the reasons why “*Pexing*” happens and the environmental factors that drive this noted consumer behaviour in South Africa’s black youth.

### 1.2. Background of Study

An underground youth movement referred to as “*pexing*” is a growing phenomenon in many South African townships. “*pexing*” is a form of brand gangs that engage in conspicuous consumption as a form of war with the branded products used as the artillery (E.N. Mkhwanazi, personal communication, April 18, 2011, N. A. Mbokane, personal communication April 18, 2011,).

“Pexing” has emerged as one of the most explicit displays of conspicuous consumption noted in youth. This is a form of costly social signalling to indicate social status or standing. This movement has allowed for the creation of an opportunity to procure branded luxury goods and then to subsequently flaunt them in front of a crowd (therefore engaging in conspicuous consumption) (E.N. Mkhwanazi, personal communication, April 18, 2011, N. A. Mbokane, personal communication April 18, 2011). Furthermore this youth movement is taking place in an environment where there are non-enabling factors to engage in such costly signalling. However through the conscious creation of a “stage” upon which these youths can publically display their consumption conspicuously an enabling environment is created.

One of the non-enabling factors is that some of the participants come from low income families and the parents would not allow such behaviour. It is for this very reason that this movement is kept secret from the adults that may deter such behaviour. This movement is in line with Veblen’s theory that there is a requirement for a network to exist for word to get around about a person’s degree of leisure and the object that he or she possesses for consumption to be conspicuous (Trigg, 2001).

There are some very distinct and interesting characteristics of the movement not evident in any of the consumer culture theory and literature reviewed. First, the rate at which conspicuous consumption takes place with some frequencies being weekly and some biweekly. Second, youth in this

movement do not consume products conspicuously with the end in mind of owning the product or hanging on to it. Instead, once the product has been displayed, it is destroyed in front of the crowd through some vandalistic ritual such as arson. The vandalistic ritual is said to re-enforce the resourcefulness of the consumer so much so that they can afford to act in such a wasteful manner.

This conspicuous consumption pattern does not follow patterns that have been noted in literature where the product can be used for future flaunting or display (Trigg, 2001) but instead once the product is used it loses its value instantaneously. Lastly, in this youth movement there is conscious exclusion of certain perceivers of the status signalling and inclusion seems to be limited to a very specific preference group.

The purpose of this research was to explore this concept of conspicuous consumption amongst black youth in emerging markets. The aim was to understand how this conspicuous consumption manifests itself and the reason why this behaviour is noted. There is an established view that the Black population consumes for status reasons (Lamont & Molnar, 2001). With this in mind the study will distil the nature of this phenomenon in black youth (as this is where the phenomenon was discovered by the researcher) and within the context of an emerging country (South Africa).

### **1.3. Research Motivation**

Given the unfolding and unstructured approach to the research (Punch, 2000) the result is a notable metamorphosis of the focus of the study as an extensive literature review allowed for continuous distillation of the research questions. The primary rationale and motivation for the selection of the parent field of study was inspired by gaps that exist in the consumer behaviour field of conspicuous consumptions particularly in emerging markets (Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2005, Chipp, Kleyn, Manzi, 2011, Shukla, 2010) as distilled through the literature review and the discovery of a phenomenon of interest that has not yet emerged from any of the CCT (consumer culture and theory) literature reviewed.

The research problem for this study was motivated by a phenomenon that not many scholars (sociologists, economists or marketers), the general public or the government were aware of. This phenomenon is a form of consumption that mimics some aspects of conspicuous consumption however also displays some characteristics not noted in literature such as the use of people as commodities that can be used to conspicuously consume. The implications for this noted problem especially related to the unit of analysis (black youth from low income families) are immense. There is increased status consumption and materialism amongst youth (Isakson & Roper, 2008) particularly low income youth (Hamilton & Catterall, 2005) and the black population (Lamont & Molnar, 2001) and marketers are said to be leveraging off this trend.

Conspicuous consumption is the number one driver in the growth of consumerism and materialism (Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2005) and affects decision making on product buying decisions every day. CCT (consumer culture and theory) scholars have called for research questions that are based on wider social and cultural issues pertaining to consumption activities of consumers (Shukla, 2010). Such conspicuous consumption impacts on individuals on a daily basis and drive consumption decision making with regards to fashion, food choices, means of communication (O’Cass & McEwen, 2004). Conspicuous consumption is seen as the most critical determinant of consumer behaviour (Reinstaller & Sanditov, 2005, Trigg 2001). A number of scholars identify the need for the understanding of conspicuous consumption in emerging markets due to the limited research that exists (Shukla 2010, Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2005, Chipp et al, 2011, Atik & Sahin, 2007).

### **1.3.1. Relevance of Field of Study**

In setting the scene for the relevance of this research to South Africa the words of Posel (2010, p 173) suffice:

*“The challenge is to frame the terms of debate in ways that transcend simplistic moral binaries: on the one hand, an outright dismissal of African consumerism as simply crass and vulgar, a betrayal of the ‘true’ project of liberation and capitulation to the forces of capitalist markets and class interests; and on the other, a naively romantic celebration of rampant consumerism, evading or denying wider questions of global exploitation along with the more local politics of class, power, deepening inequality and poverty. If our relationships to commodities may be both alienating and self-expressive, so too the debate about the place of conspicuous consumption in a new and fragile democracy should consider appropriate modalities and limits that, while cognizant of the racially charged symbolic politics of acquisition, also keep the aspiration to a humane and just society at the forefront. (Posel, 2010, p. 173 - 174).*

“Pexing” has received a lot of media attention and has surfaced (from being an underground movement) as a very topical issue in South Africa in the past month (October 2011) with the broadcast of a documentary in South African television (Cutting Edge “*Izikhothane*” Episode- 20 October); a publication in a newspaper (Appendix A - Mail and Guardian 28 October 2011); a radio broadcast (Kaya FM, 1 November, 2011). This media coverage has generated public interest as to what is driving this phenomenon and its implications for the affected population. Academics have been called upon by the media to explain it and some views have been given however there has been no empirical research on the subject. It is clear from all of the above that this is a very relevant phenomenon in South Africa and calls for further empirical understanding. The research will therefore not only add to the academic body of knowledge on CCT, and assist academics in understanding this phenomenon, but will also give insight to marketers about consumption behaviours related to their products and related to this particular segment of the market.

### **1.3.2. Relevance of Unit of Analysis**

There are implications of conspicuous consumption by blacks in South Africa that have been raised as a concern such as the misuse of credit as a result of conspicuous consumption (Chipp et al, 2011); the manipulation of this noted pattern by politicians in increasing affiliations with their political parties (Posel, 2010) and the economic concerns of indebtedness and the way this informs economic policy in the country. Posel (2010) notes that politicians have used the existence of this behaviour in blacks by appealing to the desperate need

of poor black South Africans for social mobility and the promise that is made is that affiliation with a certain party will offer them the opportunity to consume luxurious goods (Posel, 2010). Marketers are also taking advantage of this noted pattern (Chipp et al, 2011) in emerging countries and this issue is relevant given that South Africa is an emerging country with citizens vulnerable to consumerism. Other negative implications of conspicuous consumption are the misuse of credit as a result of not having financial management know how (Chipp et al, 2011) and neglect of other “basic needs” such as health and education in exchange for luxury goods ( Charles, Hurst & Roussanov, 2009).

#### **1.4. Research Scope**

The scope of the research was restricted to the exploration of the “*pexing*” amongst Black South African Youth and the drivers and reasons for it. The study will be limited to youth in the East Rand area who partake in this phenomenon in order to distil the drivers for the noted behaviour. It seeks to understand from a theoretical basis how to explain this noted behaviour and understand how this behaviour manifests itself differently or similarly to other consumption activities in the CCT

#### **1.5. Research Problem and Objectives**

The aim of this study is to explore and disseminate a phenomenon of interests, “*pexing*”, that is prevalent in Black South African youth. In conducting this study the objectives are to understand the phenomenon with regards to the following:



- What constitutes “*pexing*”
- What are the drivers for the noted phenomenon “*pexing*” amongst black youth in emerging markets
- In what way is this consumption activity different or similar to other types of consumption?
- In what way does the phenomenon give them identity or talk to identity formation?
- What is the role of brands in this noted behaviour?
- Is there some form of identity construction linked to brands?

## **2. CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter reviews literature on the theory of conspicuous consumption, as well as anti-consumption as a key theme that emerged. There is an important link between these two phenomena, through the non-functional attributes of service and products as perceived by the consumer. The reviewer took each construct through a number of iterations in order to arrive at a level of saturation that gave insight into formulation of the research questions (Punch, 2000).

### **2.2. Conspicuous Consumption**

Conspicuous consumption has been extensively covered in literature and there is a unified view of its existence as a seminal theory dating back to the eighteen hundreds when it was coined by Thorstein Veblen (Trigg, 2001). Conspicuous consumption has held the interest of economics, marketers and behaviourist alike given the implication it has on consumer behaviour; buying patterns; demand for products and most importantly its contribution to the expansion of consumerism (Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2006). There are, however what Trigg (2001) terms charges against the theory. Although these are outside of the current scope, they are noted for completeness.

Charles et al (2009, p1) refer to Veblen's articulation: "Consumption [as] evidence of wealth," based on the proposition that commodities not only hold functional value but can also be used as tools for social communication

(Reinstaller & Sanditov, 2005). This is the basis for the definition of conspicuous consumption which comes in many configurations (**Error! Reference source not found.****Error! Reference source not found.**). Nonetheless, there is a common thread that articulates it as an explicit or demonstrative act of signalling one's economic standing, status or prestige through the consumption of goods within a social set-up. Related to the social set-up, there are arguments as to the relationship between status consumption and conspicuous consumption, with some recognising the existence of a synonymic relationship (O'cass & Frost, 2010) and others a non-synonymic relationship (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004, Shukla, 2008). The next section will focus on the key themes.

**Table 10:** Definition and provenance of conspicuous across authors

Author	Conspicuous Consumption Definition	Provenance
Shukla (2008)	Behaviour whereby an individual can display wealth through extensive leisure activities and luxury expenditure on consumption and services	Adapted from the Longman American Dictionary
Shukla (2010)	The act of buying a lot of things, especially expensive things that are not necessary, in a way that people notice	Adapted from Trigg
Foley, Holzman & Wearing (2007)	The purchase of goods for display as a means of asserting prestige and status	Adapted from Trigg
Piron (2000)	Social and public visibility surrounding the consumption of goods	Not Adapted from a particular author claiming that there is no traceable formal definition of the term
Charles & Hurst (2009)	Consumption that aims to demonstrate one's economic position to observers	Adapted from Veblen
Nellisen & Meijers 2010	The preference for more expensive over cheaper yet functionally equivalent goods has been famously referred to as conspicuous	Adapted from Veblen

	consumption	
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There is a wealth of literature on consumption (be it conspicuous or traditional) embedded in sociology, psychology and economics (Vu Nguyen, Moschis & Shannon, 2009), and relating all of the elements that emanate from the different fields of research becomes complex. However, for the purposes of this study a number of key themes may be identified.

### **2.2.1 Conspicuous Consumption as Costly Signalling**

It is said that Veblen regarded conspicuous consumption as a form of costly signalling, conveying financial standing (wealth) (Bliege Bird & Smith, 2005; Cronk, 2005; Griskevicius, Tybur, Sundie, Cialdini, Miller & Kenrick, 2007; Nellisen & Meijers, 2010). Griskevicius et al. (2007) posit that it originated as a tactic for sexual selection (part of the Darwinist theory of natural selection) of mates and has subsequently evolved into conspicuous consumption as seen today. The signalling may therefore be a principle borrowed from biology that is typical of the behaviour found in peacocks, when the males flaunt their tails as a signal to a potential mate amongst female onlookers (Griskevicius et al., 2007). According to Griskevicius et al. (2007), these signals are meant to be honest; however other literature proposes they may not be conveying accurate information about the signaller (Cronk, 2005).

Some scholars (Bliege, Bird & Smith, 2005; Cronk, 2005; Griskevicius et al., 2007; Nellisen & Meijers 2010; Sundie, Griskevicius, Vohs, Kenrick, Tybur, Beal, 2011) focused on costly signalling or the handicap theory, listing conditions that need to be met for a signal to qualify as such: 1) the signal

should be visible to observers and in a very obvious way; 2) the signaller must be benefiting in some form or the other from signalling; 3) in order to signal the act needs to be costly to the signaller, either economically or from a risk or time point of view; and 4) the signal must be a yardstick the observer can use to measure a particular trait in the signaller.

In signalling theory conspicuous consumption is said to be used as a tool for sexual signalling to observers (of the opposite sex) for romantic motives (Griskevicius et al, 2007, Smith & Bliege Bird, 2005, Sundie et al, 2011). Individuals use the consumption of expensive and normally luxurious goods as a way to attract partners and the sexual signalling patterns differ between men and women (Griskevicius et al, 2007, Smith & Bliege Bird, 2005, Sundie et al, 2011).

### **2.2.2 The Role of Brands in Conspicuous Consumption**

Great attention has been paid to luxury consumption which makes up one of the collection of activities that constitute conspicuous consumption. However, Shukla (2011) argues that luxury brands, representing the greatest rate of growth and revenue generation in brand segments, have been neglected by the research community in terms of their impact on social behaviour. An exception is the work of Nellisen and Meijers (2010), who write that luxury brands allow for observable signalling as these are explicitly constructed for easy visibility and recognition. The signal becomes hard to copy, given the cost of luxury brands, and allows for the derivation of a fitness benefit as a result of sending the signal. This is typical of costly signalling where the cost

ensures that the signal is hard to fake or copy (Bliege Bird & Smith, 2005; Cronk, 2005; Nellisen & Meijers, 2010). The consumption of luxury brands supposedly indicates that the signaller is wealthy, with the intended benefit being preferential treatment from perceivers, irrespective of the true nature of the person sending the signal (Nellisen & Meijers, 2010).

Another view relates to market-controlled features, such as the country of origin of the brand (Piron, 2000; Shukla, 2010), which global companies incorporate in their international strategies for luxury brands (Shukla 2011) and has been seen by Essoussi and Merunka (2007) as an area for future research within the context of emerging countries. In developed countries, however, it is of insignificant importance compared to other inherent properties of the brand, such as performance (Piron, 2000).

### **2.2.3 Unconscious Decision-making**

According to Trigg (2001), in Veblen's construction of the theory the act of engaging in conspicuous consumption is not a conscious one, as has been noted in low-income consumers in Turkey (Atik & Sahin, 2011). The aspect that is manifested consciously is a desire to "measure up" to what is regarded as respectable in terms of the goods that one consumes. Trigg (2001) substantiates this argument through an observation that in some cases consumers buy expensive goods that will be consumed privately, for example undergarments (O'cass & McEwen, 2004) and not as explicit, demonstrative signals within a social configuration (Charles & Hurst, 2009; Piron, 2000:

Shukla, 2008). For O’cass and Frost (2010) the two forms of consumption amount to the same.

Attempting to resolve this fluidity, Trigg (2001) turns to Bourdieu’s framework, which reinforces Veblen’s theory and has its roots in mythology, to posit that this state of unconsciousness cannot be explained academically or empirically, given that it is a naturally occurring phenomenon. Whilst this view ignores the self-concept and the self-esteem that such goods provide for the consumer (Nellisen & Meijers, 2010, O’cass & Frost, 2010), Trigg (2001) suggests that such criticism is the result of ignorance of the basis of this argument, mythology. Perhaps the argument is unpopular because its basis is outside the empirical realm of research and is more abstract.

#### **2.2.4 The Evolutionary Nature of Conspicuous Consumption**

Some critics (Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2006; Vu Nguyen et al., 2009) argue that consumer behaviour at a particular time disregards events, circumstances and environmental factors that may affect the consumer, and expression of the evolution of social structures will ultimately affect consumers in different ways throughout time. Corola (2005) asserts that although the theory of conspicuous consumption has endured, but due to changes in cultures and economies it requires revision and refinement. Socio-economic conditions have changed but this does not mean that the theory requires further dissemination but rather that the theory and its manifestations change with time (Corola, 2005, Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2006). Furthermore the subjects studied on the basis of theory are affected by the changes that time presents (Vu Nguyen et al., 2009) and researchers need to be wary of this. To

this end, Chaudhuri and Majumdar (2006) propose that this is important to allow for insightful, holistic and contemporary interpretation of conspicuous consumption and its manifestation and implications.

In building substantives into this argument, attention was turned to Chaudhuri and Majumdar (2006), who noted that the phenomenon had metamorphosed over three phases, based on the social structure of the time (pre-capitalist - feudal, modern - capitalist, and postmodern), and as a result the consumers who partake in conspicuous consumption; the products of consumption; the drivers of the behaviour; and behaviour dimensions, will morph accordingly.

Another substantive is presented in the argument of Veblen on the existence of social structures, which Trigg (2001, p.110) terms “schemes of life,” and he argues that these will change over time as governed by the social hierarchy of the time. These lifestyles do not exist in a vacuum but within a certain capital structure (cultural or economic). Trigg (2001) further proposes a framework that takes into account a person’s capital structure and which shapes his or her lifestyle. He proposes that people who lack one form of capital will compensate with the other. There is a proposition that people’s lifestyles might change based on changes in the capital they possess, which is referred to as „mobility,’ up or down the capital structured framework, and is seen as postmodern (Trigg, 2001).

The final substantive is from Reinstaller and Sanditov (2005), who also refer to a similar evolutionary phenomenon they see as the changing specifications



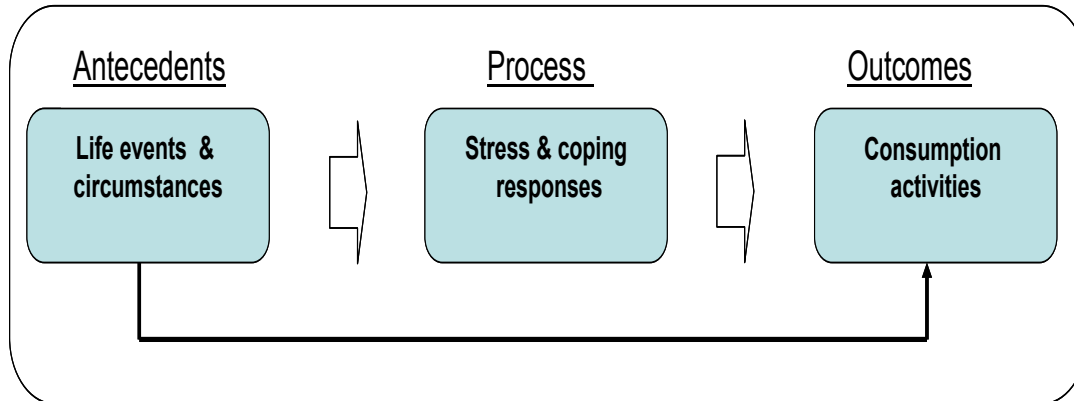
indicative of a certain social structure and the influence of this on conspicuous consumption. This view is of particular importance, given that conspicuous consumption as a phenomenon has evolved over time and is not static in its nature. Therefore, time, events and conditions need to be considered during research (Vu Nguyen et al., 2005). This gives insight into the consumer behaviour that manifests itself and the drivers of it (Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2006; Corola, 2005; Trigg, 2001; Vu Nguyen et al., 2005).

The substantives presented above are a good indication of the unity of thought amongst scholars pertaining to the evolutionary nature of conspicuous consumption, and are underscored by the debate that exists amongst scholars that overt display of status through conspicuous consumption has become diluted (Trigg 2001), as consumers are now displaying status in a much more subtle way (O'Cass & McEwen 2004). Chaudhuri and Majumdar's (2006) evolutionary approach to conspicuous consumption may offer an explanation to these noted peaks and troughs in consumption patterns in emerging markets.

It is to this continuously changing social, political and economic landscape that Vu Nguyen et al. (2009) propose a theoretical framework for the assessment of the determinants of consumption activities. The framework is the Conceptual Life Course Model (Figure 1 **Error! Reference source not found.**), elements of which are grouped into events and circumstances experienced by an individual during the course of his or her life (antecedents); the processes (coping mechanisms) that are activated by these events; and

the subsequent outcomes (consumption activities) of the individual's consumption.

**Figure 8:** The Conceptual Life Course Model



Note: Adapted from “Effects of family and socialisation on materialism: A life course study in Thailand”, by H.Vu Nguyen, G.P. Moschis, and R. Shannon, 2009, *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 33, p. 487

### 2.2.5 Postmodernism

Reinstaller and Sanditov (2005) refer to an evolutionary phenomenon that they dub the “changing specifications” indicative of a certain social structure and their influence on conspicuous consumption. This view is of particular importance given that conspicuous consumption as a phenomenon has evolved over time and is not static in nature, therefore time, events and conditions need to be considered during research (Vu Nguyen et al., 2005). Chaudhuri and Majumdar (2006) state that conspicuous consumption will change with differences in social structure and since the current social structure is postmodern it is important to study conspicuous consumption within the current era, which is postmodern (Simmons, 2008)

The changes that Vu Nguyen et al. (2009) refer to are so diverse and complex that scholars find it difficult to find a term that groups all of them into a single phenomenon. Other scholars have turned to the use of the terms postmodernity, which is described by Venkatesh (1999) as a collective term that then described the conditions of the social structure. This is now supported by Dinu, Tanase, Dinu and Tanase (2010), who describe postmodernism as a framework that facilitates the dissemination and understanding of complex changes taking place in society.

There are also contestation and debates as to what entails postmodernism, given that modern society no longer finds common ground on issues such as culture, religion and the economy (Firat & Dholakia, 2006; Goulding, 2003; Simmons, 2008). According to Firat & Venkatesh (1995), those who doubt postmodernity as a theoretical form of representation of consumer behaviour assert that it is all encompassing, and therefore lacks clarity in meaning.

Firat and Dholakia (2006) offer an explanation for this “all encompassing” nature of postmodernism by suggesting that it is embedded in “paradoxical juxtaposition of opposites,” such as polarities in beliefs and morality. Postmodernists argue that there is amorphousness and flexibility that postmodernity brings to the order of things, without settling on a single grand meta-narrative or truth which allows for multidimensional views and analysis of the world, and that is not as rigid as modernity (Firat & Dholakia, 2006; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Goulding, 2003; Venkatesh, 1999). Many researchers have found richness in the use postmodernism to study and research

consumer behaviour, due to its versatility and ability to incorporate a number of theories (Goulding, 2003). That said, there is extensive literature that covers two commonly understood aspects of what defines postmodernity.

The first is on the beginnings of postmodernity and the other is on the conditions of postmodernity. One of the better ways found in literature to understand postmodernism is the element of evolution (an era) that makes up postmodernism. The “post” prefix denotes the existence of a predecessor era and that era is modernity and each era brings with it its own socio-economic conditions (Goulding, 2003).

Postmodernity actively rejects modernity due to its basis on rationality but rather embraces a move towards a time of schizophrenic modes and juxtapositions (Brown, 1994; Goulding, 2003). It characterises contemporary society as an era of the individual, with distinct consumption patterns and a rise in the number of social movements (Haanpää, 2007). The various differences between the two eras are depicted in Table 2. **Error! Reference source not found.** Brown (1994) posits that postmodernists are different and free from the responsibility of further dissemination as to the meaning of the theory. However, this does not appear to be the case in the literature, in which there are many commonalities (Firat et al., 1995; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Firat & Dholakia, 2006; Midgley, 2004; Simmons, 2008; Venkatesh, 1999) across most constructs given as descriptors of the phenomenon (Table 12).

**Table 11:** Modernity vs. Postmodernity

Modernist Emphasis	Postmodern Emphasis
Object	Image, symbol
Cartesian subject	Symbolic subject
Cognitive subject	Semiotic subject
Unified subject	Fragmented subject
Centred subject	Decentred subject
Objectification	Symbolisation
Representation	Signification
Truth (Objective)	Truth (constructed)
Real	Hyperreal
Society as a structure	Society as a spectacle
Universalism	Particularism
Knowing	Communicating
Economy	Culture
Economic Systems	Symbolic systems
Production	Consumption
Shift from use value to exchange value	Shift from exchange value to sign value
Mechanical technology	Digital/communicative technology

Note. Adapted from “Postmodern Marketing” by S. Brown, 1994, *European Journal of Marketing*, 27, p. 22.

A second element of postmodernity that is extensively covered in literature relates to the conditions that make it up, including: the sign system, paradoxical juxtapositions of opposites, hyperreality, particularism, fragmentation, and symbolic behaviours (Firat & Dholakia, 2006; Goulding, 2003; Venkatesh, 1999). These conditions (Table 12) allude to the dilution of differences and in some instances deem as acceptable the existence of opposites within a single construct (Firat & Dholakia, 2006). Counter-intuitive to the modernist view, postmodernists view the following concepts not as polarities but concepts that can exist as one: reality and fantasy, mind and body, subject and object, material and symbolic, production and consumption, order and chaos (Firat & Dholakia, 2006).

**Table 12:** Postmodern Conditions and Elaboration on Processes

Condition	Key attributes, processes, phenomena (from a marketing theory/practice perspective)
Hyperreality	<p><i>Simulation:</i> Assuming a feigned appearance, an imitation – often to induce consumer delight; as in themed spaces in Disneyland or Las Vegas, or the chimerical rise of Dubai.</p> <p><i>Signification:</i> Communicating by signs, to convey meanings in symbolic ways; as in Nike’s pervasive and sometimes subtle use of the „swoosh’ to convey endurance and performance.</p> <p><i>Simulacra:</i> A semblance, a mock appearance that seems to mimic reality.</p>
Fragmentation	<p><i>Complexity:</i> An intricate, entangled state – also sometimes called arhizomatic state; as in complex, rhizomatic lifestyles and roles often depicted in commercials for „household’ calling plans of wireless service providers.</p> <p><i>Disjointedness:</i> Lacking order or coherence; as in the disjointed (clashing) character of some youth fashions.</p>
Decentering	<p><i>Objectification:</i> To regard or present as an object; as in objectification of the female (occasionally male) body in ads for perfumes, cosmetics, clothing, and shoes.</p> <p><i>Multiplicity:</i> The state of being various or manifold; as in disparate (cont.) architectural styles in a postmodern building or multiple roles that a wireless palmtop device holder can be in while using it.</p>
Juxtapositions	<p><i>Paradox:</i> Exhibiting inexplicable or self-contradictory aspects; as in filling a luxury sports car with discount off-brand gasoline.</p> <p><i>Opposition:</i> Coexistence and interrelationship of opposed entities</p> <p><i>Non-commitment:</i> Lacking fixity of purpose, inability to bind to one course of action; as in fast-food TV ads showing indecisive waffling customers facing tempting choices, with impatient lines of other customers behind them.</p>
Difference	<p><i>Openness:</i> Willingness to uncover, reveal, disclose, and expose – as well as to accept; as evident in the wide endorsement received by the „open’, conversational ways of marketing portrayed in <i>The Clue train Manifesto</i> (Locke et al. 2000).</p> <p><i>Plurality:</i> The state of being more than one; as in increasing number of ads showing people switching rapidly or blending work-pleasure roles, and in multiple cyber-identities of a person.</p> <p><i>Diversity:</i> Multiformity – the condition of being varied and diverse; as in the MTV show „Real World Paris’ with a hip cast that is diverse on many dimensions, including some biracial members.</p>

*Note.* Adapted from “Theoretical and philosophical implications of postmodern debates: some challenges to modern marketing”. By A.F. Firat, and N. Dholakia, 2006, *Marketing Theory*, 6, p.129.

### 2.2.5.1 The Postmodern Consumer

Postmodern theory suggests that consumption is the most critical factor that determines the lifestyle and cultures that individuals follow and that the social movements that arise from these lifestyles are typical of a postmodern era

(Haanpää, 2007). The postmodern consumer who lives in this postmodern era is what Firat and Dholakia (2006) refers to as the *post-consumer*, who consumes products and services not with accepted functional aspects in mind (Dinu et al., 2010) but what the consumer dictates is the meaning of the product (Simmons, 2008), such as the ability of these products and services to create or indicate social relationships, and in so doing not conforming to any single state (Simmons, 2008) or driving distinction from others (Haanpää, 2007).

This is further underscored by Firat and Dholakia (2006), who posit that the post-consumer is engaged by the experiential aspects of a product and not so much the material aspects. It is not what the material aspect can deliver in terms of the “grand future” but rather the moment and experience of the activity in the current moment (Firat & Dholakia, 2006). Furthermore this use of consumption in image construction is meant to improve likability from others people within a social set-up (Goulding, 2003; Simmons, 2008). Some of this consumption is carried out conspicuously (Haanpää, 2007).

There are two views on some traits of the post-consumer. One is that he or she thrives on the individuality and distinction that is driven by conspicuous consumption (Firat & Dholakia, 2006; Haanpää, 2007), the other that the post-consumer is gravitating away from individualism towards social interaction and belonging, therefore resulting in the formation of social networks in which people come together homogeneously with consumption of brands and products at the centre of the gathering (Dholakia, Bagozzi & Klein 2004;

Simmons, 2008). Lastly, the post-consumer is seen as very superficial and existing in a fickle reality, dubbed by simulation and hyperreal experiences, living for the moment and seeking sensation and excitement (Simmons, 2008).

### 2.2.5.2 Postmodern Conspicuous Consumption

In summary, Chaudhuri and Majumdar (2006) have proposed a framework for structural analysis (Table 13) that helps in understanding how consumption has changed from pre-capitalist - feudal times to the current postmodern era.

**Table 13:** A Structural Analysis of Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour

Social Structure	Primary objectives of consumption	Drivers of behaviour	Consumers	Principal behaviour dimensions
Precapitalist -Feudal	Slaves, Women, Food	Military and Political Powers	Nobility	Pure Ostentation
Modern-Capitalist	Very Expensive Products e.g. Diamonds	Social Power and Status	Nobility and Upper-middle Class	Ostentation, Signalling and Uniqueness
Post-Modern	Image and Experience	Self-expression and Self-Image	Middle-class and the "Masses"	Uniqueness and Social Conformation

*Note.* Sourced from "Of Diamonds and Desires: Understanding Conspicuous Consumption from a Contemporary Marketing Perspective", by H.R. Chaudhuri, and S. Majumdar, 2005, *Academy of Marketing Science Review*, 11, p. 3.

### 2.3. Conspicuous Consumption in Emerging Markets

The first point to note with regards to findings in this section of literature is that a number of scholars call for the extension of research on conspicuous consumption to emerging markets, in which there is a notion that it is minimal (Atik & Sahin, 2011, Chaudhuri & Madjumdar, 2006, Chipp et al., 2011, Hamilton & Catterall, 2005; Shukla 2010;). Whilst much research has been



conducted in developed countries such as the United States of America (USA) (Chipp et al., 2011), it is only now expanding to more consumer segments and product categories (Atik & Sahin, 2011; Essoussi & Merunka, 2007), such as specific age cohorts, such as the youth and older generation (Pedrozo, 2011; Wang & Cui, 2008); race and relative deprivation (Chipp et al., 2011); and low-income consumers (Atik & Sahin, 2011).

Key findings in the limited amount of literature that exist on emerging markets that may pertain to the study at hand will be discussed but first it is important to understand some of the characteristics that are inherent in these markets. Emerging countries are characterised by: 1) High income inequality as depicted by Andersen (2001) and Pedrozo (2011) in Latin America; 2) a collectivist culture (as seen in South Africa's philosophy of Ubuntu by Chipp et al, (2011); by Atik & Sahin (2011) in Turkey; by Green, Mandhachitara and Smith (2001) in Asian countries and by Wang and Cui (2008) in China; and 3) a rise in a new middle income class (the black middle class in the case of South Africa as depicted by Chipp et al, 2011 and Pedrozo (2011) in Rio de Janeiro.

Due to the emerging market conditions noted above, there has been a rise in conspicuous consumption in emerging countries (Atik & Sahin, 2011; Chipp et al., 2011; Essoussi & Merunka, 2007; Van Kempen, 2003). This is so prevalent that the poorer consumers in these markets may neglect the fulfilment of basic needs such as food and shelter (Atik & Sahin, 2011; Van Kempen, 2003). This further exacerbates the conditions of poverty in which

these individuals live (Moav & Neeman, 2008), and creates welfare issues (Van Kempen, 2003). With regards to middle income consumers in emerging markets, Pedrozo (2011) proposes that a reason for the rise in and prevalence of conspicuous consumption is due to credit availability, growth in the number of jobs available and social programmes.

The increase in conspicuous consumption of black affluent South Africans may be related to relative deprivation of this previously disadvantaged group (Chipp et al., 2011). It was found that relative deprivation exists in South Africa's black population and this has resulted in an increase in conspicuous consumption as these disadvantaged individuals try to catch up with the rest of society (Chipp et al., 2011). Another explanation for conspicuous consumption prevalence in emerging economies such as Asia lies in certain cultural aspects, for instance the cultural aspect of "gaining or saving face" in society, which also leads to the demonstrative consumption of luxury goods (Green et al., 2001).

Even with this noted rise in conspicuous consumption there is still a view that in environments not so enabling of consumption the ability to buy products for the purpose of ostentation is limited (Chipp et al., 2011, Isakson & Roper, 2008). Consumers in these financially non-enabling or low income environments have coping mechanisms such as denial and materialism (Isakson & Roper, 2008), while others resort to consumption resistance (Hamilton & Catterall, 2005). Denial involves focusing on the here and now

rather than the bigger picture (Isakson & Roper, 2008) and is consistent with postmodernity, in which belief in a grander future is replaced by “living in the moment” and a current reality informed and shaped by the consumer (Firat & Dholakia, 2006; Goulding, 2003; Venkatesh, 1999 ;).

It is suggested that in some models of coping with stress, particularly those related to consumption or the avoidance of freely consuming, due to financial constraints, it is not always about the individual but rather a group or collective coping mechanism that consumers employ. This may result in collaboration in coping with the consumption-related stressors by members of groups, such as families (Hamilton & Catterall, 2005). Other strategies are to use deceptive signalling, such as the use of counterfeit goods (Van Kempen, 2003).

#### **2.4. Conspicuous Consumption and the Black Population**

There have been a number of studies on blacks and conspicuous consumption related to possible drivers for consumption in emerging markets (Chipp et al., 2011); the role of media in driving consumption (Mukherjee, 2006); its links to political freedom (Posel, 2010); how consumption differs between blacks and whites (Charles et al., 2009); and the role of consumption in collective identity formulation amongst blacks (Lamont & Molnar, 2001). This literature review will highlight insights and arguments that arise from the abovementioned studies.

The underlying argument in most of these studies is typified by Rucker and Galinsky (2009), who posit the following: 1) people who are powerless feel indisposed and make an effort to migrate from this position, given the

discomfort; 2) they identify one form of power as status; 3) luxury goods signal status, and therefore 4) the powerless tend to place value and benefit on the consumption of luxurious goods to compensate for lack of power. Although Rucker and Galinsky's (2009) study did not explicitly focus on blacks as holding this powerless position, they did use them and their noted patterns of consumption to illustrate their point.

This position of powerlessness takes forms in the literature, such as relative deprivation (Chipp et al., 2011), but the gist is related to prejudice, lower social standing and lack of resources as a result of being part of the black population (Posel, 2010). Attention is thus turned to the empirical studies mentioned above on blacks and consumption. In a study of consumption patterns of affluent black South Africans there was a link made between conspicuous consumption and relative deprivation, where the black population as a result of a separatist social system (apartheid) were not exposed to the same opportunities in life as their white counterparts (Chipp et al., 2011). This view also comes through in Posel (2010), where black South Africans so closely associate consumption with freedom that some saw conspicuous consumption as the reward for having to endure and fight for freedom from the oppression of the past. This is in line with the theory of powerlessness expounded by Rucker and Galinsky (2009). A similar pattern was noted on African Americans, whose conspicuous consumption was used as a way to regain power or take control of their lives, given the oppressive conditions of racism in the USA (Lamont & Molnar, 2001; Mukherjee, 2006).

In linking powerlessness to events that may affect the noted consumption behaviour, attention is turned to Vu Nguyen et al.'s (2009) recommendation that when studying consumer behaviour it is important to consider the events that the consumers have experienced, as this will inform their consumption activities. This insight is that the increasing consumption by the black population is attached to some significant social events that have occurred, for instance suffrage in South Africa and the passing of civil rights legislation in the USA (Lamont & Molnar, 2001, Posel, 2010).

These events have been catalysts in enabling black people to partake in conspicuous consumption (Posel, 2010, Lamont & Molnar, 2001). These events were both related to the recognition of blacks as equal members of their societies and some form of emancipation (Chipp et al, 2011, Posel, 2010, Mukherjee, 2006). These events also led to policy formulation that gave blacks the resources and the social mobility (Posel, 2010) to partake in conspicuous consumption: affirmative action that rove the allocation of jobs to black South Africans and thus they gained access to money (Chipp et al, 2011).

This rise in consumerism amongst blacks and the emergent patterns of consumption is being leveraged by marketers (Chipp et al., 2011), through emphasis on concepts such as collective identity, linked to a sense of belonging within society (Lamont & Molnar, 2001). Marketers are not the only professionals who seem to be taking advantage of this phenomenon, and Posel (2010) notes that politicians have followed suit by appealing to the

desperately hungry amongst poor black South Africans and their need for social mobility. The promise is made that affiliation with a certain party will provide the opportunity to consume luxurious goods. There are negative impacts of conspicuous consumption on the black population that have been identified such as indebtedness (Chipp et al., 2011), and neglect of basic needs in pursuit of luxury (Charles et al., 2009).

From the above observations emerges a strong theme that this part of the population has been in a position of powerlessness, that gives them a propensity to consume goods conspicuously for status reasons, while changes in history that have resulted in emancipation further enable this behaviour, in some instances resulting in socio-economic concerns. This then begs the question: is this not a new form of powerlessness that is self-imposed by the black population, particularly those in the low income bracket? Postmodernist theory can aid in understanding this, as there can be the existence of two opposing views in a consumer's mind (reference), where they find themselves in a position of poverty which they are trying to get out of yet their actions place them at the centre of what it is they are trying to escape from.

## **2.5. Conspicuous Consumption and the Youth**

When young people enter into a new phase of their lives, such as adulthood, this transition presents a time of turmoil and confusion (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004). There are issues of identity uncertainty (Isaksen & Roper, 2008; Pedrozo, 2011; Piacentini & Mailer, 2004) and it is during such times that

items such as fashion and music are used for identity formulation (Pedrozo, 2011). These tend to be influenced by peers (Isaksen & Roper, 2008) and it is these very items that are marketed in creating youth conspicuous consumption (Shukla, 2008).

The use of objects in navigating life transitions (Isaksen & Roper, 2008) is what Piacentini (2004) refers to as a 'rite of passage,' and this phenomenon is important in consumer behaviour as it leads to symbolic purchasing (Pedrozo, 2011). Furthermore, this rite of passage is not just related to consumption of products but the consumption of brands (Isaksen & Roper, 2008).

Given that all young people go through transitions in their lives it would be expected that they will and can engage in symbolic consumption, including the conspicuous, however there are factors that may limit this. One that has been studied in youth is the effect of low income on consumption patterns (Isaksen & Roper, 2008), which may result in the exclusion of poor youth and have negative psychological impact on them (Isaksen & Roper, 2008; Pedrozo, 2011).

Even though low income youth have limited resources they still have a high propensity to engage in conspicuous consumption (Isaksen & Roper, 2008) so much so that some have found creative ways of engaging in conspicuous consumption without incurring too much cost through deceptive status signalling, such as using of counterfeit goods (Van Kempen, 2003). Another view that re-enforces this low income argument is proposed by Rucker and

Galinsky (2009), that if consumers feel powerless (not having mastery of their own lives) they tend to look to the consumption of goods conspicuously in order to display status to others around them.

The higher propensity to consume goods for display in low income youth is said to be driven by some key traits in this segment or the conditions they find themselves in: low self-esteem; short sightedness and living for the moment; excessive advertising targeted at fulfilling their need to succumb to peer pressure (Isaksen & Roper, 2008); and that the amount of time youth in low income families spend watching television, and therefore being exposed to advertising (Pedrozo, 2011).

In conclusion, the consumption of goods and materialism displayed by youth in low income families is a form of coping strategy (Isaksen & Roper, 2008; Pedrozo, 2011; Vu Nguyen, 2009), however there is another view that mentions other coping strategies such as resistance, distancing and fantasizing (Hamilton & Caterall, 2005) and these strategies move away from counterproductive coping strategies, such as conspicuous consumption. On the other hand Hamilton and Caterall (2005) admit to this area needing more research.

## **2.6. Conclusion**

The preceding sections have reviewed the literature on conspicuous consumption, and this section will summarise the key findings and gaps that have been noted in the knowledge base. There is agreement amongst most scholars in a large number of fields of the significance of conspicuous



consumption and the implications it has as a form of consumer behaviour for products, marketing and the consumers themselves.

A unified view on what constitutes conspicuous consumption is that the consumption of products and services (mostly luxurious and expensive) is not only for their functional use but also for their communicative properties, in order to indicate one's social and financial status. This symbolic communication through products occurs within a social context or reference groups, to whom the consumer aims to formulate a positive identity.

One of the key themes noted is that conspicuous consumption (given its evolutionary nature) is influenced by environmental factors (social, political and economic), such as relative deprivation and powerlessness (Rucker & Galinsky, 2009). Given these factors, many scholars posit that, as a result, conspicuous consumption cannot be studied in a vacuum. Postmodernism proved a good theory to review in order to account for these environmental factors and to inform the next steps of this study, given that it is conducted in postmodern times and focuses on the postmodern consumer.

The other theme picked up is one that highlights the role of brands (particularly luxury brands) in conspicuous consumption. Luxury brands qualify conspicuous consumption as costly signalling which is hard to copy through their easy distinction (Nellisen & Meijers, 2010). The consumption of these brands through conspicuous consumption is also influenced by the brands' country of origin (Shukla, 2010).

This country of origin effect with regards to luxury brands and conspicuous consumption has been noted as an area for future research within the context of emerging countries (Essoussi & Merunka, 2007). The literature review also revealed some gaps in the field of study that need to be filled such as conspicuous consumption in emerging markets (Essoussi & Merunka, 2007; Chipp et al., 2009; Shukla 2010, Chaudhuri & Madjumdar, 2006).

The literature review also indicates a link between consumption and anti-consumption, and it is suggested that a researcher cannot study one without investigating the other (Hogg, Banister & Stephenson, 2009). It is to this end that the next section of the literature review will focus on anti-consumption.

## **2.7. Anti-Consumption**

### **2.7.1. Introduction**

Banister and Hogg (2004) propose that consumers distinctly contribute to the polarised makeup of the marketplace via consumption and/or rejection (anti-consumption) of products. When making a choice to purchase one product a consumer foregoes the option to consume another (Zavestoski, 2002). This choice may be driven by the non-functional attributes of the product (Banister & Hogg, 2004) which allow for social communication (Reinstaller & Sanditov, 2005) between the consumer and his or her reference group (Banister & Hogg, 2004) to convey social identity (Banister & Hogg, 2004; Lee, Motion & Conroy, 2008; Zavestoski, 2002). It is thus important to review the area of anti-consumption in this research as both consumption and its antithesis are said to be rooted in the non-functional attributes that are used for communication under both constructs.

This theory of forgone choice is supported by Hogg et al. (2009) in their version of this theory which refers to the forgone choice as product distaste and the selected choice as a product taste whose consumptions allows the consumer to communicate a message to others. These two theories link conspicuous consumption and anti-consumption as areas that need to be reviewed in unison when a researcher is investigating either (Hogg et al., 2009).

### **2.7.2. What Constitutes Anti-Consumption**

In trying to define what constitutes anti-consumption one faces a variety of terms: boycotting, culture jamming, green consumption, anti-brand communities, new consumption communities, conscience consumption, downshifting (Black & Cherrier, 2010; Cherrier, 2009; Cherrier & Murray, 2007; Holt, 2002; Lee et al., 2008; Moraes, Szmigin, Carrigan, 2010; Ozanne & Ballentine, 2010; Rumbo, 2002; Shaw & Newholm, 2002; Witkowski, 2010; Zavestoski, 2002). In an attempt to explain what anti-consumption is, researchers have not given a definition (Moraes et al., 2010), but they have named the concept as an overarching construct (Izberk-Bilgin, 2010; Lee et al., 2008; Moraes et al., 2010) or constellation (Hogg et al., 2009) that includes a variety of forms of behaviour. This indicates that there is no generally accepted or definitive description of anti-consumption. To summarise, these fluid and ambiguous findings have necessitated a more rigorous and holistic look at the concept of anti-consumption as an area of research.

Anti-consumption manifests itself as a resistance (Zavestoski, 2002) and/or a reduction in consumption (Shaw & Newholm, 2002) of products, brands or markets (Lee et al., 2009). The aim of this resistance is to counter any influence of consumer culture (Penaloza & Price, 2003). Zavestoski (2002) also sees this resistance as an expression of preference, which is said to be voluntary (Sharp, Hoj, Wheeler, 2010) and is characterised by three elements (Phipps & Govan, 2006): politically based (Moraes, 2010) as demonstrated by ad-avoidance bodies such as Adbusters (Rumbo, 2002); withstanding of

certain cultures such as hyper consumption (Albinsson, Wolf & Kopf, 2010) and consumerism (Cherrier, 2009); and based on some value system as seen in voluntary simplicity and downshifting (Shaw & Newholm, 2002), where ethical consumption is a guiding principle.

### **2.7.3. Anti-Consumption as an Area of Research**

Since the turn of the twenty first century researchers have made a plea to fellow scholars for the need for more research on anti-consumption given that the counter (consumption) has been extensively covered and well understood by marketers (Lee et al., 2008; Zavestoski, 2002). This plea has been heeded and qualified by other researchers in the field (Cherrier & Murray, 2007; Ozanne & Ballentine, 2010; Shaw & Newholm, 2002; Witkowski, 2010). The earlier researchers (Lee et al., 2008; Zavestoski, 2002) noted this need for further research is in order to understand what drives anti-consumption and on reviewing the literature there is still a strong view that although the research stream is growing there is still a lack of substantive understanding on the drivers of anti-consumption (Ozanne & Ballentine, 2010).

The statement by Lee et al. (2008) and Zavestoski (2002) may stem from the way that anti-consumption is handled. Some scholars propose that anti-consumption is a collective term for a number of forms of consumer behaviour: boycotting, dispossession (Cherrier & Murray, 2007); downshifting (Moraes et al., 2010); voluntary simplicity (Shaw & Newholm, 2002); emancipated consumption (Holt, 2002); frugality (Witkowski, 2010); consumer resistance (Cherrier, 2009; Rumbo, 2002; Zavestoski, 2002); culture jamming

(Cherrier, 2009); sharing (Ozanne & Ballentine, 2010); sustainable consumption (Black & Cherrier, 2010); brand avoidance (Lee et al., 2008), and ethical consumption (Shaw & Newholm, 2002). Ozanne & Ballentine (2010) ascribe this classification to the relative nature of anti-consumption as a concept and as a result it has no absolute boundaries in terms of the consumer behaviours that fall under this phenomenon. This view is strongly supported by some researchers who explicitly allude to the lack of clarity in defining anti-consumption (Moraes et al., 2010). It begs the question as to why the emergence of this convoluted mosaic of meanings and manifestations of consumer behaviours fall under one banner.

In unravelling the answer to this question, Lee et al. (2009), in their review of anti-consumption as a research arena, give insight into the amorphousness of this topic by suggesting that there is yet a “Grand Theory” to be found on anti-consumption. This is strongly supported by Phipps and Govan (2006), who look at the values that drive anti-consumption and find no overarching dogma under which social movements such as anti-consumption can be classified. Furthermore, according to Iyer and Muncy (2009), the broadness of the spectrum is due to circumstantial factors: environment, politics and personalities. The existence of these factors is aligned to Witkowski’s (2010) thinking, and a warning to researchers to be mindful of the evolutionary nature of anti-consumption and its dependence on social customs and historical events which bring about differences in consumer culture (Izberk-Bilgin, 2010), political and economic conditions.

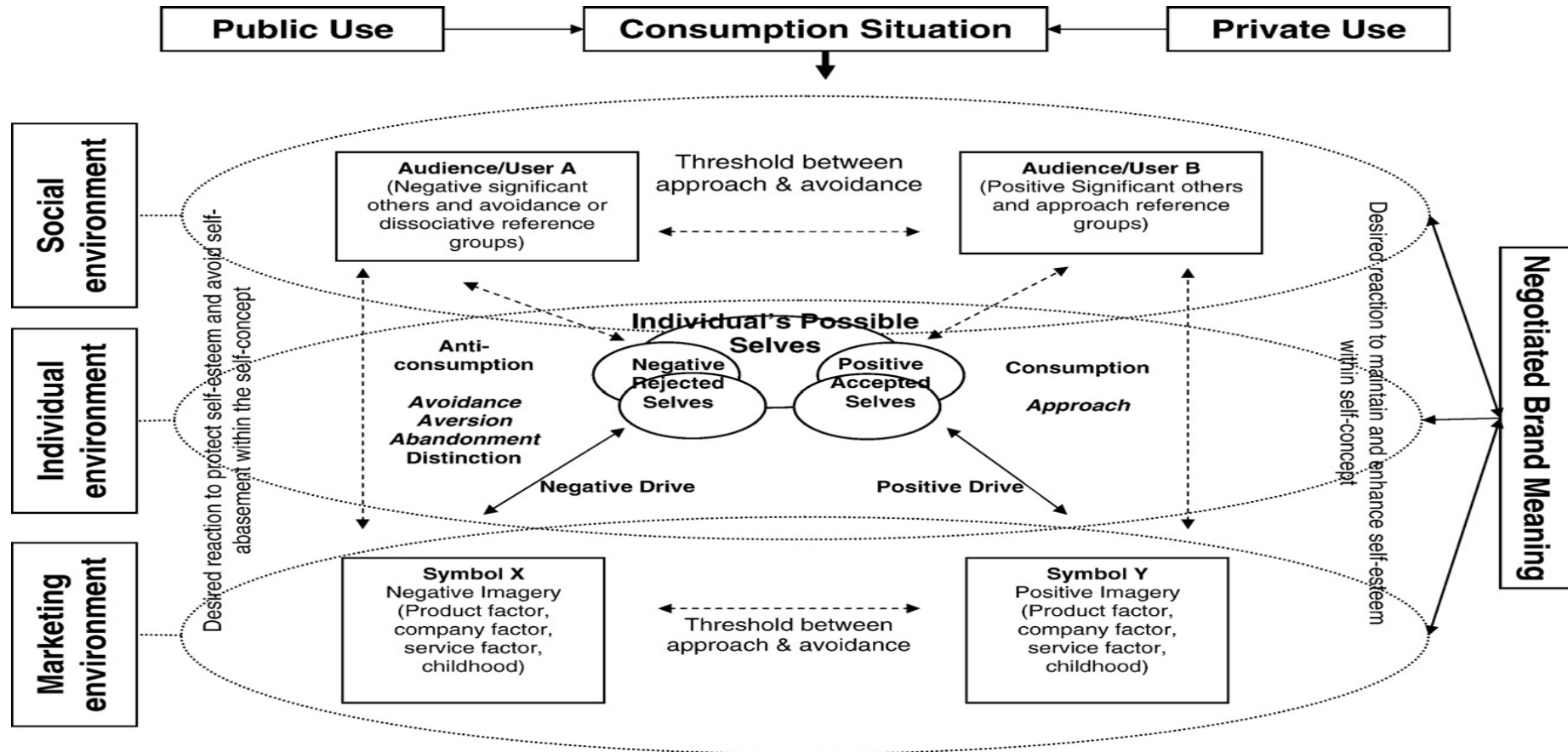
Witkowski (2010) further proposes that anti-consumption has gone full circle in its evolution, from seventeenth century English settlers who practiced voluntary simplicity as a practical way of living as travellers, to Puritan times when consumption was the manifestation of evil, and frugality brought one closer to spirituality. This proposition and warning is validated by other researchers who have linked anti-consumption to economic literature on consumer capitalism and proletariat resistance (Cherrier, 2009; Holt, 2002; Izberk-Bilgin, 2010).

#### **2.7.4. Link between Symbolic Consumption and Anti-Consumption**

Hogg et al. (2009) propose a conceptual map that shows the relationships between symbolic consumption and anti-consumption that exist within symbolic consumption. The framework (Figure 9) rests on two polarised planes that paint a picture of how formulation of self-identity via non-functional attributes of a product can result in two types of reactions to a product or service: anti-consumption (negation) and consumption (affirmation) dependent on the resultant self-identity (undesired and desired self respectively).

These noted relationships are also informed by the environmental factors at an individual, social and marketing level (Hogg et al., 2009) and the identification of the scholars of these fulfils the limitations that other scholars raise as a concern when conducting consumer behaviour research, particularly on symbolic consumption (Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2006; Corola, 2005; Reinstaller & Sanditov, 2005; Vu Nguyen et al., 2009)

Figure 9: Mapping Symbolic (Anti-) Consumption



Note. Adapted from "Mapping Symbolic (Anti-) Consumption, by M.K. Hogg, E.M. Banister, and C.A. Stephenson, *Journal of Business Research*, 62, p. 150.



Similar to conspicuous consumption (Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2006; Corola, 2005; Vu Nguyen et al., 2005), there are environmental factors that drive anti-consumption behaviour of consumers, and these have been grouped into social, individual and marketing environment (Hogg et al., 2009). The social environment includes aspects such as consumption in public or private context and the link of this consumption to the observers in this social set-up (Hogg et al., 2009). There are also links to socialising agents, for example parents or peers, who influence the values and views that an individual may have about a product or service (Hogg et al., 2009). The individual environment entails identity formulation that in some instances is linked to childhood memories a consumer may have, and which can trigger a reaction of consumption or rejection of consumption of certain brands and products (Hogg et al., 2009). Lastly, there is the marketing environment that most corporate bodies try to direct and manage, however much other market forces such as perception of product and corporate factors try to impede them (Hogg et al., 2009).

### **2.7.5. Conclusion**

The literature review on anti-consumption highlights some common themes in the research conducted in this field. The first is that it still requires extensive research, the second that there is a lack of a unified view as to what constitutes anti-consumption, other than the existence of constellations that include a number of forms of consumer behaviour centred on resistance or reduction in consumption of certain products and brands (Zavestoski, 2002), in order to counter consumerism (Penaloza & Price, 2003). As seen with

conspicuous consumption, anti-consumption is also said to have evolutionary aspects that result in some environmental factors that influence this behaviour as manifested in consumer behaviour.

Finally, the last theme that emanated out of the literature review is the link between consumption and anti-consumption. Some researchers suggest that to study one without the other would be a disservice to the field. The aspects of both phenomena that link them are the non-functional attributes of the product; the formulation of identity and the impact of some environmental factors. According to Hogg, Banister and Stephenson (2009, p.1):

*“Rejection is at the heart of anti-consumption within symbolic consumption. Symbolic consumption involves reciprocal and reflexive relationships between products (tastes and distastes) and consumers (positive and negative selves) within their social contexts...”*

It is to this end that Hogg et al. (2009) also suggest that anti-consumption is pivotal to the dissemination of symbolic (in this case conspicuous) consumption and, as a result, researchers need to consider anti-consumption in studying forms of symbolic consumption behaviour.

## **2.8. Literature Review Conclusion**

Through the review of a number of iterations of construct in the literature, a level of saturation has been reached, with the main points emerging as follows

- Conspicuous consumption is said to be the greatest determinant of consumer behaviour and informs the buying decisions of consumers. It is the primary driver of materialism and consumerism and therefore research in this field is critical.
- Scholars have heeded the need for research into this critical field of study; however there is a lack of research of conspicuous consumption in emerging markets.
- The other level of saturation raises the point that in studying consumption, researchers have to include anti-consumption as a construct as the two have a critical and proven link.
- In pursuing further research on conspicuous consumption and anti-consumption there is a plea from scholars not to conduct it in a vacuum, but rather to consider the environmental factors that influence these consumer behaviour phenomena.
- In the literature reviewed there were no findings of research that has been conducted on a similar form of conspicuous consumption as seen in *pexing*. In conclusion, all of the above findings have been critical in informing the research questions that will be discussed in the next chapter.

### **3. CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTION**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

It is necessary to restate the research question/s as a result of having conducted the literature review, which helps crystallise the research question (Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler, 2008) through interrogation of existing literature. The literature review has helped formulate research questions as stated below. Literature was reviewed and in so doing there was a phenomenon of interest that emerged in the form of *pexing*, which is consistent with Punch (2000) and the proposed routes he believes research can take. The phenomenon of *pexing* presented itself as a form of consumption and was studied under this field of study, the objectives of which then became to understand better and explore it with regards to the drivers, the role of this behaviour in identity formulation, and the role of brands.

Since the field of study was not pre-structured but unfolded through the literature review (Punch, 2000) there is distinct metamorphosis in terms of the focus of the study. This metamorphosis was as a result of an extensive literature review that allowed for continuous distillation of the research question. It is therefore important to restate the research questions post the literature review as will be presented by the next section of this chapter.

However, on reviewing consumption literature conspicuous consumption and anti-consumption emerged as constructs that can help explain and explore this phenomenon as there seemed to be aspects of *pexing* that matched

these two forms of consumption. The researcher could thus not be sure of this, which resulted in the formulation of the following research questions.

### **3.2. Restated Research Questions**

**Research Question 1:** What aspects of conspicuous consumption are to be found in *pexing*?

**Research Question 2:** What aspects of anti-consumption are to be found in *pexing*?

**Research Question 3:** Why is *pexing* practiced?

**Research Question 4:** What is the role of the environment in *pexing*?

## **4. CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1. Introduction**

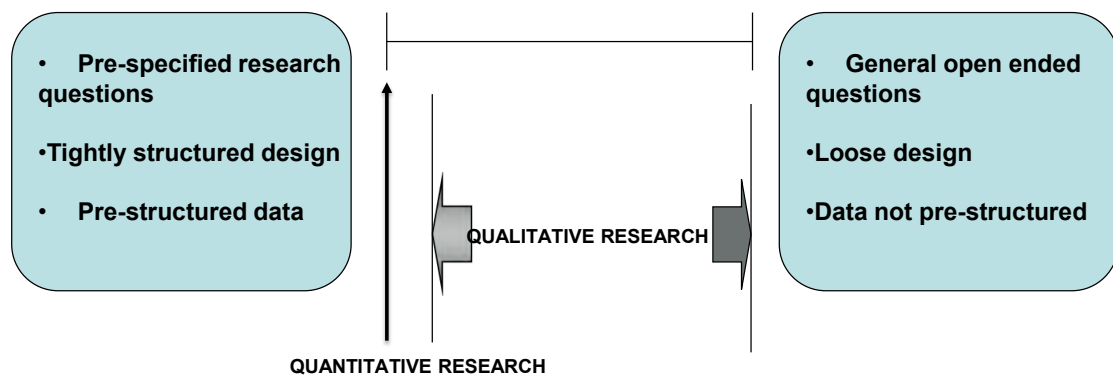
This chapter will outline the research plan in terms of approach that led to the research design, methodology and the rationale for the selection of the research design and method. There will also be discussion of the research limitations of the study. Punch (2000) proposes two distinctions pertaining to research: pre- structured versus unfolding research. The approach taken by a researcher sets the path for the methodology. The path that Punch (2000) refers to is one that navigates through the choices of research design, data collection and conceptual frameworks that may be used as part of the research plan.

The research was unfolding in nature (Punch, 2000) and its conceptualisation was distilled through the review of literature and other sources. The unfolding approach allowed for identification of areas that have not been covered before or have had minimum coverage. The unfolding approach led to the discovery of a phenomenon of interest (black youth within emerging markets who are part of brand gangs, as will be unveiled in the population section of the plan). This will bring new and valuable knowledge to the body of research that the proposed topic belongs to. The approach then informed the research design and method that will be discussed in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

#### 4.1 Research Design

The study followed a cross-sectional qualitative (exploratory) research approach in exploring the four elements of conspicuous consumption in black youth in emerging markets, aimed at exploring the nature of patterns. According to Blumberg et al. (2008), quality denotes the nature or form of an entity and therefore a qualitative design becomes appropriate in this study. Furthermore, Punch (2000) suggests that when research does not show a high level of pre-structuring, pre-planned design and pre-coded data, then the research will migrate along a continuum towards qualitative research, as was the case in this research (Figure 10).

**Figure 10:** Pre-specified versus unfolding: the timing of structure



*Note.* Adapted from “*Developing Effective Research Proposals*”, by K.F. Punch, p. 41, London: SAGE Publications.

llllkajdfD

#### 4.2. Research Method and Rationale for Selection

In searching through the variety of methods available for a qualitative study, individual, face-to-face, in-depth interviews were finally settled on. The rationale for selection of the interview instrumentation is that it allowed for

increased salience and supports the view that qualitative inquiry is philosophically centred, with minimal burdening of the study with a predetermined stance (Patton, 2002). This is further supported by Punch's (2000) approach to qualitative research that is based on general open-ended questions, especially where emergence of themes and concepts is relied upon. Also light ethnographic?

The motivation for selection of depth versus focus group is that the topic of discussion is related to portrayal of status and how one is perceived by others, and there is reluctance to discuss this topic in a focus group setting as individuals may respond in order to accentuate their status position (which this population regards as sensitive). This is what Olson, Hafer, Couzens, Kramins (2000) and Blumberg et al. (2008) warn against: ingratiation of participants. However it should be acknowledged that the interaction between the members of the group may also offer insight that is valuable to the research, which may not be present during an individual interview (Blumberg et al., 2008). This was addressed through another method as a part of triangulation of the data collection method.

Since there are imperfections for each method selected scholars such as Patton (2002) and Blumberg et al. (2008) have recommended that triangulation be used in order to improve on the data's accuracy. In summary, triangulation adds robustness to the study through the provision of cross-data validity tests (Patton, 2002). In this study there was methodological triangulation, wherein multiple data gathering methods were used, i.e., one-



on-one in-depth interviews and observation, making up overt and ethnographic research (Patton, 2002).

To complete the triangulation, thick description (Patton, 2002) was used as part of the methodology. This allowed the researcher to conduct thick interpretation and capture some history, in the form of context and feelings of the participants, related to the event or the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2002).

### **4.3. Population and Unit of Analysis**

On discussion of the research problem with colleagues, discovery of a unique and relevant population was made. The phenomenon of “*pexing*” has emerged as an explicit display of conspicuous consumption and/or destructive anti-consumption amongst South African township youth. This is a form of social signalling to indicate social status or standing and has allowed for the creation of an opportunity to procure branded luxury goods and to subsequently flaunt them in front of a crowd. This movement is taking place in an environment in which there are non-enabling factors to engage in, such as costly signalling. However, through the conscious creation of a stage upon which these youths can publically display their consumption conspicuously, an enabling environment is created. One of the non-enabling factors is that some of the participants come from low income families and the parents would not allow such behaviour. It is for this reason that this movement is kept secret from the adults who would otherwise have influence over the youth. This movement is in line with Veblen’s theory that there is a requirement for a

network to exist for word to get around about a person's degree of leisure and the object that he/she possesses (Trigg, 2001).

There are some distinct and interesting characteristics of this youth movement that are not evident in the literature reviewed. First, the rate at which the rituals take place varies, with some being weekly and some biweekly. Second, youth in this movement do not consume products conspicuously with the end in mind of owning the product or hanging on to it, but rather, once the product has been displayed, it is destroyed in front of the crowd through some act of ritual vandalism, such as arson (destructive anti-consumption). The ritual is said to re-enforce the resourcefulness of the consumer so much so that they can afford to act in such a wasteful manner.

This conspicuous consumption pattern does not follow those that have been noted in literature, where the product can be used for future flaunting or display, but rather once the product is used it loses its value instantaneously. This pattern of conspicuous consumption has elements of destructive anti-consumption. Lastly, in this youth movement there is conscious exclusion of certain perceivers of the status, and signalling and inclusion seem to be limited to a very specific preference group.

Youth who participate in this movement were identified as very appropriate for this study, not only for their adherence to a "textbook" approach but also for their divergence from it. The population selection criteria were youths who

participate in this movement at least once a month and those who have been doing so for at least three months.

There was a focus on 16 to 21 year olds, as the legal interview age in South African is 16, the age at which a child can make his or her own decision (Children's Institute, 2011). However, approval of inclusion of youth below this age was within the ethical guidelines, providing parental approval was received via a consent form, as was the case in this research. The unit of analysis was a youngster who participates in *pexing*.

#### **4.4. Sampling Method and Size**

Snowball sampling was used in this study through a referral system of one candidate by another, given the secrecy that surrounds the movement (Blumberg et al., 2008). There were concerns around gender representation in the sample, given that literature notes a difference in consumption patterns (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004) and coping strategies (Hamilton & Catterall, 2005) between boys and girls. A sample size of fifteen was decided on in order to achieve a depth of interviews conducted on a smaller sample, and to gather richer data than possible with a larger sample in the limited interview time (Blumberg et al., 2008). However, a sample of ten was settled on, as discussed in chapter five. A sample of fifteen was identified for the research but individuals had to gain parental consent to participate and 5 declined, as they did not want parents to find out about their involvement in *pexing*.

#### **4.5. Data Collection**

Face-to-face depth interviews were conducted for data collection with interviews conducted by the researcher. Consent letters were obtained from the parent or guardian of the interviewee prior to conducting of any interview. An assent form was also obtained from the interviewee prior to commencement of any interview. No interviews were conducted on participants where there was no parental or guardian consent form, nor participant assent form.

The interviews were unstructured, as recommended when conducting an exploratory study (Blumberg et al., 2008). An interview guide was used in order to ensure consistency in question content and sequence from one interview to the next (Appendix A). However, there was minimum focus on the specificity of the guide as specificity may result in rigidity and so hinder unveiling of rich information from the respondent (Blumberg et al., 2008). The only aspects of the guide that were specific related to the demographic data.

The interviews were recorded on paper and on an electronic device in order to ensure integrity and accuracy of the data (Blumberg et al., 2008). The second method of data collection was through overt observation (Patton, 2002), which failed for reasons discussed in chapter four. Lastly, thick description was used as part of the data collection method, as it not only allowed the researcher to conduct thick interpretation but also allowed for the subsequent reader of the research document to be integrated into the context within which the events took place (Patton, 2002).

#### **4.6. Data Analysis**

The responses were analysed on the same day as the content, and so were still fresh in the interviewer's mind. Narrative analysis was conducted in analysing data, as is common in qualitative studies, to provide greater depth (Blumberg et al., 2008). The narrative analysis was heavily dependent on the availability of thick descriptions gathered from collection of the data, which ultimately adds richness and depth to the analysis (Patton, 2002).

#### **4.7. Data Validity and Reliability**

The guide was assessed for specificity and consistency with research objectives and the conceptual framework in use. Both the assessments were conducted by a researcher qualified in both business and academic research. This ensured that there was no researcher bias and it resulted in improvements on the interview guide. (Blumberg et al., 2008). There are imperfections that exist in each method, for instance, there was a risk that overt observation would lend itself to unconscious influence by the researcher when participants deviated from their usual behaviour in the presence of the observer (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, observation may not lend itself to an analysis of the internal aspects of the participants, but rather give a picture only of what is happening externally. The interview method is susceptible to personal bias (Blumberg et al., 2008); however in combining multiple methods of data collection these noted weaknesses in the different methods were minimised through a triangulation processes (Patton, 2002).

#### **4.8. Research Limitations**

The findings of the study cannot be extrapolated across other black youth in emerging markets as the sample that will be selected will not be representative. Given the differences in consumption patterns noted in males and females, and given their different coping strategies, it may be worthwhile for a study to focus on the difference as the sampling method in this study did not aim for a balanced sample of males and females. A snowball sampling procedure was used, thus guaranteeing a balanced sample. One of the methods used in the research was overt ethnographic research, so there may be limitations in that the observer (researcher) might unconsciously have influenced the events taking place (Patton, 2002). In the presence of the observer the participants may have varied their behaviour.

Since conspicuous consumption behaviour manifests itself differently across gender groups (Hamilton & Catterall, 2005; Piacentini & Mailer, 2004) there were limitations in a sampling technique that did not allow for a balanced gender sample.

## **5. CHAPTER 5: RESULTS**

### **5.1. Introduction**

The purpose of this research was to explore conspicuous consumption and anti-consumption in black youth in emerging markets. A phenomenon (“*pexing*”) of interest was identified and juxtapositioned against known traits of conspicuous consumption and anti-consumption in order to understand if the phenomena share the same aspects. Reasons people engage in “*pexing*” were also collected, along with the environmental factors that play a role in this “*pexing*”. This chapter presents the results of the research from in-depth interviews conducted with a sample of ten, as stated in chapter three.

A sample of fifteen was identified for the research, however individuals had to gain parental consent to participate in the research and five disagreed, not wanting their parents to find out about their involvement in “*pexing*”. As stated in chapter three, a covert ethnographic method was to be undertaken as part of the data gathering triangulation, however this failed. When the researcher arrived at the “*pexing*” session the subjects under observation reverted to passive mode and would not continue with the “*pexing*” session, given the intrusion by an adult. The chapter is arranged into four sections: demographic details of the sample; responses classed under each research question; other results; and summation of common trends.

## 5.2. Demographics of Interviewees

This section will give a summary of the demographics of the sample that was used in the study with regards to characteristics that are significant to the study such as gender and race and age (Table 14)

**Table 14:** Demographic Data on Samples

Interviewee	Age	Tenure in <i>pexing</i>	Gender	<i>Pexing</i> Frequency	Race	Place of Residence
1	18	4	Male	Monthly	Black	Gauteng
2	15	3	Male	Monthly	Black	Gauteng
3	16	3	Male	Monthly	Black	Gauteng
4	16	1	Male	Monthly	Black	Gauteng
5	14	4	Male	Monthly	Black	Gauteng
6	16	3	Male	Monthly	Black	Gauteng
7	16	2	Female	Monthly	Black	Gauteng
8	16	2.5	Female	Monthly	Black	Gauteng
9	17	2	Male	Monthly	Black	Gauteng
10	17	2	Male	Monthly	Black	Gauteng

Although the youth were not explicit about their family background and could not give accurate information on household income low income backgrounds were deduced from the following: RDP housing and informal settlements (low income); schools attended to (subsidised township government school); jobs that parents occupy are menial labour; some households rely on government grants; and lastly there was mention from the participants about how much some youths don't have.



### **5.3. Research Question 1: What aspects of conspicuous consumption does “*pexing*” have?**

In order to assess aspects of conspicuous consumption that exists in “*pexing*” its constructs were revisited and traced back to the responses. When the interviewees were asked to talk about “*pexing*” (what it is and what takes place at a “*pexing*” session) they all described a process that has constructs that are very similar to the constructs that describe the nature of conspicuous consumption. Although the information came out at different points of the interview, most of the responses were aligned. The following are quotations that contain constructs that are in alignment with those that make up the definition and nature of conspicuous consumptions as laid out in Table 15.

#### **Construct 1: Public display and consumption within a social context**

There are aspects of “*pexing*” that match conspicuous consumption, as it is done amongst a crowd (social set-up) with many observers. There are sessions of “*pexing*” that are organised in which crews gather to compete against each other through the display of goods for others to see. The scale of the social context is much bigger, with groups of children arriving from different townships to gather at the annual event at Witbank in many buses.

**Table 15:** Conspicuous Consumption Constructs

Conspicuous Consumption definitions	Construct
Explicit or demonstrative act of one's economic standing, status or prestige through the consumption of goods within a social set-up Buying and consumption of things in a way that people notice	1. Public display and consumption within a social context
Consumption meant to demonstrate economic position to observers Indication of wealth	2. The consumption is meant to indicate how much money a person has and what is that person's economic standing
Luxury expenditure on consumption of goods Act of buying a lot of expensive things not necessary Preference for more expensive over cheaper yet functionally equivalent goods	3. The spend is on luxurious and on goods that are expensive but other alternatives that are not as expensive are not considered
Means of asserting prestige and status	4. There is a reputation and grading that is linked to the consumption of goods and services
Commodities do not only hold functional value but can also be used as a tool for social communication Purchase of goods for display	5. The consumers use the products and services not only for their functional value but as a way of communicating something to the observers within the social context
Conspicuous consumption takes place at an unconscious level due to pressures exerted by society	6. When consumers conspicuously consume they do so unknowingly and involuntarily

*“It’s simple you know “pexing” is about taking the crowd, so that they are on your side. As I have said some girls underestimate you and you need to have the last say and show them that you have stuff and that way you won over them and you take the crowd and the fear goes you know”* (Respondent 9)

*“There are lots of kids there, like there are all the townships from around Daveyton, Watville, and Vosloo, all of that its some 300 or 500 kids it’s full.”*  
(Respondent 5)

*“That is it you know “pexing” is about being accepted by the crowd [emphasis added] and taking the crown, it is about the expensive life and enjoying yourself and proving yourself to others that I am here and no one is better than me.” (Respondent 9)*

*“you know it’s hectic, the crowd is all over you and there are people everywhere everyone wants to be next to you and it is so hectic you know. It’s so crowded that you do not even have room and it can get rough and sometimes” (Respondent 6)*

**Construct 2: The consumption is meant to indicate how much money a person has and to demonstrate a person’s financial standing.**

All of the respondents indicated that part of “pexing” is about showing off to people in terms of the ability to afford an expensive lifestyle; the ability to destroy something of financial value, and very easily get another one for replacement. This is not noted in any literature. The notion of financial standing is further reinforced through the physical destruction (tearing and burning) of cash notes.

*“You also “pex” with money and you give it away and you tear it and burn it. I like to “Pex” with money because it is like you are wasting the ultimate thing [emphasis added] you know, it is not some clothes that you have won and you can wear again its money you have not used it to buy anything and you just give it away and you say to your opponent here take this money and go get yourself a Rossimoda and then come back here and then we can “Pex”*

*because right now you have nothing. Or you give him the money and tell him to get his gold teeth because you have pampers on your teeth” (Respondent 6)*

*“It’s about what you have and what others do not [emphasis added]. You have to show them that you live this life that is better than theirs and that you can afford it you know. This thing makes me who I am to other people and it’s important that they know me as someone who can afford his life and who is cool” (Respondent 6)*

*“You bring expensive stuff because you want to show people that you are not there to play, you show them that you can afford stuff [emphasis added]. Someone comes up to you and tells you your life is so and so so and you basically get into a competition and you make sure you show them how your life is” (Respondent 5)*

*“like I said its showing off to tell others that you can afford this and tear the clothes because you will get better ones [emphasis added] and you can afford. You want to be seen this thing means nothing to you, you will get another one” (Respondent 8)*

Some of the children do not have money but want to put on an illusion that they do by engaging in “*pexing*”. Some were very reluctant to admit other ways in which to get money to engage in “*pexing*”, but there was mention of crime and stealing either from each other or by breaking into houses. There

was also mention of respondents helping each other when one of the crew members was especially poor and without money. The crew would find money for their member or even lend them money so that the reputation of the collective was preserved.

*“yes I can afford it you know and that’s why I “Pex”, I budget and save and most of my lunch money I never use and it save it and they do not so I can afford it but sometimes it is so difficult and you have to get money other ways”*  
(Respondent 10)

*“I work part time and wash cars and help people who need some hands but other kids take things too far they get into crime[emphasis added]and they steal things and steal money from home and steal stuff from home and sell it to get money they do all sorts of things”* (Respondent 6)

*“I do not want to end up stealing like the other kids do. They steal money and go buy shoes for two thousand rand and they hide them at home and only wear them outside the house when the parents do not see them”* (Respondent 2)

*“There are others who are under “dependary” you know. There are kids who cannot afford this and the clothes do not get them far because they cannot afford it all the time, they are dependent on their parents. Some kids have part time jobs in this industry to get by you know so that they can “Pex” with*

*money and clothes. They will work for two days cleaning for someone or washing cars so you can get some money” (Respondent 2)*

*“the really poor kids ... the ones who come from a really bad situation and you see they are really forcing it and really want to “Pex” then want it bad like bad they steal clothes, money, pick pocket, they break in. There is a kid from Daveyton it was two years ago and he wanted Michael Jordan for the Witbank trip and they could not afford it at home and he killed himself” (Respondent 1)*

**Construct 3: Spend is on luxuries and on goods that are expensive but alternatives that are not as expensive are not considered.**

Another aspect of “*pexing*” that is similar to conspicuous consumption and that comes through is the use of expensive goods and services. With most respondents, when asked if the way the researcher was dressed would suffice for a “*pexing*” session, there was overwhelming interjection was in the negative. The reason given for this was that the clothes did not have any well-known brand name on them, did not look expensive and were not the right style. Furthermore, “*pexing*” is different in that there is use of people to “*pex*” with instead of just products and services, such as the use of girls to fight off a competitor who may or may not have a girl in attendance.

*“yes you “Pex” with the girl as well you know. You must give like a big amount of money so they see you can afford you know even your girl is OK and you can afford to give her this stuff” (Respondent 7)*

*“This industry will not end, it’s growing and it improves and changes all the time you know. There are changes like ... there are time you “Pex” with girls”*

(Respondent 3)

*“the expensive and well-known brand. For now the big ones are DMD (but just put there Moschino) and Rossimoda, Sportswear but it cannot be cheap it must start from about nine hundred to one thousand. To be honest nowadays we “Pex” with stuff from like... one thousand five hundred and upwards. You cannot pex with tekkies from five hundred rands. There is Le coq Sportif; Nike; Adidas for sportswear. For other clothes its DH and Uzzi especially for formal wear, relay, Guess but it must be Guess premium, Kaporal. Just as long as the label is expensive it is there, there are also the Rose T-shirts”*

(Respondent 1)

*“one kid that was battling with another and the one kid had for gold caps on his teeth. The guy who was battling with him took out five thousand rand and asked him to go and get that dirt removed from his teeth. The kid with the gold caps obviously could not take the money because he would have lost face and his status and his respect you know...he could not take the money...he did not take the money...there is no way...the crowd took the money and the guy was just passing it out”* (Respondent 7)

*“Also you never bring Amstel because it’s so cheap it’s like ten rand you know and you do not want to “Pex” with something so cheap. So something like blue ice is better and when they open your bus they need to see there is lot of*

*alcohol. The bus you are in as well needs to be the right one the colours differ in terms of money, like yellow, gold, pink and blue are the hot colours and cost more to rent”(Respondent 9)*

The majority of the respondents mentioned high end luxury items as examples of products that are used as part of the “*pexing*” session. They did not articulate the items as luxurious but rather described them as large and expensive in their language

*“It is about clothes, money cars and expensive stuff and big names so if you do not have any do not try because you can be humiliated” (Respondent 9)*

*“sister you do not just decide you are going to bring anything. I can go and get water from a tap and go “Pex” with it but so can everyone else it must be about what you can afford and you must bring lots of this stuff [emphasis added] something like 50 cases you know. Ultramel is better than yoghurt it’s a nice to have you know Danone you can get everywhere and cheap-cheap but Ultramel you cannot just get it every day” (Respondent 7)*

*“no you cannot you will be laughed at and they are so cheap and when you “Pex” you cannot pex with something that is let us say less than five hundred rand otherwise you just do not come, do not waste your time”(Respondent 2)*

*“it has to be a label like Adidas, Puma, Abita, Rossimoda all the expensive clothes you know. The cell phones must be black berry and the touch phones*



*like the new Nokia. We break the phones tear and burn the clothes you know it is all expensive stuff. We also use to “Pex” with credit cards but over time that did not get popular because we are not too sure how much is in there”*

(Respondent 6)

**Construct 4. There is a reputation and grading that is linked to the consumption of goods and services.**

With many of the respondents there was constant referral to “how much you are”; “what you are all about”; “being powerful and respected”; “being it.” These terms were all indicative of some grading system that is also linked to reputation, and as such “*pexing*” has aspects that are similar to those found in conspicuous consumption. There was also mention of popularity and fame that is associated with “*pexing*,” or having the reputation of the being the ultimate “*pexer*”.

*“It does not just stop with how much money you have but really how much you are, you, yourself and what you are all about and how sure you are about yourself and other people. There are other people who will do more things and do more things than you but you must also show them how much you have as well”* (Respondent 3)

*“it means I am better and above everybody else and I feel good. I am cool and people fear me you know not just anyone is going to come up to me and tell me anything about nothing. When you “Pex” you entertain others girls*

*especially you become famous and you are the entertainer and people start to know that you mess things up and you are better than others” (Respondent 2)*

*“then they fear you and respect you no one is going to be talking bad about you. You become it and even when you get to Witbank they might not want to “Pex” with you so you need to show them all the way there. You also get girls there you know because they have seen that you can afford so when you get there the other girls are already looking at you and think yes he is the right one you know I am watching him and when it’s time to go then you can pick from a lot and decide you know” (Respondent 7)*

*“Like if I come across a popular “pexing” guy like...mmhh...what’s his name again...Stumza you know, I mean when I see him the first thing when I see my friends I tell them Oh my God I say Stumza and he is so respected, feared, so famous, he is powerful, he is big...wow” [emphasis added] (Respondent 8)*

*“There are many people every day that work around looking good with good and expensive clothes but the key thing is can you take those things and damage them in front of a crowd and turn back go back to the shop and buy more and come back and do the same thing over and over you know that is how you maintain your reputation. [emphasis added] Looking good is not enough. You must be respected and people must be so sure about you and not doubt anything you see” (Respondent 6)*

*“you have to maintain your reputation especially with the girls. They talk and tell their friend about you and the fact that you are cool and you become famous when you “Pex”. There are crews and you do not want them to undermine you and they come from all over Barcelona, Las Vegas, and Daveyton. People will talk and say that this crew has money they dress well, they have style and they are cool. You organise and you meet somewhere and you are known and you get status and you become famous” (Respondent 10)*

*“You know things get so bad at the “Pex” like when some kids “Pex” and now do not have clothes we say you are a “hero to zero” you no longer have anything and we make them feel so bad [emphasis added] and it is not right we do not even look at their background and our own background we just go on like this. “Pex” is good and bad you see. Boasting and flashing on this earth and this world will never end” (Respondent 3)*

**Construct 5: The consumers use the products and services not only for their functional value but as a way of communicating something to the observers within the social context.**

Although respondents did not explicitly indicate that they used products for their non-functional value, there was consistency across all that the products they used in “*pexing*” helped them communicate to their reference groups in terms of their identity and how they needed to be seen by others.

*“I feel like the best like I can do whatever I want and people love me and respect me. I am held higher than anyone else and I become feared and respected, when I walk in the streets people love me and talk to me and say there is that girl who can afford her life and is living a good life” (Respondent 9)*

**Construct 6: When consumers conspicuous consume they do so not knowingly and involuntarily.**

Although literature suggests that conspicuous consumption happens at an unconscious level due to social pressures the findings in the study are different given the approach to *“pexing”*. *“pexing”* is a much planned process where youth agree on locations and dates for gathering with the intention of conspicuously consuming goods; the process is governed by a tracking and monitoring system (score sheet). All of these factors are an indication that this is voluntary and done with prior knowledge of the participants.

*“There are the big trips for PP and Witbank Dam, there is the Friday sessions and then there is the Host, one crew will host other crews in their area. There is this new thing where we all go to N1” (Respondent 8)*

*“we have these trips to PP and Witbank dam and we hire buses for two days and you need to buy new clothes and the brand you used last time you can’t use because you need to show improvement. So if I go with a Carvela you know because you know you need to be armed and everyone will know your standing. Also if we brought strong bow last week we cannot this week show*

*up with the same we are going to bring for example red square you know”*(Respondent 9)

There are a number of characteristics of “*pexing*” that are noteworthy of mentioning alight they do not match any conspicuous consumption construct as derived from the definition. It is noteworthy that these contribute to better understanding the phenomenon and contribute to the body of knowledge of conspicuous consumption, as some of have not been noted in any literature.

There is a much formalised logging system of scores to track who conspicuously consumes the best. There is an order to the points system, but at the same time there is chaos in the destruction of goods.

*“you know there is a system like there are dates; it goes back five years like the 14th of February. The big dates are the big 'pexes” where you go to Witbank Dam and Springs and then there are the Friday pexes like at Crystal Park. You go and “Pex” with taxis and the colour must be good and you drink and all of that. The big ones you really have to budget for you can pay up to three thousand rands”* (Respondent 1)

The goods are not normally used more than once, unless large items such as a car or someone’s house. It is more about destruction of the goods at a session and bringing something new to the next session. There is ritual vandalism in which things are burned and torn, so that one cannot use the

same product or thing the next time one *pexes*. This reinforces the notion that one can afford the things that one is burning or tearing.

*“no you cannot just show your clothes and that is it. You have to burn them and tear them because it’s to show that this not something you are just wearing and you will hear again you know. If you are going to flash you must show that this is so easy for me and I can get another one ad I can buy another one again and again and you keep on coming back. It is not about wearing the same clothes today that you wore last month we do not want to see that...show us that you can afford it and you buy more and get more and spend the money you know. So the burning and tearing of money and breaking of cell phones is key to this you cannot pex and you cannot call it a “Pex” if you do not have this stuff” (Respondent 6)*

The children help each other out financially if there is a crew member who cannot afford a trip to go and “Pex,” and also borrow each other’s clothes as well. It is about the individual “I” and the self, but at the same time there is an element of collectivism that comes through.

*“Some kids who have absolutely nothing you go and borrow from friends to “Pex” and your friends give you their things you know so you can go and show them and then you come back to your buddy and you say thanks” (Respondent 3)*

*“So if a trip is six hundred then it’s six hundred and everyone must pay, we do not have a care what is going on in your family. We also agree on outfits you know. Obviously when a crew member cannot afford then as the Sexy Divas you help your member who is less fortunate but in other schemes you will get left behind but our crew we will bring you clothes borrow them to you”*  
(Respondent 8)

Lastly, conspicuous consumption is based on consumption of goods and services to indicate social standing. However, “*pexing*” involves a third element, namely the use of people and the relationship one has with them, to indicate social and financial standing. The youngsters use “girls” as a commodity to “*Pex*” with within a social set-up.

*“yes you “Pex” with the girl as well you know. You must give like a big amount of money so they see you can afford you know even your girl is OK and you can afford to give her this stuff”* (Respondent 7)

*“You cannot go to a fun time and get there with an ugly girl you know. Like last year I was with this girl at the garage and I gave here lot of money and I gave her instructions that show must ask the guy behind the counter to keep the change so that people know I have the money”* (Respondent 5)

## **Research Question 2: What aspects of anti-consumption does “*pexing*” have?**

In order to assess aspects of anti-consumption that exist in “*pexing*” it is important to return to the nature and definition of anti-consumption. The constructs that make anti-consumption (Table 7) were revisited and traced back to the responses.

When the interviewees were asked to talk about “*pexing*” (what it is and what takes place at a “*pexing*” session) they all described a process that has constructs very similar to those that describe the nature of conspicuous consumption. Although the information came out at different points of the interview, most responses were aligned. The following are quotations that contain constructs that are in alignment with those that make up the definition and nature of conspicuous consumption as laid resistance (Zavestoski, 2002) and/or a reduction in consumption (Shaw & Newholm, 2002) of products, brands or markets (Lee et al., 2009), with the aim of countering any influence of consumer culture.

### **Construct 1: The resistance and/or rejection in consumption of certain products and brands**

When asked if I can “*pex*” with my clothes; what do they not “*Pex*” with; whether I can come “*pex*” with just any clothes the youngster mentioned a number of brands that they consumed and a number of brands that they avoided (Figure 4). There is also an indication of the most mentioned brands (Table 17)



**Table 16: Anti-consumption Constructs**

Anti-Consumption	Construct
resistance and/or a reduction in consumption of products, brands or markets with the aim of countering any influence of consumer culture	1. The resistance and or reduction in consumption of products and brands
This is driven by non-functional attributes of the product or service to convey social identity (avoidance of undesired self-identity) to a preference group.	2. Positive identity communication and negative identity avoidance in preference group setting.
Anti-consumption preference is voluntary and is characterised by environmental factors relevant to the era the consumer finds themselves in. This era informs three elements that drive anti-consumption: politically based (brand avoidance bodies); withstanding of cultures (consumerism and hyper consumption) and driven by values (ethical consumption) The Marketing environment also plays a significant role in anti-consumption	4. Social, political, economic condition; and marketing environments drive anti-consumption

**Table 17: Summary of Brand Count**

BRAND	COUNT	BRAND	COUNT	BRAND	COUNT
Debonnaires	4	Pep	1	Rossimoda	9
Ultramel	8	Jet	1	Abita	4
Nike	14	Reebok	3	RT	1
Adidas	8	DMD	4	Mr Price	3
Puma	5	Danone	1	Diesel	6
Toyota Quantum	2	Kaporal	1	Blackberry	2
Truworhs	1	Polo	1	Biblios	1
Lania Italia	1	Lacoste	1	Mille	1
Flosheem	1	KFC	1	Uzzi	2
Nokia	1	Levi	1	Carvella	14
Le coq Sportif	1				

*Note.* Researcher's own data

Figure 11: Brand Mapping of Consumption and Avoidance



Note. Researcher's own data

*"It no you cannot you will be humiliated, just do not, you cannot. I have not seen anyone risk that but I can only imagine...You cannot get there wearing Mr Price"* (Respondent 8)

*"that is so cheap you cannot do that it's a cheap label"* (Respondent 6)

*“Also you never bring Amstel because it’s so cheap it’s like ten rand you know and you do not want to “Pex” with something so cheap. So something like blue ice is better” (Respondent 9)*

*“Carvela, DMD, you cannot just appear with Mr Price and Pep stuff you must be mad you know. Everything from head to toe accounts”*

*“Ultramel is better than yoghurt it’s a nice to have you know Danone you can get everywhere and cheap cheap but Ultramel you cannot just get it every day” (Respondent 10)*

*“food that is the new thing ... pizzas like if they appear with some cheap snacks form the Indian shops then they lose we have Debonnaires pizzas” (Respondent 3)*

*“: labels obviously you cannot “Pex” with clothing with no label...definitely not because you are not wearing the right label, you must wear a label that will be seen. You can come and just watch you cannot pex with that” (Respondent 8)*

*“Loxion Kulta, RT, Reebok....nobody pexes with Reebok... we just do not talk to them or look at them. Even they will see that they must just go... Jabaru production...no I will not” (Respondent 7)*

*you the black for the same price as the white you know and the sound must be ok so when you get there they see you coming” (Respondent10)*

*“yes like some guys will show up with Mille shoes and they think they are “pexing”... this really shocks people because you cannot “Pex” with this brand, it’s is not expense... Jabaru, shirts sold at Jet and Networks... they do not even get counted” (Respondent 7)*

*“beer but it must only be cider to show how expensive it is you cannot go and “Pex” with Amstel or black label” (Respondent 4)*

**Construct 2: Anti-consumption is driven by non-functional attributes of the product or service to convey social identity (avoidance of undesired self-identity) to a preference group.**

Many of the respondents mentioned specific clothes that they used for “pexing,” and these had attributes (non-functional aspects) that made them appealing in signalling to their reference group a certain message. The attributes ranged from price to brand and country of origin.

*“You must bring expensive clothes that will make you feel good even when you walk down the street because sometimes you can be working down the road and you are dressed but if you are no dressed expensively you feel naked even through your clothes are on but it is not the right brand” (Respondent 3)*

*“no you cannot you will be laughed at and they are so cheap and when you “Pex” you cannot pex with something that is let’s say less than five hundred*

*rand otherwise you just do not come , do not waste your time.” (Respondent 2)*

*“they do it with their cars, they will say why do not you put on new tyres and they boast in front of each other, they also “Pex” with their kids and say my child wares a Carvel and yours wears a five hundred rand tekkie. The want to be seen as having a higher status” (Respondent 1)*

### **Construct 3: Individual, social and marketing environments drive anti-consumption**

There a number of environmental factors that drive the respondents’ attitudes towards certain products. Respondents gave a number of reasons why they rejected the consumption of certain products. On assessment of the respondents’ views a number of factors emanated from the data: pricing of the product (marketing environment); country of origin (marketing factors); brand of the product (marketing factors); accessibility to the product (social environment); portrayal of a certain identity and rejection of another (individual environment); what is considered fashionable by reference group (social).

**Pricing of the product and service:** respondents saw the price of the product and service as a reason not to consume the products, as with cheaper brands and commodities. Cheaper products do not contribute to the formulation of a positive self-identity but can rather result in the opposite. Respondents feel humiliated by this and therefore make a point of not

consuming those products that are cheaper. Respondents also gave an indication of what price range they considered cheap. The range considered cheap for items such as shoes was five to one thousand Rand.

*“For now the big ones are... Moschino and Rossimoda, Sportswear but it cannot be cheap it must start from about nine hundred to one thousand. To be honest nowadays we “Pex” with stuff from like one thousand five hundred and upwards. You cannot pex with tekkies from five hundred rands”* (Respondent 1)

*“Abita, Rossimoda and all Truworths labels especially for girls, Nike, Adidas. Carvel is like a thousand and Rossimoda is like three thousand”* (Respondent 10)

**Country of origin:** what emerged from the results is that brands that were local were frowned upon and brands from foreign countries were much more accepted. They were more expensive and more luxurious, and therefore much better commodities with which to “Pex.” Respondents avoided the consumption of local brands as they were seen to be cheaper, ‘uncool’ and inferior.

*“They will be boasting about the fact that they clothes they wear and “Pex” with are from “Oorkant” like Italy... USA, Japan and ... yah from there”* (Respondent 8)

*“no you cannot come and “Pex” with Loxion Culture you will be laughed at and they are so cheap and when you “Pex” you cannot “Pex” with something that is let us say less than five hundred rand otherwise you just don’t come, don’t waste your time”*(Respondent 2)

**The product or services originality (not imitation):** the originality of the product and the ability to verify how genuine the product is, were important to the participants and they actively checked if the goods used in “*pexing*” were original in nature. Goods that were imitation were not consumed and any individual who consumed such goods was also looked down upon. Respondents noted that they avoided imitation as they did not want their reference groups to have a negative perception of them with regards to whether they could afford an expensive lifestyle or not.

*“no you cannot you will be humiliated, just do not, you cannot. I have not seen anyone risk that but I can only imagine. Like you cannot show up with old clothing even if it’s the right label it must be new and it must be original. You leave the tags on and any case we know these things and we know what is real”* (Respondent 10)

*“You come with the tags on the clothing. There is a list that we keep like top ten girls and top ten boys and who was wearing the worst thing. It will be all over mix it you will be humiliated. We also go the shops and check these things”* (Respondent 9)

*“you get used to the clothes and you see if it’s the real thing and you know how much it costs and if you are not sure you must go and check it at the shop” (Respondent 6)*

**Brand name of product or service:** according to the respondents there were some brands that lent themselves to being conspicuously consumed and some that did not. The brands most favoured were those that were more luxurious, expensive and very expensive, and that fell in certain categories, such as formal wear and sportswear.

*“Clothes like Abita and RM, Carvel... they are the right ones they are expensive and they fit us well you know...Loxion culture no you cannot you “Pex” with it you will be laughed at” (Respondent 1)*

*“Also you never bring Amstel because it’s so cheap it’s like ten rand you know and you do not want to “Pex” with something so cheap. So something like blue ice is better” (Respondent 10)*

*“food that is the new thing...pizzas like if they appear with some cheap snacks form the Indian shops then they lose we have Debonairness pizzas” (Respondent 9)*

**Accessibility to the product or service:** there were a number of respondents who highlighted why they would consume one product and not another, based on its accessibility. A good illustration of this was on *Ultramel*



and *Danone*. The former is seen as a “nice to have” that one cannot consume all the time, and traditionally blacks in townships would consume it as a dessert on special occasions, so it was not an item that would be consumed every day but rather as something special to have. On the other hand, the latter product is an item that is consumed on a daily basis, that many people have access to. As a result it was not consumed in “*pexing*.” The thinking from the respondents was that the harder products were to access the more status they provided when conspicuously consumed.

*“sister you do not just decide you are going to bring anything. I can go and get water from a tap and go “Pex” with it but so can everyone else it must be about what you can afford and you must bring lots of this stuff something like 50 cases you know. Ultramel is better than yoghurt it’s a nice to have you know Danone you can get everywhere and cheap cheap but Ultramel you cannot just get it every day”* (Respondent 9)

**Portrayal of an identity and rejection of another:** on questioning of the respondents as to why certain goods were rejected for consumption, all respondents said that certain products communicated a certain identity about them and others another. The respondents rejected the consumption of products that communicated a perception about them that they considered negative (such as being poor or not able to afford something).

*“Adidas, Nike, Puma and Guess brands it must be an expensive name and you get them and mess them up and show them how much you are and how*

*much they are. You must bring expensive clothes that will make you feel good even when you walk down the street because sometimes you can be walking down the road and you are dressed but if you are no dressed expensively you feel naked even through your clothes are on but it is not the right brand”*  
(Respondent 10)

**What is considered fashionable by the reference group (socialising agents) in order to fit in:** the respondents rejected the consumption of some products based on what was considered “cool” or “fashionable” by their peers and “pexing” crews.

*“We also “Pex” with mini buses you cannot just come with any mini bus it must be nice and it must look good and be the right colour like the black horse”* (Respondent 1)

*“ha ha ha...no Sister, you cannot, you just cannot. It must be fashion like Diesel but there are the main brands like Abita and Rossimoda. There is also Carvela but that is now out of fashion, there is less and less kids “pexing” with Carvel”*(Respondent 5)

*“ok so you know the Quantum comes in different colours and you want to come with a hot colour and white is not so hot so you go for black or gold so that people know you are serious and it will make your group the best and if you want to get the best you must pay you the taxi driver is not going to give you the black for the same price as the white you know”* (Respondent 7)

*“Loxion cultures, RT, Reebok....nobody pexes with Reebok we just do not talk to them or look at them. Even they will see that they must just go... Jabaru production...no I will not” (Respondent 10)*

#### **5.4. Research Question 3: Why is “pexing” practiced?**

On questioning respondents on why they partake in *pexing* there are a number of varied reasons that were given. The reasons given by the interviewees were very consistent with more than one interviewee except for one response. In the next section the reasons are arranged into 8 categories. An indication of how many interviewees gave this response is given along with quotes from the interviewees indicating the response:

There were **six respondents** who gave an indication of financial standing as a reason for practising “*pexing*”. This is done in order to **show off** to other people about how much money you have and that you are more than they are as you live an expensive life of affordability. .

*“to show off and show that you have money at home and how much you have” (Respondent 8)*

*“it’s about what you have and what others do not. You have to show them that you live this life that is better than theirs and that you can afford it you know. This thing makes me who I am to other people and it’s important that they know me as someone who can afford his life” (Respondent 6)*

*“yes that’s it exactly you get arrogant and flaunt that very fact that at your home they can afford and give you this money toe able to do this and at your house they give you little money, I dress like this and you dress like that”*(Respondent 4)

*“you do it because you need to keep people quite, they always want to come across as if they are more than you are and you have to keep them quite ...and show them through “Pex” that you are more than them you see”*(Respondent 10)

**Two respondents** stated that the reason they practices *“pexing”* was gain **popularity and fame** with their peers in and outside of their area.

*“it’s for fame as well you know to be famous...I come across a popular “pexing” guy like...mmhh...what’s his name again...Stumza you know, I mean when I see him the first thing when I see my friends I tell them Oh my God I say Stumza and he is so respected, feared, so famous, he is powerful, he is big...wow”* (Respondent 4)

Up to **six respondents** indicated that the reason they practice *“pexing”* was to **entertain, entice and attract the opposite sex**. One of the respondents was female and the rest male.

*“the crowd loves it especially the girls you know and if there is a girl in the crowd who wants you and it makes it easy to ask her out because she can*

*see you are the man you know. The crowd screams and you know they motivate you. In the industry it's all about the girls and the girls also say you are the man you know"* (Respondent 3)

*"my crew was there and egging me on and asked me to show these boys and you know the girls are watching so you cannot mess up. When the girls work away they talk so you must do your thing"* (Respondent 5)

*"When you "Pex" you entertain others, girls especially you become famous and you are the entertainer and people start to know that you mess things up and you are better than others"* (Respondent 2)

*"The boys are also impressed with you as well and they think Yo this girl is it and she rocks"* (Respondent 9)

*"The girls are also looking and thinking he is it and he is hot and they want to be around you and they want to get close to you all the time"*(Respondent 6)

*"You also get girls there you know because they have seen that you can afford so when you get there the other girls are already looking at you and think yes he is the right one you know I am watching him and when it's time to go then you can pick from a lot and decide you know"* (Respondent 7)

**Five respondents** started “*pexing*” through referral from friends and trying to please friends because of peer pressure and conforming to what friends. Some indicated that the reason they succumb to peer pressure was so that they do not feel alone and being without friends.

*“Also all your friends do it so you need to do it because if you do not you will be all on your own and so that’s why I started because my friends do it*

*“The things that your friends like and the way they dress and you are under pressure depending on the person you are because you also want to fit in with them... they will laugh at you and also put you under pressure... it’s just that when you have a look around Daveyton there are a lot of people “pexing” and its popular and my friends do it too and that is why I do it”* (Respondent 8)

**Four respondents** indicated that they saw “*pexing*” as a **very fun and cool activity to engage in**. There are aspects of it that they find especially cool such as the style of dressing that is prominent in “*pexing*” sessions and the music that is played there.

*“pexing is cool...and stuff so it’s nice”* (Respondent 8)

*“pex is cool because you meet lots of people, you get girls, there is dancing”*  
(Respondent 1)

**Seven respondents** relived the time when they **responded to a verbal attack and provocation** by other youths and in order to avoid being underestimated they respond with “*pexing*”. The outcome of responding with “*pexing*” was becoming feared by others and therefore no longer undermined.

*“Well it’s just that other kids will come up to you and doubt you and want to show how they are and what they have. So we go “Over the Bridge” to the “pexing” area and we bring money, snacks and clothes. You bring expensive stuff because you want to show people that you are not there to play, you show them that you can afford stuff. Someone comes up to you and tells you your life is so and so and you basically get into a competition and you make sure you show them how your life is”* (Respondent 5)

*“The way it started is I was getting out of school and then there were these guys who came up to me and where saying I go on as if I am the dog and I ignored them because I did not really know what they meant you know. Then they followed me calling me potato bag and telling me I am a hobo and I do not have nothing, no clothes yes things like that and I decided that I am going to show them and this thing was hurting me you know so yes I decided I will show them”* (Respondent 10)

*“you know people start to underestimate you...you know they look down on you as if you have nothing....they underestimate you. It’s just that when you step out the house you know you must feel yes everyone knows that I can afford. You see sometimes you know when people know that you do not have*

*money they underestimate you, they can almost predict on a Monday what you will be wearing on a Friday because they think you do not have money”*

(Respondent 3)

*“well.....you know you sometimes have money and one guy comes to you and challenges you and you then decide you will take the challenge but you were planning to use the money for something else and then you do not and sometimes it’s a waste”* (Respondent 7)

*“People fear this girl and then when I am done with this girl the power moves to me and I do not fear them they fear me, when I see her I just see a piece of trash. When they see you they dot underestimate you”* (Respondent 9)

Half of the respondents (**five**) engage in “*pexing*” in order to **gain respect; status; power and love from observers and to be held in high esteem.**

*“I feel like the best ... people love me and respect me. I am held higher than anyone else and I become feared and respected, when I walk in the streets people love me and talk to me”*(Respondent 10)

*“Its reputation, status and power you know you want to hang on to it”*

*“The people you use to fear now respect you because they go around saying you know that guy can afford and he has money... So as someone who has no money if you get a “Pex” then people think you have money and then after that they respect you and fear you”*(Respondent 9)



*“They look at you with respect as if to say this guy has it all and you do not mess with him you know. You feel like the man and even when you walk you can feel yourself you know and you are like wow I can feel myself”*

(Respondent 6)

There was **one individual** who was very adamant in his mind as to why he got involved in “*pexing*” and held this as the ultimate reason why he got started. The reason was that he got involved in “*pexing*” In order to **feel alive** and to be somebody. It must be noted that this response was given in a very emotive way by the youngster indicated by him shifting in his chair and through the crackle in his voice as he was relaying his views to the researcher.

*“how can I put it? It is like if you are not there you are not alive and life is passing you by”* (Respondent 6)

To conclude some respondents when asked if they will ever stop “*pexing*” some say they will and when asked why they give the very same reasons that they gave for “*pexing*” as the reasons they will stop.

#### **5.5. Research Question 4: What is the role of the environment on the “*pexing*”?**

As captured in chapter Two, there is an element of evolution that affects consumer behaviour. This evolution is linked to the era in which the consumers find themselves, and this study took place in a postmodern era.

The data collected was analysed for the role of the environment on “*pexing*”. This section will capture the results that are related to the role of the environment on destructive consumption, contextualised in the postmodern era.

**Poverty is a disincentive in “*pexing*,” however the action to stop is not taken.**

Most of the respondents realised the behaviour in which they were engaging was wasteful, and there is also a moral realisation that what they are doing is wrong as it promotes poverty, and the resources that they waste could have been used by other poor people who are in need. The respondents indicated that this social condition was the reason that they would stop “*pexing*,” however most indicated that as much as they knew that this is wrong, and they had to stop, they were not willing to stop this behaviour now. The reason given by respondents for this was that they felt “*pexing*” is “cool” and is fun, and that they will stop much later on in life. For the present it is something they need to engage in. Respondents also see “*pexing*” as good and bad at the same time, in the social context.

*“this thing is wasteful...People are hungry out there who need food and I waste food; who need clothes and I just tear them up” (Respondent 6)*

*“well.....you know you sometimes have money and one guy comes to you and challenges you and you then decide you will take the challenge but you were*

*planning to use the money for something else and then you do not and sometimes it's a waste"*(Respondent 7)

*"I have decided to stop because in life you will not have anything and you will not have things for the benefit of them"* (Respondent 3)

*"Pex" is good and bad you see. Boasting and flashing on this earth and this world will never end and the more we "Pex" the more poverty goes up"* (Respondent 3)

*"Pex is not cool at times but sometimes it is. "pexing" is something questionable and you can ask and answer yourself with it"* (Respondent 10)

*"I still want to have fun and go and trips and enjoy this and maybe next year I will stop"* (Respondent 4)

**Views of reference and peer groups (socialising agents) and opposite gender drive youngsters to partake in "pexing".**

Many of the respondents noted that the reason they "pex" is in order to please others, particularly those of the opposite sex. This response was common in the male respondents. The respondents indicated that they "pex" in order to formulate an identity that is viewed as positive in the eyes of the opposite sex and other peers.

*“But you know I love to please people and mainly the people I please are girls because in this industry you cannot do anything without a girl you know you have to please them”*(Respondent 4)

*“the crowd loves it especially the girls you know and if there is a girl in the crowd who wants you and it makes it easy to ask her out because she can see you are the man you know. The crowd screams and you know they motivate you. In the industry it’s all about the girls and the girls also say you are the man you know”* (Respondent 3)

Some respondents noted that from a social point of view, peer pressure and views from their reference groups fuel them to continue with “*pexing*,” and even when they want to stop, given the wasteful nature of their behaviour, they do not because of what others will say

*“it would be painful because everyone will realise that your family has no money so when you “pex” people think you have money you know. You might lose your friends”* (Respondent 10)

*“with “pexing” life is a bit bad though because your parents work so hard to make the money but the problem is that you cannot stop because once you stop them everyone will look down on you and then your life goes backwards you know and you lose face and your life is messed up”*(Respondent 5)

*“yes I will because it hurts my parents but maybe I will only stop in 3 or 5 years’ time for now “pexing” is my life and this is what we do and how we live with my friends and everyone at school and here id Daveyton”(Respondent 6)*

*“I can never get to the point where I have clothes and things at home and I am like everybody else you know and I can wash and dress nice and just walk normally in the street without worrying who will say you had this on last week and you have no clothes and you do not get embarrassed” (Respondent 3)*

**Increase in age (and entry into the work place) amongst youngsters drives less participation in “pexing”**

In the “pexing” community, an increase in age is an influential factor in “pexing”. Older youngsters find the participation of younger children as a deterrent. Some indicated that participation of younger children might be the reason that they would stop partaking in “pexing,” as they did not want to associate themselves with an activity that groups them with younger children.

*“you know young kids are now doing this and everybody is doing this so I have decided to stop you know. I cannot be doing this and young kids are doing it too you know I am old now” (Respondent 7)*

The other influence that age has on “pexing,” as noted by the respondents, is that the older one gets the more difficult it is to reconcile the responsibilities one has with the activity of “pexing.” Many of the respondents said that as

they get older they will stop partaking in “pexing” as they will have adult responsibilities, such as children that they need to take care of financially.

*“no I will not stop the only reason I will stop is because I am getting older you know, it’s difficult to “pex” like this when you are older because then it’s not as good anymore because now you are “pexing” with money you are working for, from a normal job and you are not getting money from home to show everyone who rich you are at home. People say you are now taking advantage of the younger kids who are not working and do not have jobs. The kids budget and you work” (Respondent 5)*

*“when I am a single mom and no husband and I have a family to take care of then I might stop it you know. When I have to work for my kids and anyway I am still enjoying this now and now I can still get the things I want to “pex” with from my parents and also my budgeting and saving” (Respondent 9)*

**Parental discipline (socialising agent) plays a role in the propensity that kids will “pex,” however it not always restricts the behaviour**

Respondents pointed out that the financial support they received from their parents either promoted their involvement in “pexing” or deterred it. Respondents said that some parents support their children’s involvement in “pexing,” as they did not want them to lose during the session. Other respondents indicated that their parents were strict and unhappy with their involvement in this activity.

*“It’s bad like if they have no money at home then you make your parents feel bad and you point to all the other kids in your group and you tell your parents that you know they are messing up your life and eventually they feel bad and do make all means to get you the money, borrow whatever” (Respondent 5)*

*“even adults pex, they will be in their cars and brag about tyres, cars and tell each other that I drink Hennessey. The clothes that we wear like Abita we see from them and DH that is what they wear. They might not burn them and waste but they do it too” (Respondent 2)*

*“The adults really complain but hey also boast you know in their own way only the do not go drinking and destroying things but they do it but at the same time they want to complain about us and tell us this thing is wrong but if you see them there at the stokvels they do the same things with their cars parked and they are also wearing their Abita and their DH shirts you know it’s all the same I think. It’s just parents and adults never want you do to what they are doing” (Respondent 6)*

*“well you will not take all the people there but a couple and some parents do not want the kids to lose and some do not want this thing like my dad he checks my clothes so I do not pex too much with clothes more with other stuff  
“But sometimes this thing makes you feel bad you know, yes sometimes you budget and save to get this stuff but parents also buy for you and eight Carvelas later you feel guilty that your parents have been getting you this stuff” (Respondent 7)*

*“then I will “Pex” with food instead of tearing and burning clothes because at home they start to notice that your clothes are missing and they start to punish you but you make a plan you know to get money. At home they are not happy about this” (Respondent 2)*

*“this thing is wasteful and my mom is very unhappy you know because I have burned so many clothes and sometimes she refuses to buy me clothes you know” (Respondent 10)*

*“Sometimes I manipulate my parents and get very angry and they feel bad for me and go to the neighbours and you know they borrow so that I can “Pex” and I go and do it and feel good but yet at home there is this big debt you know” (Respondent 2)*

### **Adults (socialising agents) as role models for behaviour**

Respondents are of the view that adults also partake in “*pexing*” in a form that is different from that in which the children partake, however in their minds they still see the adults’ behaviour as a form of “*pexing*”. Some respondents alluded to the trends they follow with regards to which brands to “*pex,*” seen from the adults around them. Adults are said to even use their own children and the products they buy for them as a form of “*pexing*” within the adults’ reference group.



*“The adults really complain but hey also boast you know in their own way only the do not go drinking and destroying things but they do it but at the same time they want to complain about us and tell us this thing is wrong but if you see them there at the stokvels they do the same things with their cars parked and they are also wearing their Abita and their DH shirts you know it’s all the same I think. It’s just parents and adults never want you do to what they are doing” (Respondent 6)*

*“You know “pexing” lets you know how our current lifestyle is now, you know adults have their own thing and we have now created our own and it’s our own way of showing what we are all about and how life is” (Respondent 5)*

*“even adults are doing it... they “pex” they just do not know it, well he gets home and he wears these expensive shoes and they get to pubs and they buy expensive beers... they do it with their cars, they will say why do not you put on new tyres and they boast in front of each other, they also “pex” with their kids and say my child wares a Carvela and yours wears a five hundred rand tekkie. The want to be seen as having a higher status” (Respondent 1)*

## **5.6. Conclusion**

The results of the research show that “*pexing*” has aspects that are very similar to those manifested in conspicuous consumption. In both “*pexing*” and conspicuous consumption consumers consume goods within a social context and these goods and services are intended to signal to reference groups the social standing of the consumer, and not anti-consumption. Furthermore, this consumption is linked to reputation and grading in terms of the consumer’s status. Consumers who partake in conspicuous consumption consume goods not only for their functional value but as a way of communicating to others a certain perception, including feasibility as a partner.

It should also be noted that there are aspects of “*pexing*” that are very different from conspicuous consumption. “*pexing*” involves the destruction of goods, which has not been noted in literature under any conspicuous consumption behaviour. “*pexing*” involves not only “*pexing*” with products and services but the use of people as commodities with which to “*pex*”. There is a much formalised way in which “*pexing*” is carried out, and this is through a rule set and a rating system. The consumption is evidence-based, so much so that there is focus on proving how expensive and how genuine products and services (that are conspicuously consumed) are.

The result also indicated that there is some alignment of “*pexing*” to anti-consumption, but as a secondary activity to “*pexing*.” In both phenomena there is rejection of certain products and brands and this is also driven by non-functional attributes of the product in order to convey a positive social

identity. The environmental factors that drive the respondents' anti-consumption were the price of the product or service; the country of origin; the accessibility of the product; the genuineness of the product; the brand name; and what is considered fashionable by socialising agents such as the respondents "*pexing*" crews.

Although there are similarities in some "*pexing*" to activities to anti-consumption, these two phenomena are not derived from the same ideology or premise, making them very different if analysed closely. There was, however, much evidence that suggests that some "*pexing*" activities are related to coping more than anti-consumption. In the case of "*pexing*," the social identity that the respondents aim to portray is one that communicates to observers that the respondents have money and can afford their lives and avoid perception of the opposite.

The results also indicate that there are a number of reasons these youngsters partake in "*pexing*". One is to indicate to others the affluent life one lives and how much money one has; another is that one is more (as a person) than others. Popularity and fame were other reasons given for participating in "*pexing*" particularly with peers. "*pexing*" is also practiced in order to entertain, entice and attract the opposite sex, and this reason was particularly evident with males. Other reasons why "*pexing*" takes place range from peer pressure and to its "cool" elements.

## 6. CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

### 6.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings in chapter five in line with the literatures in chapter two and the research questions that were agreed on in chapter three. The chapter will also confirm the existence or otherwise of links between the findings of the study and the literature. Research question one will be discussed under section 6.2, Research question two will be covered under section 6.3, and finally research questions three and four will be discussed under section 6.4, given the commonalities and overlap in findings.

There are a number of departure points for the discussion of the results in this chapter. The first is that “*pexing*” has not only elements of conspicuous consumption but also those that cannot categorically be classified as pure conspicuous consumption. There is an element of destruction that is not found in the conspicuous consumption that is inherent to “*pexing*”. Based on this, the chapter then provides insight into how this noted form of consumption can be classified and viewed. The second point of departure is that although there are “*pexing*” activities that are indicative of anti-consumption behaviour, the reduction or rejection in consumption is not driven by an ideology as literature suggests (Albinsson et al., 2010; Black & Cherrier, 2010; Cherrier, 2009; Moraes et al., 2010; Ozanne & Bellentine, 2010; Penalosa & Price, 2002; Rumbo, 2002; Shaw & Newholm, 2002)

The anti-consumption behaviour noted is a way of reinforcing the imagery that conspicuous consumption is meant to signal. The last departure point is that the study took place in postmodern times with the post-consumer. Postmodern theory suggests that consumption is a critical factor in determining lifestyles and cultures that individuals follow (Haanpää, 2007). It is to this end that postmodern theory will be used to gain insight into and understanding of the findings, then of the links or lack of links between them and the literature.

## **6.2. “Pexing” mimics conspicuous consumption but also has attributes that are distinct from it.**

On analysis of the data collected from the research it was found that “*pexing*” mimics conspicuous consumption but also has aspects that make it distinct from it. As discussed in chapter two, a number of scholars propose that conspicuous consumption impacts on individuals’ daily choices (O’Cass & McEwen, 2004) and this was confirmed by the study. It was found that “*pexing*” drives the consumption decision of the youths interviewed from the transportation they use to get around, the clothes they wear, the food they purchase and in some cases the partners with whom they associate themselves.

As discussed in chapter two, there are a number of definitions that are given to conspicuous consumption and on analysis of the constructs that make up conspicuous consumption there was clear alignment of these constructs to the activities involved in “*pexing*”. As Charles et al. (2009) suggest, consumption is a display of one’s wealth through the use of commodities (and

their non-functional attributes) to communicate a message in a social setting. This is how the youth in this study described “*pexing*” and the activities in which they were partaking.

However, there are aspects of “*pexing*” that the definition of conspicuous consumption does not cover, the most obvious being that of the use not only of commodities but also of people as commodities to indicate social standing. This will be covered in detail further in the chapter.

### **6.2.1. Orchestrated and systemic conspicuous consumption**

As Trigg (2001) argued, Veblen’s theory on consumption has a condition that for conspicuous consumption to occur there is requirement for a network to exist so that word will get around about a person’s degree of leisure and the objects that he/she possesses. “*pexing*” fulfils this requirement, albeit in a much more orchestrated manner. The supporting evidence that “*pexing*” is far more orchestrated lies in: 1) planning of events (dates, times and locations), wherein conspicuous consumption is at the centre of the event; 2) the existence of a system that governs what is consumed; 3) the existence of rules around the degree of consumption; 4) a points system used to judge the extent to which someone has successfully been conspicuously consumed; and 5) the existence of a quality assurance system to ensure integrity and quality of goods being consumed.

There is no other noted systemic orchestration of conspicuous consumption in the CCT literature reviewed in this study. This phenomenon makes “*pexing*” a very distinct form of conspicuous consumption. Furthermore, Van Kempen

(2003) cites that in developing countries consumers will use deceptive signalling, such as the use of counterfeit goods, to consume conspicuously when they cannot afford the products. However, in this study, the findings are contrary to this because of the very systematic quality assurance system in place amongst the “*pexing*” group. Counterfeit goods are frowned upon and detract from the identity that the consumer is trying to formulate and communicate through conspicuous consumption. The participants are very strict on this, even going to the extreme of leaving on price tags and investigating via shopping trips the originality of the item being consumed. This finding is in line with costly signalling theory that proposes that product features (such as counterfeit) that dilute the reliability of the consumption as a costly signal will limit or undermine the benefits the consumer hopes to gain from conspicuously consuming a product (Nellisen & Meijers, 2010).

In analysing the orchestrated nature of “*pexing*,” attention is turned to postmodernity to understand the noted pattern. It is said that postmodernity will result in gravitation away from individualism and towards social interactions and belonging, therefore resulting in the formation of social networks in which people come together homogeneously with consumption of brands and products at the centre of the gathering (Dholakia, Bagozzi & Klein 2004; Simmons, 2008). “*Pexing*” represents this gravitation, with the much orchestrated session of conspicuous consumption in which preference groups and peers gather to consume goods conspicuously.

This is further supported by other postmodern scholars, using the theory of deconcentration, in which there is formulation of urban spaces that are very

fragmented but organised, at the same time presenting the existence of many contradictions existing in harmony (Firat & Dholakia, 2006; Firat et al., 1995; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Goulding, 2003; Venkatesh, 1999). This means that there are in existence multiple consumption environments that allow for different consumption experiences. With the subjects of this study there is existence of one consumption environment, in which the subjects consume as does anyone else, but there is also the *Hyperreal* (Firat & Dholakia, 2006; Firat et al., 1995; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Goulding, 2003; Venkatesh, 1999) environment that they create as their reality through “*pexing*” that allows for certain identity formulation.

### **6.2.2. Destruction is at the centre of conspicuous consumption behaviour**

This very orchestrated and systematic approach to consumption may explain some of the other characteristics of “*pexing*” that are not noted in conspicuous consumption. “*pexing*” and conspicuous consumption are both about the display of wealth (Nellisen & Meijers, 2010; Shukla, 2011; Trigg, 2001), however “*pexing*” reinforces this notion through the destruction (tearing and burning) of products as part of the consumption ritual. Those who engage in “*pexing*” tend to destroy the very goods that they use to conspicuously consume. In other instances the goods are given away (such as clothing and cash) and do not contribute to future use of the product. The fact that the goods are not re-used means that a person will have to procure more in order to partake in “*pexing*” again. It is this very act of procuring again that re-



enforces to observers that the individual is in a good financial position, such that they can destroy an item and go out and get another one.

However, in some instances the individual does not have the means to acquire more goods. Other avenues available are through stealing and borrowing, so the very costly signal that was sent out by the participant is not necessarily genuine. This is consistent with costly signalling theory, where there are strategic costs related to the costly signal and these strategic costs are meant to ensure that the signal sent is perceived as honest (Bliege Bird & Smith, 2005, Cronk, 2005, Griskevicius, 2007), and the act of destruction of items is meant to convey this. What is also in alignment with signalling theory is that the cost of the signal is not necessarily equivalent to the honesty behind it (Cronk, 2005), which has been found to be the case in this study, where participants do use costly signals that they cannot afford in order to indicated good financial standing when the true reality is that they cannot afford to engage in the consumption.

Given that the youth who participated in this study come from low income families with limited financial resources, this vandalistic principle is counter-intuitive with regards to trying to escape poverty. By the respondents' own admission, they realise that this act breeds more poverty. However, many are unwilling to stop partaking in this activity as it is something that is good for them in the present moment, and fulfils their current needs and reality. This contradiction between poverty and the vandalistic act will be discussed later in the chapter.

There is no mention of this destruction related to conspicuous consumption in the CCT literature reviewed, but rather it appears to be unique to “*pexing*” as a form of consumption. However, there is mention of a similar type of phenomenon, related not to CCT but to anthropology. Researchers came across Northwest native American tribes who would publically burn, destroy or give away their possessions in a competitive act of pot latching, as a way of indicating status and power. (Bradley, 1982, Roth, 2002, Snyder, 1975, Rosman & Rubel, 1972). In explaining this behaviour, anthropologists turn to Veblen’s theory of conspicuous consumption (Roth, 2002, Rosman & Rubel, 1972).

The similarities between these two phenomena are the orchestrated nature and the ritual of destruction of the products and items consumed. In both phenomena there is an element of rivalry and competition amongst participants, which ranges from insults and provocation to boasting. The distinction between these two phenomena are the reasons for the engaging in the acts of conspicuous consumption.

Given the above discussion, the finding that “*pexing*” is a form of consumption, and the distinction in that destruction as central to the consumption activity, this study proposes the formulation of a term that classifies “*pexing*” as a very distinct form of conspicuous consumption. The destruction is key to this form of consumption as it reinforces the costly signal being sent, reinforcing the identity being formulated and communicated, and is pivotal to the consumption pattern or activity. The second destruction

comes in the form of the socio-economic effects that “*pexing*” has on its participants: the crime; the disturbance in education; the lack of a vision of a grand future that they need to start planning for and considering now in their youths; the disregard for their circumstances; the suicide that was noted by one of the respondents as a result of “*pexing*”. The term that is proposed for the classification of the phenomenon under study (“*pexing*”) is “*Destructive Conspicuous Consumption*” and will be discussed in detail at the conclusion of this chapter when discussion on each research questions are integrated.

### **6.2.3. The commodification of people and their use in conspicuous consumption**

“*Pexing*” not only takes consumption out of the realm of products and services but also involves the view of people as disposable commodities that can be conspicuously consumed. Youths see their partners as a commodity that can be used to signal their status and also use the display and association with these partners as a way of eliciting sexual interest from onlookers.

This is what scholars refer to as sexual signalling (Bliege Bird & Smith, 2005; Cronk, 2005; Griskevicius, 2007; Sundie et al., 2011) as discussed in chapter two, where men conspicuously consume in order to elicit interest from the opposite sex, for short-term relationships that will provide economic benefit for the woman. Where this is common in males the study also found it to be true of the study. However, it should be noted that the sample was not balanced with regards to male and female representation.

Of particular interest in this study is the use of females as commodities (in a conspicuous way) during consumption sessions. The females used look a particular way, which is interpreted as attractive by the males, who then lavish money on them and in so doing this becomes a signal to other females that they have the ability to attract such a female and that they also can afford to take care of her. This sends out a signal to other female onlookers of the potential of the male as a provider and a sexual partner. This use of women as commodities to signal to other women does not receive coverage in the existing literature on costly signalling or sexual signalling.

The use of people as commodities to be conspicuously consumed is also consistent with the post-consumer and postmodernity as covered in literature. The use of objects in an image-like or symbolic manner, and the objectification of human beings, is typical of postmodernism (Firat & Dholakia, 2006). There is a dilution of the distinction between object and subject and in some instances the subject becomes the object, and humans as subjects are handled as objects, which is the case in this study with the treatment of females as commodities to be conspicuously consumed by the males and used as objects in the process of sexual signalling.

#### **6.2.4. The decision to conspicuously consume takes place consciously**

Veblen suggests that the decision to conspicuously consume takes place at an unconscious level, and what is manifested consciously is the need to measure up to a reference group (Trigg 2001). "*Pexing*," on the other hand,

seems to be very staged and pursued actively with an individual's explicit and conscious knowledge of what they are partaking in. As discussed above, the conspicuous consumption displayed by the group under study is very systematic (rules and guidelines), orchestrated (a calendar of session for "*pexing*") and planned (dates, times and locations) by participants. There is a network created with the sole purpose of creating a platform or a stage upon which individuals can conspicuously consume. From this it can be concluded that the decision to conspicuously consume in "*pexing*" is made with the knowledge and the intention of participants, and therefore is done consciously. Findings in this study are different from a study conducted in low income consumers in Turkey, where the researchers claim they found in the group that consumers were unaware of their conspicuous consumption (Atik & Sahin, 2011).

However, with all of the above noted it is prudent to note that the findings in this study do not necessarily oppose or support Veblen's theory or those found in the Turkey study. The reason for this view is that as with Veblen's critiques it is very difficult to prove empirically at which level of the psyche the decision to conspicuously consume takes place (Trigg, 2001). The conclusion of the findings of this study is that the decision is pre-meditated and coordinated by the participants, and there is thought behind it. As with Veblen's critiques and defenders, the view presented in this study is merely insight and cannot be taken as irrefutable. The conclusion here is that this area requires a well selected empirical approach when researching.

### **6.3. “Pexing” does not mimic Anti-consumption however there are anti-consumption behaviours present.**

It has emerged from the study that there are “*pexing*” activities that are indicative of anti-consumption behaviour, the first form of which noted is related to not consuming certain products as a way of reinforcing positive identity formulation. The second form of behaviour noted arises by virtue of procuring something and then destroying it so that is not consumed again. Here there is an element of anti-consumption and this is also meant to reinforce the costly signal that is sent via “*pexing*” in terms of social standing. However, on further analysis of the findings there is a key point of difference between anti-consumption, as noted in other consumption activities such as *green consumption* or *boycotting* and “*pexing*”.

The driver for the anti-consumption in this study is not reduction or rejection in consumption driven by an ideology, as some literature suggests. The anti-consumption behaviour noted is a way of reinforcing the imagery that conspicuous consumption is meant to communicate, i.e., that of good financial standing, higher status and a position of power. This is more consistent with conspicuous consumption than it is with anti-consumption.

The behaviour may appear to be anti-consumption in nature; however the drivers for it appear to be embedded in reinforcing conspicuous consumption behaviour and aligning of consumption of products that will reinforce conspicuous consumption. The rejection of consumption of some products

and brands is related to amplification of the costly signal that the consumers are sending to onlookers. This will be discussed in the next section.

### **6.3.1. Anti-Consumption behaviour in “*pexing*” is not driven by ideology but by the need to reinforce the costly signal**

It has emerged from the study that there are “*pexing*” activities that are indicative of anti-consumption behaviour. The drivers for anti-consumption are said to rest with some ideology: political (Moraes, 2010); withstanding of culture (Albinsson et al., 2010; Cherrier, 2009; Penalosa & Price, 2002); value system (Black & Cherrier, 2010; Moraes et al., 2010; Ozanne & Bellentine, 2010; Shaw & Newholm, 2002). In “*pexing*” the driver for the noted reduction or rejection in consumption of certain products and services is not driven by an ideology as literature suggests. The anti-consumption behaviour noted is driven by the need to reinforce the identity that conspicuous consumption is meant to communicate and aversion from the formulation of a negative stereotype.

The theory that better explains and gives insight into the noted anti-consumption behaviour within “*pexing*” is one conceptualised by Hogg (2009) in his analysis of the link between symbolic consumption (in the case “*pexing*”) and anti-consumption. At this conceptual level the basis for a consumer decision to reduce or reject consumption is informed by self-identity formulation via non-functional attributes of a product or service that can result either in a positive or negative self-identity (Hogg, 2009). In the case of

“*pexing*,” the participants aim for formulation of a self-identity that reinforces the identity that conspicuous consumption gives them, notably of having money, status and power.

Therefore, the decision not to consume a product for a participant is assessed against the potential identity of the participant that will be perceived by his or her reference group (Hogg, 2009). This resultant identity communicated via the consumption or lack thereof of a product translates into acceptance or rejection by a social group. Hogg (2009) further alludes to the articulation of the anti-consumption behaviour that can range from aversion to abandonment with aversion and avoidance, seen as a response given by consumers who are determined to diverge from association with negative stereotypical images (in the case of “*pexing*” poverty), and gravitate toward an identity that is preferred by their reference group.

The findings of the study are aligned to this aversion and avoidance theory by Hogg (2009), and the respondents indicated very assertively that they would not consume certain products (such as cheaper or local products) in order to avoid the humiliation that would result from being perceived as poor or not having the means to buy expensive products. Other stereotypes that respondents were averse to being seen as uncool, powerless or too different from peers.



### **6.3.2. Environmental factors that inform anti-consumption behaviour in “*pexing*”**

As noted in chapter two, Hogg et al. (2009) suggest a very strong link and relationship between status consumption (in this case “*pexing*”) and anti-consumption. The relationship between the two phenomena is driven by social, individual and marketing environments (Hogg et al., 2009). In this study the main environmental factors that drive anti-consumption were consistent with the literature.

From a marketing environment perspective, product pricing, branding of the product, and country of origin of the brand emerged strongly. The participants rejected consumption of some local brands as they were seen to be cheaper, “uncool” and inferior, but preferred the consumption of “overseas” brands. This is clearly indicated in the brand names consumed, the majority of which were international (Figure 4). Price was also a factor in these participants rejecting consumption. Cheaper products do not contribute to the formulation of a positive self-identity but can rather result in the opposite, and to avoid feeling humiliated by this the respondents said they would therefore make it a point not to consume products that were cheaper, thus reinforcing the costly signal they were sending to the crowd. The selection of a higher priced product as a way of reinforcing their costly signal and making it believable to the observer is in line with findings in literature (Bliege Bird & Smith, 2005; Cronk, 2005; Griskevicius, 2007).

Anti-consumption noted in “*pexing*” has social environmental factors, such as the influence of some socialising agents on some of the noted anti-consumption behaviour. Socialising agents are said to have an influence on the values and views that individuals may have about products and services (Hogg et al., 2009). The socialising agents in “*pexing*” are the crews and onlookers involved in “*pexing*” sessions, and these socialising agents dictate what is fashionable and “cool.” This view is then considered by the participants in their consumption decisions. There were many instances when the participants indicated that they would never consume something as this would be humiliating within their reference groups.

The other social environmental factor was found to be accessibility to the product. Participants rationalised what they accepted to consume or reject on the basis of accessibility. If the product was easily accessible (sometimes from an affordability point of view) to all then the participants rejected consumption of this product as this took away that distinction the consumption of the product would give them. To try and understand this, further attention is turned to literature in which the post-consumer consumes products and services not with the accepted functional aspects in mind (Dinu et al., 2010) but what the consumer dictates is the meaning of the product (Simmons, 2008), such as the ability of these products and services to create or indicate social relationships, and in so doing not conform to any single state (Simmons, 2008), but derive distinction from others (Haanpää, 2007).

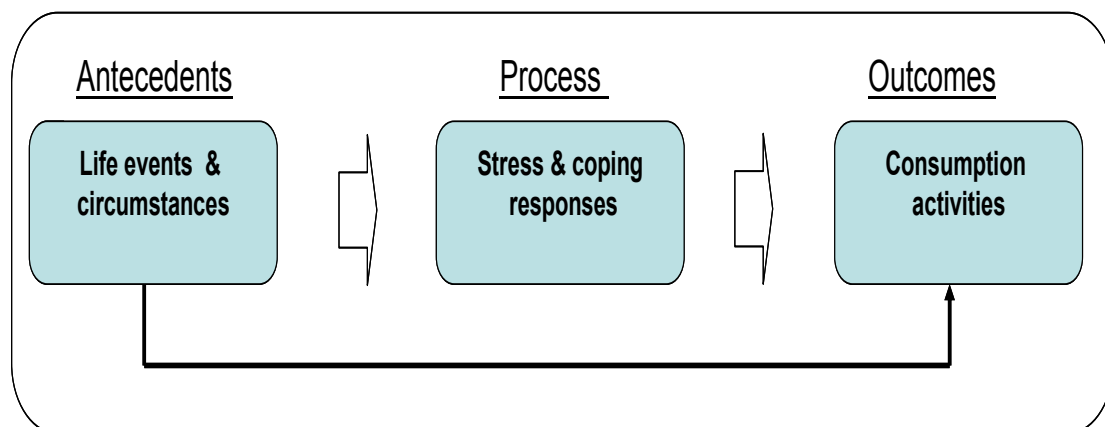
The individual environment entails identity formulation that in some instances is linked to childhood memories a consumer may have, which can trigger a reaction of consumption or rejection of consumption of certain brands and products (Hogg et al., 2009). The individual environmental factors identified in this study are consistent with the literature. One such individual environmental factor is portrayal of a certain identity and rejection of another via the products that a person decides to consume or not consume (Hogg et al., 2009). The respondents rejected the consumption of products that communicated a perception about them that they considered negative (such as being poor or not able to afford something).

#### **6.4. “Pexing” is primarily practiced as a coping mechanism and life events and circumstances trigger this consumption.**

In chapter five there were a number of commonalities between the findings for research questions three and four. The reason for this may be that research question three is focused on why “*pexing*” is practised and from the findings it was clear that the reasons were driven by some environmental factors, while research question four focused on the role the environment has on “*pexing*”. Findings on research question four reinforce or give insight into the environment the subjects of the study find themselves as influencing their consumption activities, such as those seen in “*pexing*”. This is consistent with Vu Nguyen (2009) on the role life events and circumstances have on individuals’ consumption activities.

In answering research questions three and four, as to why “*pexing*” is practiced and the role of the environment in it, attention is turned to the Conceptual Life Course Model (CLC) (Figure 12), introduced in chapter two as a framework that can be used in consumption research to understand materialistic attitudes and consumption activities (Vu Nguyen et al., 2009). The Model shows a link between circumstances (antecedents) that are experienced by an individual during the course of his or her life, the processes (coping mechanism) that are activated by these events, and the subsequent outcomes when the individual consumes.

**Figure 12:** The Conceptual Life Course Model



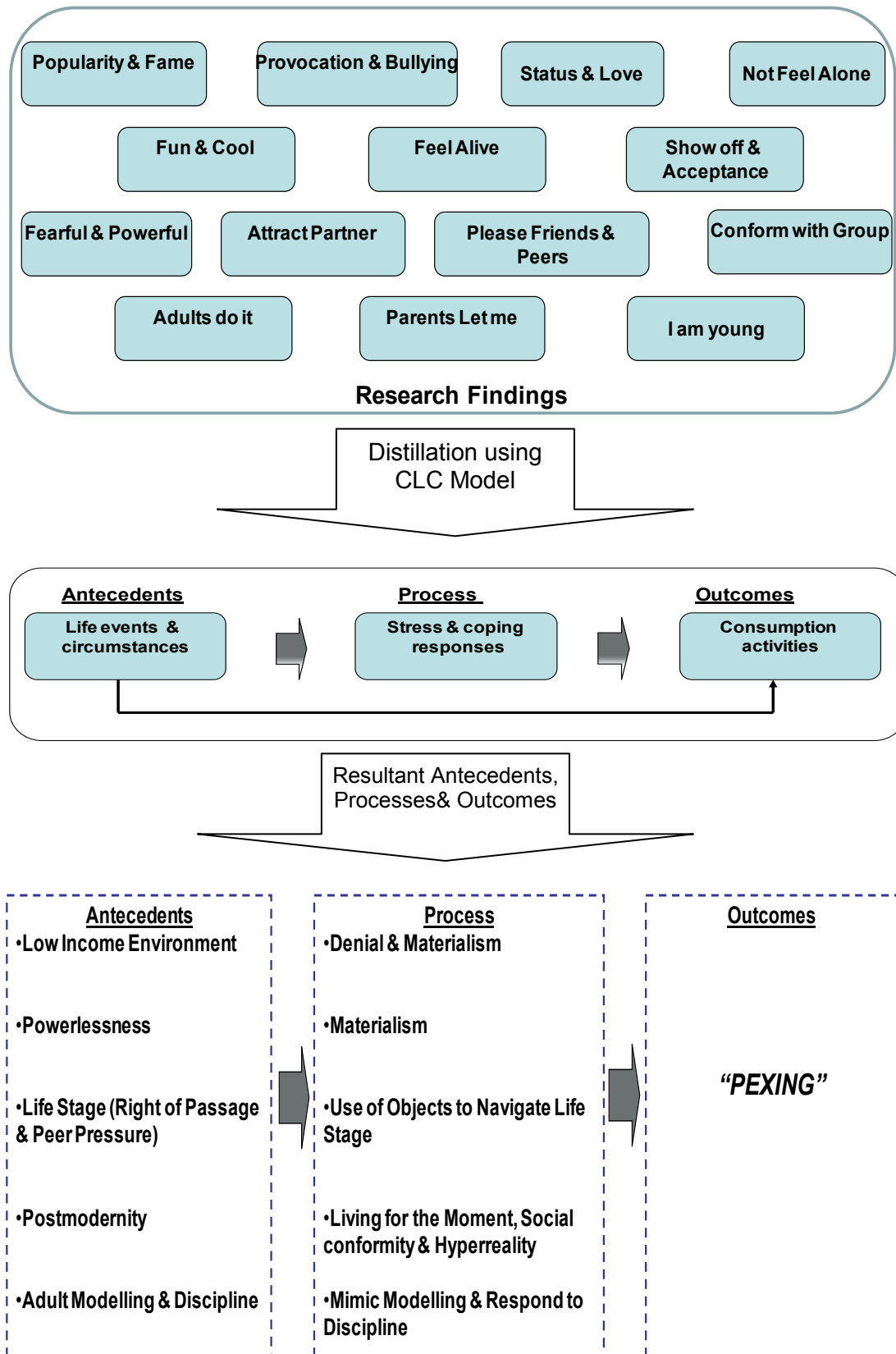
*Note.* Adapted from “Effects of family and socialisation on materialism: A life course study in Thailand”, by H.Vu Nguyen, G.P. Moschis, and R. Shannon, 2009, *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 33, p. 487

There were a number of reasons (and in some cases indicated as an emotion) given by respondents in this study as to why they and others practiced “*pexing*” (Figure 13). In summary “*pexing*” is primarily practiced as a coping strategy to deal with stressors (life events) or antecedents that the

youth in this study have experienced or were currently experiencing. In order to aid the analysis and gain deeper insight into why “*pexing*” is practiced, reasons will be discussed using the CLC Model under the heading of the life event or circumstance as recommended by Vu Nguyen (2009).

When the model is superimposed on the findings of this study as a way of distilling the main reasons “*pexing*” is practiced and the role of the environment in “*pexing*,” five main reasons (which can be regarded as antecedents; life events and the environment) arise: low income environments; powerlessness; life stage; and postmodernity (Figure 13). The distillation of findings into insight is depicted in Figure 13.

Figure 13: Distillation of “pexing” Antecedents using the CLC Model



#### **6.4.1. Antecedents (Life Events and Circumstances) that drive “pexing”**

A number of antecedents were found in the life events and circumstance that drive “pexing.” These are discussed in this section.

##### **6.4.1.1. Low income environment**

As stated in literature, youth from low income families turn to materialism to indicate status (Hamilton & Catterall, 2005, Isakson & Roper, 2008, Pedrozo, 2010). This was the case in this study, where youth from low income families partook in “pexing” as a way of dealing with a financially non-enabling environment. It is their way of “feeling like they are somebody” and gaining power. Furthermore, literature indicates that this need for status is so strong that low income consumers will forego basic needs (food and education) for wasteful spending on luxury goods such as clothes (Charles et al., 2009).

Although some of the individuals who “Pex” come from low income families they find other means to generate resources such as part-time jobs and engagement in criminal activities. There is a similar view in literature, however the point of difference is that the creative ways of generating resources that have been documented are deceptive signalling, such as the procurement of counterfeit good (Isaksen & Roper, 2008, Van Kempen, 2003). The respondents in this study frowned upon the use of counterfeit goods and felt so strongly about this that they had put in place a system that ensured integrity of goods consumed. Although the participants did not admit to this circumstance (low income) explicitly, it was implied in some of their

discussions, backgrounds and comments. Many of the youths indicated that poverty was a disincentive to “Pex,” however this did not deter their actions, and they still “pexed”. There appears to be much denial with regards to the circumstances in which they find themselves.

This is in support of the theory on denial as a coping mechanism. Denial involves focusing on the “here and now” rather than the bigger picture (Atik & Sahin, 2011; Isakson & Roper, 2008) and this came out consistently in the findings of this study in which participants refer to the fact that they realise the consequences of their wasteful spending (given their low income background). However, they will worry about this at a later stage in their life when they are older. This is also consistent with postmodernism, which will be discussed later in the chapter as a separate antecedent.

It is said that in some instances individuals experience stressors within a social context and may cope with them in a collaborative fashion with other individuals (Hamilton & Catterall, 2005). This is aligned to findings in this study that different crews collaborate and help individuals within the groups who cannot afford to buy goods to “Pex” with. There is a collection of clothes and money for the member who cannot afford these items and this is done in the spirit of camaraderie and to ensure that the status of the crew as a whole is maintained.

The higher propensity to consume goods for display in low-income youth is said to be driven by some key traits: low self-esteem; short sightedness and



living for the moment mind-set; excessive advertising targeted at these young people and their need to fit in with peers (Isaksen & Roper, 2008). The one factor that drove youth in this study to “Pex” was peer pressure from friends and reference groups. This will be discussed under „life stage’ as an antecedent.

Lastly, a low income environment may result in the exclusion of poor youth from partaking in symbolic consumption and this exclusion may have negative and psychological impact on these youths (Isaksen & Roper, 2008; Pedrozo, 2011). This was also noted in this study, where one of the respondents cited a story of a youth whose family could not afford shoes for a “*pexing*” session and who resorted to suicide. Other negative psychological effects found included resorting to alcohol abuse in order to deal with lack of financial resources, disturbances at school due to preoccupation with “*pexing*” and lower concentration due to the effects of saving lunch money and not eating at school.

#### **6.4.1.2. Powerlessness**

Many respondents in this study indicated that the reason they practiced “*pexing*” was to feel powerful and feared. This finding is in line with literature on conspicuous consumption and the black population, although it takes different forms such as relative deprivation, racism and oppression and powerlessness (Chipp et al., 2011; Lamont & Molnar, 2001; Mukherjee, 2006; Posel, 2010; Rucker & Galinsky, 2009). If consumers feel powerless (not having the ability to be masters of their own life), they look to the conspicuous consumption of goods in order to display status to others around them

(Rucker & Galinsky, 2009), to relinquish their power (Lamont & Molnar, 2001), and associate consumption with freedom (Posel, 2010).

Two studies that have been carried out on conspicuous consumption and the black population indicated racial prejudice and injustice as the trigger or stressor that resulted in the noted consumption behaviour, as with apartheid in South Africa (Chipp et al., 2011; Posel, 2010) and the Civil Rights Movement in America (Lamont & Molnar, 2001). Of interest in this study was that the life event that resulted in youths feeling powerless and therefore using “*pexing*” as a coping mechanism was not racial prejudice but social prejudice from their reference groups and peers. Respondents referred to provocation by other youths with regards to their character in a bullying manner. Respondents also referred to wanting to have a sense of belonging; wanting to be like their friends; and being accepted by their reference groups. This is in line with other conspicuous consumption findings related to marketers trying to sell to the black population the idea that collective identity links a sense of belonging within society to conspicuous consumption (Lamont & Molnar, 2001).

#### **6.4.1.3. Life stage**

The exit from one life stage to another presents a time of turmoil and confusion for young people, such as the transition from childhood to adulthood (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004). The confusion that this life stage brings is on issues of identity (Isaksen & Roper, 2008; Pedrozo, 2011; Piacentini & Mailer, 2004), and fashion and music are used for identity formulation

(Pedrozo, 2011), which tend to be influenced by peers (Isaksen & Roper, 2008). These very items are pointed in creating youths' conspicuous consumption (Shukla, 2008).

The young people in this study (age range 14 to 18, and who are in transition to adulthood) indicated identity formulation as the reason for practising "*pexing*". There was much reference to "*showing others who you are*", "*how much they are*" and "*what they are about*," and portraying a certain identity that communicates something to their peers and reference groups. The other life stage related theme that was consistent was that of peer pressure and wanting to please friends, and so what their friends were doing was the driver for their consumption behaviour. This is consistent with Isaksen and Roper's (2008) findings. Reference groups, friends and peers in this study acted as socialising agents to the youths who partook in "*pexing*". The socialising agents influence the values and perceptions that an individual has about a product or service (Hogg et al., 2009), as they determine what is "cool" and what is not.

The way that young people in this study formulated identity was through the consumption of brands and therefore communication of whom they are to their reference groups. Young people used objects (such as clothes and brands) in navigating life transitions (Isaksen & Roper, 2008), and this is seen as a rite of passage (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004) which is an element that leads to symbolic purchasing in consumer behaviour (Pedrozo, 2011) and consumption of brands (Isaksen & Roper, 2008). The symbolic purchasing

and consumption is used as a form of communication that relies on the existence of a network in which common language, shared knowledge and understanding exist within a social group (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004).

Also in relation to life stage as an antecedent and the process of formulation of identity through the consumption of products, youth in this study used “*pexing*” as a way of communicating to members of the opposite sex their eligibility as partners, and this is consistent with sexual signalling theory. Individuals use the consumption of expensive products as a way of attracting partners and it is said sexual signalling differs between men and women (Griskevicius et al., 2007, Smith & Bliege Bird, 2005, Sundie et al., 2011), however, this study had an unbalanced sample with regards to gender and therefore this was difficult to determine.

With regards to life stage, another transition that had an impact as an antecedent in “*pexing*” is the transition to adulthood. This was consistently mentioned by the respondents when they indicated that one of the reasons they would consider not partaking in “*pexing*” was getting older. Adults are viewed as having access to money that youth do not have and this is frowned upon if one is to participate in “*pexing*”. The rationale for this is that the adult has an easy way of accessing money through a permanent steady job, whereas youth do not and somehow this dampens the perception participants would have of an adult who participates at one of the “*pexing*” sessions. The respondents did not however indicate the age at which one would be considered an adult, but only indicated the presence or absence of permanent

employment. The conclusion from this study is that different life transitions trigger different types of consumption activities.

#### **6.4.1.4. Postmodernity**

The conspicuous consumption behaviour noted in “*pexing*” is consistent with the postmodern social structure depicted by Chaudhuri and Majumdar’s framework (2006), in which the primary objectives of consumption are image and experience, and this consumption is driven by self-identity (Table 18). Postmodernity as a circumstance that “*pexers*” find themselves in is dubbed as:

- I. Hyperreality (Brown, 1994, Firat & Dholakia, 2006, Firat & Venkatesh, 1995, Venkatesh, 1999, Firat et al., 1995), such as the reality (a form of fantasy) created through “*pexing*” sessions;
- II. Objectification (Firat & Dholakia, 2006), seen in the use of people as commodities for costly signalling;
- III. Plurality, which is about multiple identities such as the true identity of being poor but taking up a persona of wealth when “*pexing*” (Firat & Dholakia, 2006).

There are two perspectives in literature with regards to the post-consumer: the post-consumer as individualistic and aiming for uniqueness via conspicuous consumption (Firat & Dholakia, 2006; Haanpää, 2007) and the post-consumer as gravitating towards social interaction and being part of a collective or network through the consumption of brands and products

(Dholakia, Bagozzi & Klein 2004; Simmons, 2008). However, in this study (true to the nature of postmodernism), the “*Pexers*” as post-consumers aim for both individualism and also to be part of a collective: paradoxical juxtapositions of opposites or schizophrenic modes (Brown, 1994; Firat & Dholakia, 2006; Goulding, 2003; Venkatesh, 1999).

**Table 18:** A Structural Analysis of Conspicuous Consumption Behaviour

Social Structure	Primary objectives of consumption	Drivers of behaviour	Consumers	Principal behaviour dimensions
Precapitalist -Feudal	Slaves, Women, Food	Military and Political Powers	Nobility	Pure Ostentation
Modern-Capitalist	Very Expensive Products e.g. Diamonds	Social Power and Status	Nobility and Upper-middle Class	Ostentation, Signalling and Uniqueness
Post-Modern	Image and Experience	Self-expression and Self-Image	Middle-class and the “Masses”	Uniqueness and Social Conformation

*Note.* Sourced from “Of Diamonds and Desires: Understanding Conspicuous Consumption from a Contemporary Marketing Perspective”, by H.R. Chaudhuri, and S. Majumdar, 2005, *Academy of Marketing Science Review*, 11, p. 3.

They aim for uniqueness and individuality through their efforts to “*show others how much more they are*” and that they are of a better social standing than others and at the same time through engagement in a collective social movement such as “*pexing*” and being part of a crew aims for the opposite which is acceptance and social conformity. This view of the “*Pexers*” as both versions of the post-consumer are consistent with Chaudhuri and Majumdar’s (2006) structural analysis of consumption. Another finding that underscores the schizophrenic modes in which these youths find themselves is one in

which a respondent refers to “*pexing*” as „good’ (making him feel powerful and accepted) and „bad’ (poverty and parents finding themselves in debt as a result of providing the financial resources that enable the youth to partake in “*pexing*”)

Firat and Dholakia (2006) posit that the post-consumer is engaged by the experiential aspects of a product and not so much the material aspects. It is not what the material aspect can deliver in terms of the “grand future” but rather the moment and experience of the activity in the current moment (Firat & Dholakia, 2006). Youth in this study indicate that they are more concerned with the experience that is offered by “*pexing*” and the fact that they are “alive” and want to live in that moment, have fun and not worry about the consequences of their consumption, especially given that some are from a low income background. Youth admitted that for as long as “*pexing*” continues poverty will not end and there will be a continuation of the cycle of poverty. The youths indicated that they would consider stopping (given the consequences) at a later stage in their lives, when they are older.

#### **6.4.1.5. Adults as Behaviour Modellers and Enablers**

The study found that one of the drivers for these youths engaging in “*pexing*” is the influence that adults have on them with regards to their consumption activities. An insert from one of the respondents captures this finding clearly:

*“The adults really complain but they also boast you know in their own way only they do not go drinking and destroying things but they do it but at the same time they want to complain about us and tell us this thing is wrong but if you see them there at the stokvels they do the same things with their cars parked and they are also wearing their Abita and their DH shirts you know it is all the same I think. Its just parents and adults never want you do to what they are doing” (Respondent 6)*

*“even adults are doing it... they “Pex” they just do not know it, well he gets home and he wears these expensive shoes and they get to pubs and they buy expensive beers... they do it with their cars, they will say why do you not put on new tyres and they boast in front of each other, they also “Pex” with their kids and say my child wares a Carvel and yours wears a five hundred rand tekkie. The want to be seen as having a higher status” (Respondent 1)*

The first point of influence comes in the form of modelling, where young people observe the consumption patterns of adults and mimic elements such as brands they consume. There are parents who promote this behaviour in children, who view this as form of participation by parents in “*pexing*”, not to the same degree that youth participate in it but they still consider it as “*pexing*.”

From the findings it appears that there is a role that parental discipline plays in the propensity of their children to “*pex*,” however it does not always restrict this behaviour as in some instances it is kept secret from parents. However, manipulation of parents through guilt from not responding to their children’s



needs results in parents continuing to provide resources that allow their children to “Pex,” even when they know or suspect that their children are involved in the behaviour. This was found to be a major enabler in some cases, whereas in other it was found that even with parental refusal to provide financial resources towards this behaviour the youth found other creative means to access this, for example borrowing within crews, part time employment and stealing.

In illustrating the role adults play in youth partaking in “pexing,” one respondent’s view suffices:

*“you know this “pex” thing will never end; the crews are getting younger and younger and for as long as adults do this thing it will never stop. They set the tone for us and we set the tone for the younger ones and it goes on like that”*  
(Respondent 2)

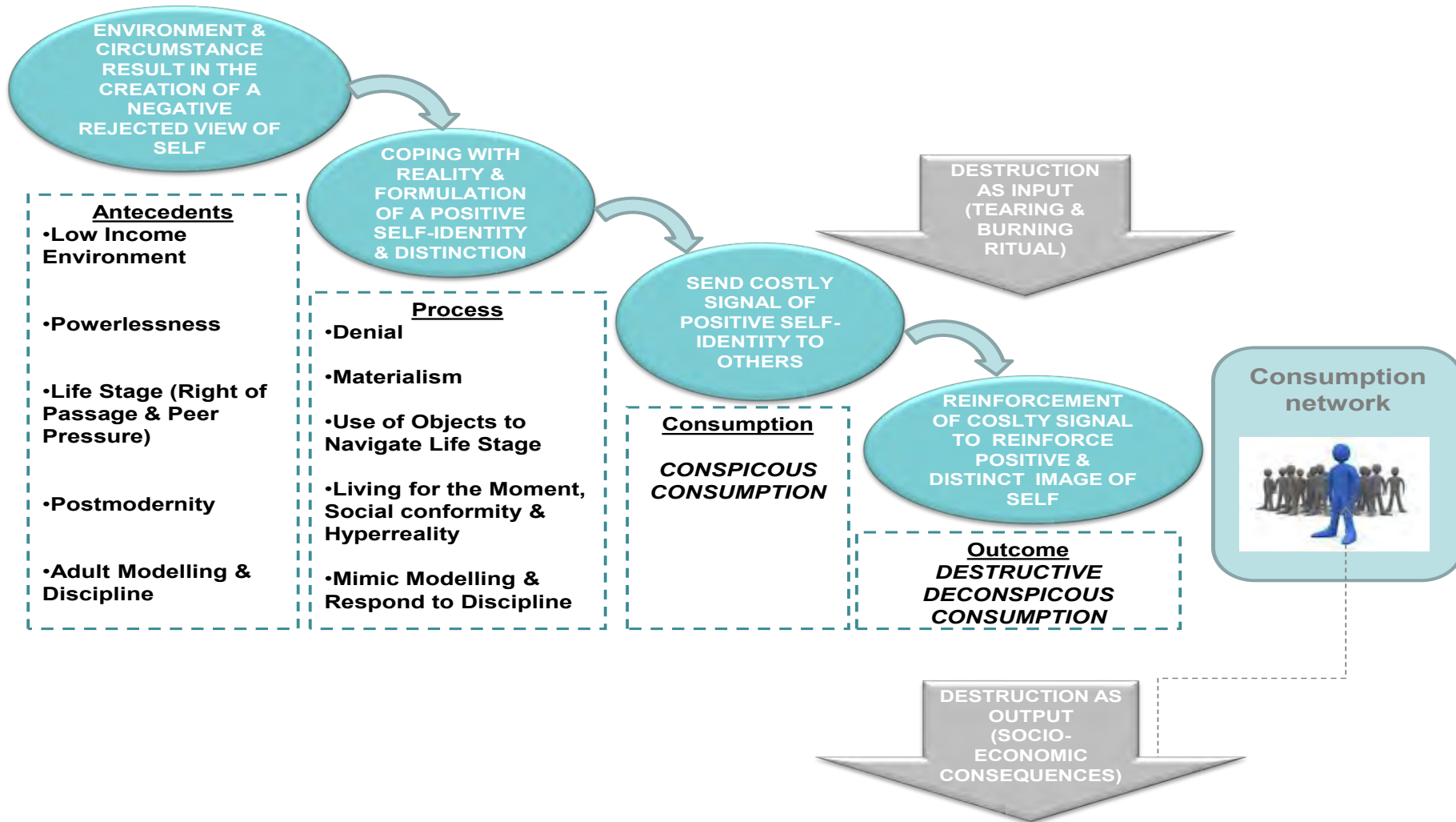
## **6.5. Concluding Remarks**

The aim of this chapter was to discuss the findings of the study in relation to the literature covered in chapter two and to give insight into any differences or similarities that exist. The discussion clearly indicated that “pexing” does mimic conspicuous consumption but also has attributes that are distinct to it such as the destruction that is central to the act and the use of people as objects to be consumed. Anti – consumption was found not to mimic “pexing” as such but that there are anti-consumption behaviours noted in “pexing” and these behaviours are not driven by ideology as is the case in anti-consumption but it the behaviours are driven by the need to reinforce the

costly signal that is sent via the conspicuous consumption act. The discussion also captured the reasons and environmental factors and reasons why “*pexing*” is practices and this was done through the use of the CLC model

With all of the above considered the study proposed a term for the classification of the type of conspicuous consumption that was noted in this study and proposes a framework for it (Figure 7). The framework posits that consumers are exposed to antecedents and environments that contribute to a view that they have about their identity and this view is negative. In dealing with the reality presented by the antecedents the consumer then uses a number of coping mechanisms (processes) to formulate a positive view of themselves, which is distinct to others within their consumption network. This view is communicated via costly signals through conspicuous consumption to a consumption network (reference group) and as a way to reinforce this signal the consumer will use some anti-consumption behaviours (such as avoidance of some brands and products) and the act of destruction (burning and tearing) so that the final identity is positive and distinct in the consumer’s and consumption network’s eyes. The other aspect of destruction comes in from the socio-economic consequences of such consumption such as poverty and crime which are destructive to the consumer.

Figure 14: Framework for Destructive Conspicuous Consumption



## **7. CHAPTER7: CONCLUSION**

### **7.1. Introduction**

“*Pexing*” has emerged in black youth as a very controversial and distinct conspicuous consumption pattern that is not academically well understood by marketers or academics, and has generated public interest and a call of understanding (Cutting Edge “*Izikhothane*”, 2011, *Mail & Guardian*, 2011, *Kaya FM*, 2011). Furthermore, CCT scholars have called for more conspicuous consumption research in emerging markets and of the black population in order to contribute to the body of literature (Atik & Sahin, 2011, Chaudhuri & Madjumdar, 2006, Chipp et al., 2011, Hamilton & Catterall, 2005; Shukla 2010) .Lastly, it was established that there was no other reporting in literature on this phenomenon and, given its distinction, it was vital to enrich the existing literature of CCT with insight on this consumption pattern. It is to this end that this study aimed to explore and understand this phenomenon in black youth.

This chapter will review whether the objectives and aims stated in chapter one have been met by the study and summarise the findings in relation to the research questions proposed in chapter three and in light of existing literature. Contributions of the findings (as depicted in the motivation of the study) will also be captured. The chapter will conclude with the implications for the findings of the research and its limitations and recommendation with regards to future research that can contribute to richer and meaningful insights into the subject matter as identified by the researcher.

## **7.2. Findings Summary and Conclusion**

The objectives of the study were met and all research questions answered. The research revealed that “*pexing*” has aspects of conspicuous consumption but also aspects that are distinct to it. “*pexing*” is orchestrated and systemic in nature and it is due to this system and level of orchestration that the study has concluded that the decision to “*pex*”, unlike other forms of conspicuous consumption, is carried out with the knowledge of the participant. Furthermore, “*pexing*” involves not only the use of products and service in the consumption activity but also the treatment of people (in this case girls) as commodities who can be used as part of the consumption activity. The term destructive conspicuous consumption was coined in order to capture the type of conspicuous consumption researched in this study, and a type of consumption that shares a similar trait that has been studied by anthropologists. The overlap in these two phenomena is orchestration; destruction and conspicuous consumption.

In engaging in “*pexing*,” participants display anti-consumption. The first anti-consumption behaviour is avoiding consumption of certain products in order to reinforce positive identity formulation. The second comes about by virtue of procuring a product and then destroying it (therefore not consuming it) as a way to underscore the costly signal that was sent by consumption of this product. Lastly, on deeper analysis and with insight from existing anti-consumption literature, the study established that these anti-consumption behaviours are not driven by factors typical of anti-consumption activities, such as ideology. Once again was done as a way to emphasise the costly

signal sent by not consuming these products due to them being cheaper; being associated with certain branding, their country of origin, and their accessibility to other consumers.

Regarding the question of why “*pexing*” is practiced, and the role of the environment on this noted behaviour, it was established, through a distillation process using the CLC model, that there are antecedents (life events and circumstances) that trigger processes (coping mechanisms) that result in the manifested consumption activities. The antecedents (reasons) were found to be the low income environment some of the participants found themselves in; the life stage that they were currently in; the social structure that they were exposed to; and the influence of adults via consumption behaviour modelling; and the enabling environment that the adults create.

Other findings of this study included the negative impact that “*pexing*” has on its participants and their lives. The one is the involvement of the participating youth in crime; physical self-harm such as suicide; the suffering of their education as a result of lack of focus at school; bullying, insulting and provocation of other youngsters; and the indebtedness of their parents as a result of providing resources to engage in this consumption activity.

### **7.3. Recommendations**

As noted in chapter one, the findings of this study will allow for understanding of the “*pexing*” phenomenon better from an empirical point of view and this information can then be used by policymakers and practitioners. The finding

will help government in tackling this phenomenon as a socio-economic issue and for marketers the findings offer understanding of the black youth as a consumer segment and the perception of their products.

### **7.3.1. Policy Makers**

The findings of this study brings to the fore a very relevant and growing phenomenon amongst black South African youths, that brings with it many socio-economic and psychological issues of which government, parents and teachers need to be aware. Government needs to conduct its own study into the effects (socio-economic) of this behaviour and focus on the spatial patterns of this phenomenon throughout the country. Immediate action that is required that may dampen or contain this phenomenon is on education (to promote self-esteem and self-worth through other means); public policy and parental guidance; discipline and appropriate modelling for these youths. Now “*pexing*” is receiving attention in South Africa the government will have some academic insight with regards to this phenomenon that can help inform the formulation of solutions.

### **7.3.2. Marketers**

The first recommendation for marketers is acknowledgement of the dark side of consumption that in certain instances is driven by the message that marketers communicate to youth. Those marketers whose brands (as indicated by the brand map and brand count in (Figure 4) need to conduct studies of their own that will inform them of the role of their advertising and

marketing of their brands on destructive conspicuous consumption. There is a wealth of knowledge to be gained by practitioners from this noted consumption behaviour on the effect that product attributes (country of origin and pricing) and the environmental factors (such as reference groups) have on the perception and consumption of their brands and products. This research also adds to marketers' further understanding on the low income consumers in emerging markets and their potential to be loyal brand consumers.

#### **7.4. Limitation of the Research**

There were several limitations to the research:

- There was no existing literature found on "*pexing*." The existence of literature would have contributed to gaining even more insight into trying to disseminate this phenomenon. Pot latching gave some insight into this study, however this phenomenon was borrowed from anthropologists and there was no similar noted phenomenon in CCT literature.
- Overt ethnographic research was part of the methodology, however it failed, given the misfit of the researcher with the group and given the age and other factors, it is to this end that the researcher proposes the use of a field worker who would be covert, as some of the youngsters wanted to maintain the underground nature of the "*pexing*" movement.



- The study focused on a sample from the East Rand and given the fact that the “*pexing*” is named differently in different areas might manifest itself differently with nuances that are inherent to that context.
- Although a view was given as to the level of the psyche at which the decision to conspicuously consume takes place, a more focused and empirical way of determining this is required.

### **7.5. Directions for Future Research**

Given that this was exploratory CCT research that has not been covered before, there are a number of avenues suggested with regards to future research:

- The first suggestion which proved critical to this study is for researchers in marketing to consider to anthropology in researching consumer behaviour and patterns. The focus, based on the literature review, indicates that the field is too focused on disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and economics as vehicles for insight. Anthropologists in their study of pot latching did turn to CCT for insight and CCT scholars could find value in reciprocating the attention.
- A number of studies with different units of analysis and different constructs need to be undertaken on destructive conspicuous consumption

- An exploratory study on the differences noted in destructive conspicuous consumption in males and females.
- A quantitative probe into the role of adults and parents as modellers and enablers in destructive conspicuous consumption of youth.
- A longitudinal study of how destructive conspicuous consumption changes over time and how it impacts on consumption as an adult.
- A quantitative study into the spatial patterns of destructive conspicuous consumption in youth in South Africa and a subsequent study to understand if there are spatial differences.
- Research into the dark side of destructive conspicuous consumption in youth and the role of marketing in this of the
- Quantitative research on antecedents of destructive conspicuous consumption as noted in this study and determining which antecedent is the greatest driver in the noted behaviour.
- Quantitative research to determine at which level of the psyche the decision to engage in destructive conspicuous consumption takes place.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A



#### Interview Guide

*Ensure that consent and assent forms have been obtained from participant and parent or guardian prior to commencement of the interview*

#### **Pexing Definition & Description**

*This happens when kids use items such as clothes and cell phones to show off to others in public spaces and as a way of communicating something to others in the same space or group as them. In some instances the items that are used to show off and communicated to others are thrown away or torn or burnt as part of the process of showing off.*

Tell me about your home life

Tell me about your school life

What do kids do at school?

What is cool? Why?

Have you heard about “Pexing”

#### **Prompt or Action**

*If they don't know what Pexing is then read the working definition above to the interviewee.*

Have you “Pexed”?

How long have you been “Pexing”?

What happens at a “Pexing session”

Tell me about the kids that go?

What do they do? Why?

What do they say?

How do they feel about it?

How do you feel about it?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

## **Appendix B**



### Learner's Assent for participating in a Research Study

#### A research project of the Gordon Institute of Business Science

*To be read to children under the age of 18 years*

#### Why am I here?

Sometimes when we want to find out something, we ask people to join something called a project. In this project we will want to ask you about yourself and others. This study will help in collecting new information on what activities kids get involved, the reasons for this and how this is different from other kids who may do the same activities. The activity that we will concentrate on in this study is "*Pexing*". We are asking you to be in this study because your parents/guardians have agreed that you can be part of our study.

#### What is "*Pexing*"?

This happens when kids use items such as clothes and cell phones to show off to others in public spaces and as a way of communicating something to others in the same space or group as them. In some instances the items that are used to show off and communicated to others are thrown away or torn or burnt as part of the process of showing off.

What will happen to me?

If you want to be part of our study you will spend some time with us answering some questions and participating in some activities. This will be done through an interview that will be 2 to 3 hours and you can stop the interview at any time you want to. The questions and activities will be about the use of items such as clothing and cell phones as an example to communicate messages about yourself to other people or other kids in public. No one will know what you said and your name and details will not be given to anyone else, what you say will be private.

Will the project hurt?

No, the project will not hurt. The questions and activities can take a long time but you can take a break if you are feeling tired or if you don't want to answer all the questions at one time. If you don't want to answer a question, or participate in an activity, you don't need to. All of your answers will be kept private. No one, not even someone in your family or your teachers will be told your answers.

What if I have any questions?

You can ask any questions you have about the study. If you have questions later that you don't think of now you can phone Penelope Mkhwanazi

Do my parents/guardians know about this project?

This study was explained to your parents/guardians and they said you could be part of the study if you want to. You can talk this over with them before you decide if you want to be in the study or not.

Do I have to be in the project?



You do not have to be in this project. No one will be upset if you don't want to do this. If you don't want to be in the project, you just have to tell us. You can say yes no and if you change your mind later you don't have to be part of the project anymore. It's up to you.

(a) Writing your name on this page means that you agree to be in the project and that you know what will happen to you in this study. If you decide to quit the project all you have to do is tell the person in charge.

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Signature of child

Date

If you have any further questions about this study, you can phone the investigator, Penelope Mkhwanazi. If you have a question about your rights as a participant you can contact the research project supervisor Kerry Chipp.

## Appendix C



### Parent/Guardian consent for participation of a minor in a Research Project

#### A research project of Gordon Institute of Business Science

##### Invitation to participate

We would like to invite your child ..... to participate in a project. In order to decide whether or not to participate in the project you should know about risks and benefits of the project to be able to make an informed decision. Once you understand what the project is about you can decide if you want your child to take part in the project. If so, you will be asked to sign this consent form, giving your child permission to be in the project.

##### Description of the project

If you want your child to be part of our project he/she will spend some time with us answering some questions. This will be done during an interview at your home that will be between 2 to 3 hours. There are no right or wrong answers, only what the child feels is best. The project will be done to understand the following:

the way in which kids use products (for example clothes and cell phone) and brands to communicate (show off) a message to others especially in a public setting?

the way these products are used to show off

how are the products handled afterwards by the kids ?

why kids would want to use these products to show off in front of others?

*“Pexing”?*

### What is “*Pexing*”?

This happens when kids use items such as clothes and cell phones to show off to others in public spaces and as a way of communicating something to others in the same space or group as them. In some instances the items that are used to show off and communicated to others are thrown away or torn or burnt as part of the process of showing off. This is not to suggest that your child is participates in “*Pexing*” but maybe aware of what it is and be able to give information on what he or she has witnessed

### Risks and Inconveniences

We do not see any risks for your child participating in this project. If any problems do arise we will speak to the child and make sure he/she understands what is going on and feels comfortable to continue in the project.

### Confidentiality

Your child’s name will not be used when the information collected in reported. The information on your child will be kept confidential at all times. If there is a serious problem about the safety of the child or any other person in the project, we are required to inform the appropriate agency. If such a concern arises we will make every effort to discuss the matter with you before taking any action. Please note that none of the questions in this project are designed to collect information that will require us to contact anyone. All the information we get from the project will be stored in locked files in research offices at the University of Pretoria. Because confidentiality is important we would expect that any information you provide is also private and that you would not discuss this information with anyone.

### Benefits

There are no financial benefits to this project.

What are the rights of the participants in this project?

Participation in this project is purely voluntary and both the parents/guardians as well as the child may refuse to take part in the project or stop at any time without giving any reason. If the child decides not to participate or wants to stop taking part in the project after they said yes, this will not affect you or the child in any way.

Has this project received ethical approval?

This project has been submitted for approval to the faculty of Education Ethics Committee of the Gordon Institute of Business Science.

Questions

Please feel free to ask about anything you don't understand and take as long as you feel necessary before you make a decision about whether or not you want to give permission for your child to take part in the project. If you have questions later that you don't think of now you can phone Penelope Mkhwanazi.

Informed consent

(a) I hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature, conduct, risks and benefits of this project. I have also read or have had someone read to me the above information regarding this project and that I understand the information that has been given to me. I am aware that the results and information about this project will be processed anonymously. I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent for the child to participate in this project. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare that the child may participate in this project.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

*If you have any further questions about this project, you can phone the investigator, Penelope Mkhwanazi. If you have a question about your rights as a participant you can contact the supervisor for this project, Kerry Chipp.*

## **Appendix D**

### **Mail and Guardian Newspaper Article**