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# The Parent Child Purchase Relationship

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Thesis submitted for fulfilment of the award of Master of Philosophy Degree (Mphil)

Dublin Institute of Technology

Supervised by

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# Abstract


**The Parent Child Purchase Relationship**

Cathriona Nash BSc. Management

*This is an interpretive inquiry into the 'parent-child purchase relationship'. This study aims to understand the parent-child purchase relationship from the consumer perspective, rather than the much reported 'vested interest' perspective, in order to enhance and inform an understanding of the phenomenon. Commencing with an overview of current literature, specifically that of the pester power phenomenon, to contextualise the theoretical framework, the extant construct of pester power is examined along with detailed arguments from vested interest parties supported by international studies. The child consumer is examined from a cognitive and socialisation perspective, but more pertinently in relation to their influencers; familial and non-familial. Emphasis is placed on familial influences, to capture contemporary family interactions in relation to purchases, communication and decision-making. This study focuses on a consumer perspective thus mothers, fathers and children are considered key respondents concerning the parent-child purchase relationship. In order to capture the contemporary consumer experience the use of an interpretivist approach in conjunction with phenomenology as a paradigm and methodology is employed. Philosophical principles of this approach are investigated in relation to the broader interpretive paradigm and its context. The research design incorporates the use of in-depth phenomenological interviews for parental respondents, while focus groups are employed for child respondents thus placing respondents at the centre of the inquiry. Findings are presented through emergent themes, the overall meta theme and supporting key themes, identified through the interpretive process. Unlike previous research, these thematic findings position contemporary parent-child purchase relationships in a positive light where an understanding of 'the game' permeates this natural familial interaction. Finally, conclusions and recommendations for future research are presented.*

# Dedication

**For Mum and Dad,**

**……for everything**

# Declaration

I certify that this thesis which I now submit for examination for the award of Master of Philosophy (MPhil), is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

This thesis was prepared to the regulations of postgraduate study by research of the Dublin Institute of Technology and has not been submitted in whole or in part for an award in another Institute of University.

The work reported on in this thesis conforms to the principles and requirements of the Institute's guidelines for ethics in research.

The Institute has permission to keep, to lend or to copy this thesis in whole or in part, on condition that such use of the material of the thesis be duly acknowledged.

Candidate Signature_____ Date_____

# Acknowledgements

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A very special thanks to all of the parents and children involved in the research. They freely gave of their time and made the research process a very entertaining and memorable experience.

Collectively my bitches of Eastwick, you know who you are, and I thank you. For all the gang in Room 5032, you guys truly are 'The Office'.

To my friends who have endured my moaning, absences, unreturned phone calls and excuses for not being there. I promise to make it up to you all.

Last but by no means least: my family, 'the clan' (way too many to mention) for all your support and encouragement, I don't know how I got so lucky. None of this means anything unless I have you guys behind me. I hope this makes you as proud of me as I am of all of you. You have my heart for all times. Dinners on me!!!

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# 1.0 Chapter One: An Introduction to the Parent-child Purchase Relationship

## 1.1 Introduction

This is an interpretive inquiry into the 'parent-child purchase relationship'. The objective is to understand consumers' experiences of this relationship in an attempt to uncover the meanings associated with the phenomenon. In addition, it is acknowledged that the term parent-child purchase relationship is all encompassing with many facets including social, consumption and behavioural aspects, but for the purpose of this study it is deemed the most appropriate term to use to describe the main field of study of this research. While much has been written about children's purchase requests (see for example, Falbo and Peplau, 1980; Isler, Popper and Ward, 1987; McNeal 1992; Valkenburg and Cantor, 2001; Quinn, 2002; Nicholls and Cullen, 2004; McDermott, Stead and Hastings, 2006) few studies have focused on the parent-child purchase relationship in its totality by excluding its main actors, both parents and children, and their actions, behaviours, experiences and meanings of this relationship as understood by them.

Previous literature in this area has been dominated by a phenomenon known as 'pester power'. While some of the issues raised in pester power research are relevant to the parent-child purchase relationship, the majority of the studies focused on pester power specifics, its influence and effects predominantly, not the parent-child purchase relationship in its totality. As a result this narrow focus of research has highlighted a gap in the knowledge and understanding of the parent-child purchase relationship and as such has acted as a springboard for the direction of this study. Upon examination and reflection of the literature it became apparent that there were a number of issues relating to pester power research which did not adequately reflect the reality and nature of parent-child purchase interactions. Furthermore, findings produced from these studies resulted in inconsistencies, claims and counter claims resulting in a contested debate surrounding the nature of the findings themselves. Proctor and Richards (2000) claimed that research concerning pester power must be founded on more accurate descriptions of what occurs in parent-child purchase relationships *following* initial requests and pleading.

It also emerged that while industry, public interest, political and financial interests, collectively recognised as 'vested interest' perspectives (Martin, 1997) are well documented; the consumer perspective concerning the parent-child purchase relationship appears wholly neglected. As such

a new direction needs to be employed to research what is occurring in contemporary parent-child purchase relationships. If one is to fully explore and understand this relationship the consumer voice must be researched considering their central importance to the phenomenon itself. It is crucial to understand what the purchase relationship means to *them*, resulting in a greater understanding of the parent-child purchase relationship itself. This is supported by Young, de Bruin and Eagle (2003) who identified that c*onsumer's experiences* regarding the parent-child purchase relationship must be understood to distinguish where consumer and scientifically factual opinion diverge.

As previously mentioned this study is an interpretive inquiry. According to (Arnold and Fischer, 1994 as cited in Schembri and Sandberg, (2002:194)) 'when studying a general phenomenon of interest without a distinct delimitation of object boundaries and with an aim to gaining a genuine understanding of the consumer's perspective, an interpretive approach is appropriate' Furthermore, interpretivist research strengths 'lies in its ability to address the complexity and meaning of (consumption) situations' (Black, 2006:319). The previous two decades have witnessed an interpretive tilt towards consumer research (Sherry, 1991) and an emergence in the range of interpretivist methods and applications employed (see for example, Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982, 1992; Thompson, 1997; Thompson and Hirschman, 1995; Arnold and Fischer, 1994; Hirschman, 1989; Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry, 1989). This has resulted in an increasing acceptance of interpretive approaches within consumer research (Goulding, 1999; Hirschman, 1993; Schembri and Sandberg, 2002).

Interpretivists aspire towards putting consumer experience back into consumer research (Thompson, Locander and Pollio, 1989). Employing an interpretive approach in this study enables the potential for a useful basis for understanding the parent-child purchase relationship and a clearer appreciation of the consumer's experience of this relationship (Thompson, 1997; Schembri and Sandberg, 2002). Understanding, a primary task, of how people make sense of their (consumption) experiences in relation to their life circumstances has been found in numerous studies including the consumption experiences of contemporary married women (Thompson, Pollio and Locander, 1990); children's understanding of television advertising intent (Lawlor and Prothero, 2003); gift selection (Otnes, Lowrey and Kim, 1993); consumer culture and branding (Holt, 2002) and service quality and the consumer experience (Schembri and

Sandberg, 2002). In addition Thompson's (1996) hermeneutic interpretation highlighted the multiplicities of embedded meanings within the 'juggling' lifestyles of working mothers. Furthermore, Thompson's (1997) hermeneutic framework of consumer meaning provided a means of managing the complexities and heterogeneity of consumers' experiences (Schembri and Sandberg, 2002).

Through an interpretive study of the parent-child purchase relationship, with consumers' experiences central and in accordance with phenomenological principles (Schembri and Sandberg, 2002) a thematic description of how consumers experience these relationships will be achieved. Therefore, a first person description of the parent-child purchase relationship is the desired outcome this study. This acknowledges variations in meanings that different people in different contexts hold for similar experiences (Schembri and Sandberg, 2002).

Traditionally, researchers of the parent-child purchase relationship or more specifically pester power, have taken a positivist approach to the phenomenon at hand and possibly and unintentionally pre-defined how consumers view the parent-child purchase relationship. While these studies are rigorous and have contributed to an understanding of the phenomenon, it provides a third person perspective, namely the 'vested interest' perspective, and as such the consumers' perspectives are not genuinely reflected (Schembri and Sandberg, 2002). As such, an interpretive, specifically a phenomenological approach is employed in this study and is considered the most appropriate methodology to allow a first-person perspective of the parent-child purchase relationship to emerge (Schembri and Sandberg, 2002). Therefore, the emphasis of this study is to understand consumers' experience of parent-child purchase relationships in its totality, through an interpretivist exploration, which moves the focus away from any 'vested interest' perspective to the real actors in the phenomenon, the consumers.

## 1.2 Research Rationale

The main objective of this study is to explore the nature of the parent-child purchase relationship from a *consumer perspective* in order to enhance and inform understanding. Furthermore, both parents and children will be included in the study in order to capture the *full* consumer experience. Previous studies have focused primarily on mothers' experiences in relation to this phenomenon. This study adopts a new approach and will include *all* parties involved in the

parent-child purchase relationship, mothers, fathers and children in order to uncover the meanings they associate with the phenomenon.

This complex area of the parent-child purchase relationship justifies a fresh exploration for a number of reasons. Firstly, as identified, it appears more pertinent to explore this research from a consumer perspective in order to fully understand it. Consumers themselves are of key relevance to this study as the majority of research to date ignores the consumers' voice regarding these types of interactions. Furthermore, a search of previous literature resulted in no other studies where consumers' experiences, both parents and children, were explored in tandem. This appears remiss of researchers considering the value of consumers' experiential insights of the phenomenon. Secondly, as previously mentioned, literature reveals inconsistencies in previous research concerning the very nature, construct, influence, effects and behaviour of the relationship itself. While these may occur as a result of the fragmented areas of the parent-child purchase relationship researched and the subjective positions adopted by some researchers, they nevertheless must be explored to enhance understanding of the parent-child purchase relationship in its totality. Finally, much of the research relating to this area is dated, some twenty years old therefore a contemporary exploration is required.

### 1.3 Research Overview

In order to fully explore this research and satisfy the objective of the study a number of significant areas are explored to facilitate an understanding of the main issues concerning the parent-child purchase relationship.

*Chapter 2* provides grounding in the existing literature, detailing several decades of international studies concerning parent-child purchase relationships, pester power in particular, and is crucial in providing this study with a full complement of the issues involved in the research area. The main concepts underpinning purchase relationships are examined and include arguments relating to the pester power debate; the constructs of pester power; how pester power is assumed to work; and the resulting consequences. Finally, arguments from both sides of the pester power debate are examined.

*Chapter 3* addresses the wider context of the parent-child purchase relationship. The developing child consumer and the main agents of consumer socialisation including families, peers, and mass media are examined. Societal changes necessitate exploration, with an emphasis on familial changes including parental styles, family communication, decision-making and negotiation strategies, inter-family conflict and an examination of familial power bases. The area of influence is also addressed from a familial and non-familial perspective. This literature provides insights into many of the contested areas of parent-child purchases including children's development as consumers and their understanding of consumption, main influences on children's requests and behaviours and the multi-faceted area surrounding parent-child interactions involving purchase requests, communication and decision-making.

*Chapter 4* details the methodology employed to uncover consumers' meanings associated with the parent-child purchase relationship. The interpretivist nature of the research and the philosophical principals of this approach are investigated in relation to the interpretive paradigm and its context. Furthermore, this chapter details the methodology utilised to uncover consumer experiences of purchase interactions utilising phenomenology as paradigm and methodology. In addition, respondents' choice and characteristics in conjunction with research tools employed are detailed. Finally, the philosophy and utilisation of hermeneutic analysis to extract themes is provided.

*Chapter 5* details findings in terms of emergent themes through the analysis of the data set generated. The overriding meta theme is presented first along with evidence from respondents narratives, followed by a detailed interpretation of supporting key themes from both sets of respondents and are also evidenced through respondents descriptions. The overall findings are then sumamrised.

*Chapter 6* presents conclusions drawn from the exploration along with a reintegration and evaluation of present literature within the area. Reflections on methodology choice and challenges are presented along with recommendations for future research.

# 2.0 Chapter Two: Pester Power-The Construct

## 2.1 Introduction

This research explores the phenomenon of parent-child purchase relationship. For decades changes in the parent-child purchase relationship have been well researched (Nicholls and Cullen, 2004). More recently, 'concern has been raised about the apparent growth in children's power to influence parents' buying behaviour and purchase decisions, a set of tactics sometimes characterised as pester power' (Nicholls and Cullen, 2004:76). While it is acknowledged that more recent research emphasises the pester power angle, this study will focus on the parent-child purchase relationship in its totality utilising an interpretive approach. Nevertheless, the proliferation of pester power research and its many facets have provided a useful starting point for an overall examination of the parent-child purchase relationship. Moreover, it provides an impetus to explore the contemporary parent-child purchase relationship as research to date does not capture the full extent of what occurs in this phenomenon today. Furthermore, existing research fails to capture the consumer perspective regarding any changes in parent-child purchase relationships and raises issues concerning the focus of this type of research.

In order to gain a full complement of the theoretical framework concerning the parent-child purchase relationship, this research commences with an examination of the key construct of pester power, including children's influence on family consumption. It is argued that reported concerns of the damage to parent-child relationships correspond with consumers' experiences supported by numerous studies offering international perspectives on parent-child purchase relationships (McDermott, Stead and Hastings, 2006). In addition, industry bodies seeking to demonstrate a responsibility in the prevention of the potential undermining of parental authority resulting from industry practices aimed at children will be explored. This however is challenged by evidence that industry practitioners target parents' spending power through such promotion (McDermott et al. 2006). These opposing viewpoints have resulted in a contentious debate which will also be explored. These views emanate from the unique market position of young consumers and their spending power and influence, which has resulted in increasingly large budgets committed by marketing departments to reach and influence children (Hasmini and Ghani, 2004).

For several decades, marketing, advertising, communications and developmental literature, concerning children and the commercial world, including advertising, has been continually examined and re-examined in relation to their effects on children and the parent-child purchase relationship (Martin, 1997), despite these efforts, inconsistencies remain, possibly as a result of the positivistic orientations of the researchers. These inconsistencies will be explored along with a proposed interpretive approach to this study.

## 2.2 The Construct of Pester Power

'The notion…of pester power is often thought to be highly influential in the marketing process of selling products to children' (Proctor and Richards, 2002:3). This influence is achieved through the enhancement of products, usually through advertising, to children resulting in improved sales, by increasing awareness levels (Proctor and Richards, 2002). Despite an abundance of research, along with evidence accounting for the growth in spending on child-targeted advertising (Martino, 2004), research concerning an understanding of pester power and the subsequent nature of the parent-child purchase relationship remains inconsistent and inconclusive.

Firstly, there is no *definitive* definition of pester power. Those in existence include: 'At its simplest pester power can be defined as "repetitive asking/requesting for a specific item and/or service"' Quinn (2000:7); 'Underpinning the concept of pester power is children's unprecedented power as consumers and their ability to deploy a variety of tactics to exert influence over purchasing by others' McDermott et al. (2006:513); 'A child's ability to pester their parents into buying a certain product or brand' (Goldstein, 1999:1); 'The children's ability to nag their parents into purchasing items they may not otherwise buy' Martino (2004:1); 'A child's attempt to exert influence over parental purchases in a repetitive and sometimes confrontational way' (Nicholls and Cullen, 2004:78). These definitions imply the 'explicit suggestion that constant badgering works; there is a "power" in essentially being annoying' (Quinn, 2001:9). Americans call it the 'nag factor' creating the impression of 'unwarranted interruption, but lacks the sense that it will deliver the goods' (Procter and Richards, 2002:3). Indeed research suggests 'pestering' often proves to be one of the most successful influence techniques (McNeal, 1992; Gunther and Furnham, 1998). Pester power is best summed up by Spungin (2004:37) who states 'by advertising to children, companies are encouraging the child to nag their parents into buying something that is not good for them, they don't need or the parent cannot afford'. The core

implication being, if children were free from advertising's exposure and influence they would cease to pester their parents for products (Spungin, 2004). This summation lies at the heart of the inconsistencies in pester power research leading to questions of every facet of its existence, construct, nature and influences. Academic researchers prefer less loaded terminology, such as purchase influence attempts (PIAs) (Galst and White, 1976) or 'purchase request behaviour' (Young et al., 1996:57). Pester power has been criticised as a pejorative term for children making requests to their parents (Brown, 2004). It is considered pejorative in relation to industry practitioners' supposed attempts to target children with promotional strategies, encouraging unwanted purchase requests, which without such strategies would lack the intensity and repetition that pestering entails (Brown, 2004). An elusive definition has launched disagreement and debate concerning each facet of pester power in research studies. This will be discussed further in Section 2.4. More importantly it highlights the lack of a consumer perspective of the phenomenon itself and an understanding of the parent-child purchase relations as experienced by consumers.

### *2.2.1 The Pester Element*

With regards to the 'pester' element of the phenomenon, Roedder-John (1999) notes from a socialisation perspective, that children learn ways to become successful influencers through the use of sophisticated strategies including influence and negotiation. Younger children, toddlers and pre-schoolers, have a limited request repertoire and exert influence directly, pointing to products, removing them from shelves and inserting them into parents' shopping trolleys (Rust, 1993; Wilson and Wood; 2004). Quinn (2002:7) states 'parents interpret their children as "pestering" particularly at young ages, when children's speech is less articulate. Repetitive asking until it is given is often children's only way of expressing their desires'. As children mature their request repertoires increase, they may ask for products by name, sometimes begging, screaming and whining to get what they want (McNeal, 1992). Pilgrim and Lawrence (2001:1) concur 'their [children's] inability to communicate leads them to resort to tantrums and screaming as the only options open to them'.

This issue is further complicated by the fact that children are dependent on parents when purchasing most goods and products, and that it is much more difficult for younger children to verbally express their reasons for requesting or buying certain goods. With frequently purchased

items children exert their influence simply by asking parents, as they become more accepting and comfortable with the idea of occasionally yielding to these preferences (Isler, Popper and Ward, 1987; Pilgrim and Lawrence, 2001), suggesting that not all requests are preceded by whining and moaning as pestering insinuates. Furthermore, if it does occur is it really that terrible? This raises a fundamental question; if children do not have the ability to articulate their requests in an appropriate manner, are their requests misinterpreted as pestering? Furthermore, is pestering for products any different to pestering for non-purchase requests e.g. staying up later, visiting friend's houses or watching more television?

Pestering is further categorised as 'persistence nagging' and 'importance nagging' (Dolliver, 1998; Ruskin, 1999). Persistence nagging occurs through continual requesting and may result in episodes of 'tantrum-like' behaviour. Importance nagging occurs when a child believes the acquirement of the coveted product is a life and death scenario. Flurry and Burns (2005) concur that central to an assessment of pester power is the degree to which children are motivated to persuade or 'pester' their parents to buy the items, this relates to the extent to which they value the product. A variety of factors will affect the perceived value of a product; among them is advertising (Goldberg and Gorn, 1974). These issues will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

However, the issue of advertising as a stimulus for purchase requests is also characterised by disagreements regarding the age at which children can distinguish between advertising and program content, understand and interpret advertising and understand advertising's persuasive appeal (Rubins, 1974; Donohue and Meyer, 1984; Blosser and Roberts, 1985; Kunkel and Roberts, 1991; Preston, 2000; Hanson, 2000; Shannon, 2000; Moore and Lutz, 2000; Lawlor and Prothero, 2003). There are no conclusive agreements amongst researchers, with each piece of research seemingly discrediting previous findings. Despite the lack of agreement the question remains; if children do not categorically understand advertising, its intentions and persuasiveness can it be held accountable for stimulating purchase requests?

### *2.2.2 The Power Element*

In relation to power, McNeal (1999) identifies three sources of power for child consumers: (1) their own purchasing power (primary influence); (2) their role as customers of the future whose

loyalties repay early courtship (future influence) and (3) their power over adults' (particularly parents) purchasing behaviour (secondary influence) which is believed to have grown substantially over the last decade. Cross (2002) claims the overt commercial targeting of children occurred in the middle of the 20th Century, when opportunities were identified in child-targeted special offers (e.g. breakfast cereals and beverages) rather than modified versions of adult products. Simultaneously, consumer culture began to 'blur the line between childlike adults and sophisticated children in major markets such as games, music and fashion' (McDermott et al. 2006:516). Cross (2002:445) views adults as:

> *Voluntarily complicit in the creation of a fantasy-culture of commercial childhood through sentimentalised consumption, leading to the paradox of adults wanting to protect children's "innocence" from the market, while at the same time "constructing" children through purchasing behaviour'.*

Neeley and Coffey (2004) state due to children's lack of finances or the ability to make transactions, they must engage in purposeful negotiation with their parents (particularly mothers) in order to acquire the desired goods, incorporating the necessary involvement of adults in purchases of child-driven consumption (a basic mechanism of pester power). This is further supported by Bailey (2002) (as cited in Neeley and Coffey, (2004:56)):

> *US statistics show that the mother in the family controls eighty percent of all household spending….Mothers allow their children to voice their opinions, but she is still in charge because she holds the money and has discretion over purchases.*

This view suggests that children have some influence, but ultimately rely on parents to make the final purchase, suggesting parents have ultimate power. Bridges and Briesch (2006:157) claim that 'advertising for adult products is aimed directly at the decision-maker/buyer; for children's products the path to purchase is less direct', suggesting that advertising's influence on children is complicated (Bjurström, 1994). Therefore, children must approach and include parents to make a purchase. Isler et al. (1987) also argue that children have limited disposable income, consistent with Quinn (2002) and rare opportunities for independent shopping for products that interest them. Therefore, children must make requests to parents and parents must mediate advertising's influence by filtering children's requests for products (Isler et al., 1987). Essentially, this purchase behaviour is 'normal' for parents and children, therefore, a central point in need of exploration is what parents (consumers) report in research.

*2.2.3 Children and Contemporary Consumption*

Valkenburg and Cantor (2001) disagree with Isler et al. (1987) and report that children circa aged five increasingly make independent purchases. Furthermore, Valkenburg (1999) reported that fifty four percent of four year-olds and seventy four percent of five year-olds had already made a purchase in the presence of a parent. As they mature, children start to make more purchases and more importantly independent store visits and purchases without their parents (Valkenburg, 1999). This suggests that children do not always require a parental presence when making purchase decisions.

In relation to children's primary purchases Quinn (2002) believes the actual power children possess in relation to household purchases is debateable stating: 'money directly available to them is limited, thus reducing their purchasing power considerably' (Quinn, 2002:9). However, it should be noted that Quinn is commenting on the Irish market, where no figures are available. Data from McNeal (1990-2001) (as cited in Sabino, (2002)) See Table.2.1 contradicts Quinn's (2002) findings, although these are United States (US) figures, indicating that in ten years children's economic power has increased both in terms of their family purchase influence (secondary influence) and their own spending (primary influence).

**Table 2.1 The Growth of Children's Economic Power**

| **Children's Economic Power ($ Billion)** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **1990** | **1997** | **2000** |
| Children's Own Spending | 6 | 23 | 28 |
| Family Purchase Influence | 50 | 188 | 286 |

*Source*: Sabino, (2002) 'Changing Families, Changing Kids', A*dvertising and Marketing to Children, p.*10.

It is evident that children may have to make a number of requests to their parents; but they are also becoming consumers in their own right (Oldenburg, 2000; Furnham, 2000). Other statistics reported on children's direct spending include: $74b of the global market (Euromonitor, 2001); £23b for European children (Kid Power Exchange, 2000); in the United Kingdom (UK) a forty percent increase in pocket money between 1994 and 2000 (Minitel, 2001). However, the majority of spending on children's products was by adults in the form of secondary purchases (Sabino, 2002). Therefore, it can be concluded that children actively participate in the consumer economy

through direct self expenditure and indirectly influencing the expenditure of parents (Nicholls and Cullen, 2004; Langer, 2005; Preston, 2006). Therefore, contrary to Quinn (2002) children can be viewed as 'active and discriminating consumers, well financed by their parents …children are consumers although not always direct buyers' (Bandyopadhyay, Kindra and Sharp, 2001:100).

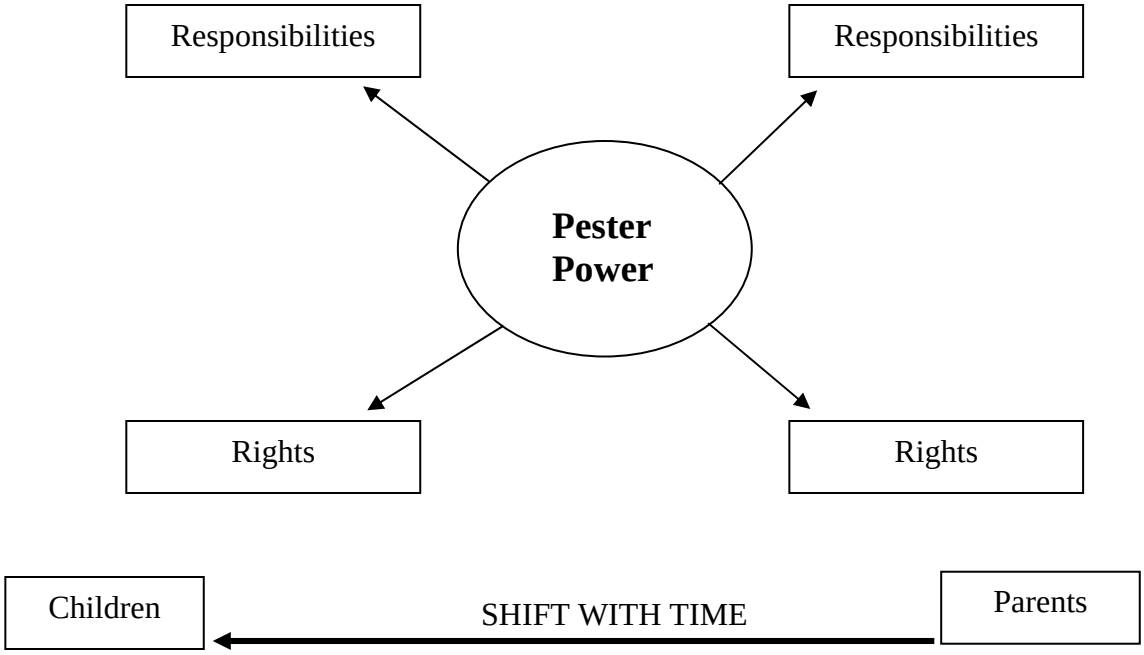
Fletcher (2004) claims advertisers are aware very few products and only inexpensive items are purchased by children themselves therefore, advertisements must be acceptable and persuasive, to the gatekeepers of children's buying power, parents in particular, other close adults in general, particularly grandparents. This suggests that children influence far more expenditure than they can direct from their own resources (McNeal, 1992; Summerskill, 2001). These studies fail to answer who has the power, parents or children?

### *2.2.4 The Ethical Perspective of Power*

The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child declared the principle of a child's right to participate in decision-making on all matters involving them, suggesting children have a (legal) right to be involved in purchase decisions (Nicholls and Cullen, 2004). However, this is counterbalanced by acknowledging that parents too have rights and are more capable of making informed purchases (Nicholls and Cullen, 2004). Furthermore, the UN Convention alters the construct and interpretation of parent-child purchase relationships from a struggle for influence, control or power to a balance of rights and responsibilities (Nicholls and Cullen, 2004). In addition, this framework suggests a shift in the *overall* parent-child relationship and how it manifests itself in a contemporary context. This issue will be further examined in Chapter Three. Figure 2.1 provides a representation of some of these issues.

Nicholls and Cullen's (2004) framework illustrates all parties rights regarding participation in purchase decisions, but these must be balanced with responsibilities. The point at which both parties' rights cease to balance conflict ensues, represented here as pester power. This framework positions the interaction as a balance of power, rights and responsibilities, at least from a legal perspective. This raises the question; does it occur in everyday purchase situation between parents and children?

**Figure 2.1 Dimensions of Child-Parent Rights and Responsibilities**




*Source:* Adapted from Nicholls and Cullen (2004) 'The Child-Parent Purchase Relationship: 'Pester Power',
Human Rights and Retail Ethics', *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol.11, Issue 2, p.80.

In relation to these issues Isler et al. (1987) conducted research focused on the intra-family dynamics associated with children's purchase requests along with all elements of pester power's construct. Figure 2.2 summarises these findings providing a useful framework for understanding the most pertinent components of the pester power construct.

This is a key study because it addresses the issue from a *consumer perspective* (mothers only). Therefore, much of the pointless discrediting of previous findings is absent. Isler et al. (1987:28*)* succinctly capture the notion and construct of pester power, when they state:

> *…… advertising so stimulates children's wants that they frequently ask parents to buy advertised products and services… such recurring and persistent asking can lead to dysfunctional parent-child conflict, since parents must continually say 'no' and that this*

*kind of parent-child dynamic may lead to frustrated and disappointed children and exacerbated*[1] *parents.*

[1] The author believes that the correct word to be used here is exasperated not exacerbated. For the purpose of remaining true to the quote it will be used here only.

### *2.2.5 Request Influences*

Purchase request influences identified include; television advertising, in-store, friends and siblings. These influences will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, particularly in relation to developmental issues for child consumers.

### *2.2.6 Request Strategies*

Pester power reportedly makes children request an increasing amount of inappropriate items as a result of marketing and advertising efforts. On this point McNeal (1999) (as cited in Valkenburg and Cantor, (2001:318)) comments:

> *Children are strongly motivated to learn the art of asking: this is how they get virtually everything the need or want. Both mothers and marketers know this, but Mom usually takes the credit and marketers get the blame-credit for having taught the children how to ask properly for things, blame for children asking so often and for so many things.*

As mentioned children have a repertoire of request strategies available to them. These vary from simply asking for a product; to more manipulative, emotionally-charged pleas to obtain purchases. Strategies identified in studies concerning adolescents (Spiro, 1983; Palan and Wilkes, 1997) also emerged in Isler et al.'s (1987) research for a variety of younger-aged children. These strategies include: *direct strategies* ranging from a direct request, 'Can I have this?' to more demanding requests, 'Get this for me'. Other direct strategies involve 'wants' or 'needs' accompanied by reasons. *Bargaining strategies,* including financial and non-financial deals (e.g. chores) are based on mutual gains for participants (Davis, 1976; Falbo and Peplau, 1980; Killgren and Moosa, 1991 (as cited in Bulmer, (2001)); Middleton, Ashworth and Walker, 1994). Reasoning, another bargaining strategy, involves logical arguments and discussion focusing on reaching mutually satisfying outcomes. *Persuasion strategies,* involve convincing opposing family members to resolve decision conflict in the persuaders favour (Davis, 1976: Falbo and Peplau, 1980) and focuses on unilateral gain for the persuader, suggesting some level of manipulation. A popular persuasion strategy used is 'everyone else' and relates to peer pressure. E*motional strategies*, involve the intentional use of emotion, either directly or indirectly including: crying, pouting, withdrawing, or the silent treatment (Falbo and Peplau, 1980; Scanzoni and Szinovacz, 1980; Spiro, 1983); anger (Spiro, 1983); and having a positive affect (such as smiling a lot) (Falbo and Peplau, 1980). Guilt is used when parents do not spend equal

amounts of money on all children or if they cannot provide products similar to peers (Palan and Wilkes 1997). These emotional strategies

are most associated with pestering, but are used by children in a variety of requests not just purchase requests. Despite these strategies Isler et al. (1987) reveal, regardless of age, children simply *ask* for products (almost seventy six percent on average) (See Table 2.2). 'Pleading', a tactic associated with pester power; (indeed its very definition) is minimally reported, occurring in approximately eleven percent of requests. Therefore, one must again question is pestering actually taking place in the majority of parent-child purchase interactions? Isler et al.'s (1987) study suggests a variety of other request strategies are used including bargaining or putting the product in the shopping basket at the store, however, there is minimal occurrence of these strategies.

**Table 2.2 Request Strategies-By Child's Age**

| | **AGE** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Request Strategy** | **3-4 (%)** | **5-7 (%)** | **9-11(%)** | **Total (%)** |
| Just asked, didn't nag | 79.3 | 71.6 | 79.3 | 75.9 |
| Really pleaded over and over | 11.3 | 14.8 | 8.2 | 11.9 |
| Said had seen it on television | 6.7 | 6.3 | 3.2 | 5.3 |
| Said sibling/friend has or likes it. | 3.7 | 8.2 | 4.8 | 6.2 |
| Bargained (offered to do chores etc.) | 1.0 | 4.2 | 2.8 | 3.1 |
| Gave bunch of ways would use | 1.2 | 2.8 | 1.7 | 2.1 |
| Just put in shopping basket at store | 1.9 | 1.0 | 0.7 | 1.1 |
| Other | 1.0 | 3.4 | 3.9 | 3.1 |
| N= | (682) | (1600) | (1092) | (3374) |
| *May total more than 100% because multiple responses were permitted | | | | |

*Source*: Isler et al. (1987) 'Children's Purchase Requests and Parental Responses', *Journal of Advertising Research*, Oct/Nov, p. 34

The ethical perspective of parent-child purchase interactions incorporates parents' responsibility to manage a child's natural inclination to request desired products by acknowledging the child's right to do so (Valkenburg and Cantor, 2001). Thus children have a 'right' to ask; suggesting 'pestering' is a *natural* part of children's consumer socialisation, thus the responsibility in avoiding associated confrontation episodes lies in responsible parenting (Furnham, 2000).

*2.2.7 Mother's Responses to Purchase Influence Attempts*

Pester power influence is also reported to result in successful purchases. Isler et al. (1987) identified relationships, between influences, types of requests, and initial responses, other than yielding. Table 2.3 summarises their findings.

**Table 2.3 Mother's Initial Response to Child's Requests by Product/Service**

| | Cereal | Candy | Candy | Clothes | Sports gear | Snacks Food | Other Misc | Total Requests |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Mothers Initial Response** | **(%)** | **(%)** | **(%)** | **(%)** | **(%)** | **(%)** | **(%)** | **(%)** |
| Don't mind, said yes right away | 65.7 | 55.0 | 20.0 | 45.7 | 20.7 | 63.7 | 69.8 | 54.9 50.7 |
| Discussion before saying yes | 10.0 | 14.8 | 13.8 | 20.9 | 16.8 | 12.6 | 11.6 | 14.6 14.3 |
| Said no and that was that | 2.9 | 10.5 | 10.7 | 2.5 | 5.6 | 4.4 | 3.1 | 5.4 6.2 |
| Said no and explained why | 9.6 | 11.5 | 22.3 | 9.2 | 22.9 | 11.5 | 7.6 | 10.9 13.0 |

S*ource*: Isler et al. (1987) 'Children's Purchase Requests and Parental Responses', *Journal of Advertising Research*, Oct/Nov p. 35

Mothers use a variety of tactics including: immediately succumbing to requests; entering into discussion with the child; substituting the brand; a direct 'no'; explaining request refusals and 'stalling'. No responses suggest frustrated parents, a supposed consequence of pester power, with the majority happy to purchase such items. If parents are happy to make the purchase where is the argument for exasperated parents succumbing to 'pestered for' products? Moreover, where is the argument for the existence of pester power?

Furthermore, responses to children's requests are highly dependent on the particular items requested. The actual product requested is the main determining factor in purchases, not the influence or request strategy, an issue seldom addressed in most studies. Instead the focus, misplaced as it may be, remains the influence and effects of advertising on children. Most successful purchases relate to lower priced goods e.g. cereals, sweets and snack foods; while most refusals relate to expensive items e.g. toys or sporting goods. Request attempts for food products result in most success. Mothers immediately purchased approximately half of the total product requests, slightly lower than other studies which report approximately sixty percent of

parents say ‘yes’ to the demands of their children, however, these figures are based on responses to television advertisements (Hite and Eck, 1987; BBC, 1998a). A child’s conduct e.g. exhibiting good or bad behaviour is also a determinant for their responses (Wells and Lo Scuito, 1966; Ward and Wackman, 1972; Atkin, 1975b; Caron and Ward, 1975; Robertson and Rossiter, 1976). Furthermore, these studies identify a positive correlation between child purchase influence attempts and mothers’ yielding; children who request frequently are frequently successful.

Isler et al. (1987) also identify younger children as the most frequent requesters, although the frequency of requests declines between the ages of five and twelve (Wells, 1965; Caron and Ward, 1972; Adler, 1977). This may in part be due to ‘passive dictation’; older children request less because mothers are aware of their requirements and attribute greater competence in making judgements about products to older children (Isler et al., 1987). Thus parents in receipt of more purchase requests from young children are more likely to act on them, as children mature.

Isler et al.’s (1987) research highlights a number of issues: firstly, requests by children are not a constant barrage of demands and secondly advertising is not the main influence in stimulating product requests. However, this research does not take into account possible secondary influences including did the child request the item as a result of previous exposures to an advertisement for the item. Finally, mothers accede to the majority of requests but they are product and price dependent.

### 2.3 The Effects/Consequences of Pester Power

Pester power reportedly results in a number of negative effects on parents and children (Adler et al., 1980; Isler et al., 1987; Killgren and Moosa, 1991; McNeal, 1992; Middleton et al., 1994; Zoll, 2000; Bandyopadhyay et al., 2001; Quinn, 2002). While they may be unintended by industry practitioners, they are considered an everyday reality for many consumers. They include:

1. Unsought products and increasing materialism;
2. Parent-child conflict;
3. Disappointed children;
4. Exasperated parents.

### *2.3.1 Unsought Products and Increasing Materialism*

Advertising persuades people to buy or request products they do not need (Young et al. 2003). Atkin's (1975c) study suggests the majority of mothers believe television advertisements make their children more materialistic. However, this research is thirty years old and society and culture has moved on considerably since then. Consumer groups and general media believe many promotions stimulate pestering resulting in purchases of unwanted products, thus creating unfair pressure, particularly on less affluent families (Zoll, 2000; Pilgrim and Lawrence 2001; Spungin, 2004). Furthermore, children's understanding of other consumers includes brands worn and consumed (Belk, Bahn and Mayer, 1982; Belk, Mayer and Driscoll, 1984). Pressure on children arises when they are expected to own brands in order to make friends, fit in and because of teasing experienced if they use unbranded items or originate from less affluent homes (Mayer and Driscoll, 1984). In order to 'fit in' children request these brands even if purchasing power is limited. But does this pressure originate from advertising, peers or a social context? In contrast Hill and Tisdall (1997:91) state children 'are sensitive to the needs, stresses and wishes of parents too'. These more contemporary findings suggest children's materialism is curtailed because they are aware of parental pressures, suggesting children do not perpetually make purchase demands, therefore pestering and conflict is avoided.

### *2.3.2 Parent-Child Conflict*

Conflict centres on the incompatible needs of parents and children. Parents seek qualities including, safety, nutrition, health, educational benefits, and social responsibility (Valkenburg and Cantor, 2001). Children's interests lie in fun, taste, style and peer group acceptability (Valkenburg and Cantor, 2001; Fletcher, 2004). Children emphasise short-term needs or wants, while parents are more concerned with longer-term value and children's health (Valkenburg and Cantor, 2001). Prior to their own research, Isler et al. (1987) reported that child-targeted advertising *may* encourage repeated demands on parents, thus inciting conflict. 'Parents say they feel in conflict. They want to say no, but they don't want to have their child upset with them' (Zoll 2000:2).

In relation to conflict Quinn (2002:8) states that 'purchasing decisions are the result of discussions and conversations *as well as* arguments between parent and child'. Essentially,

refusals do not always result in conflict. Furthermore, Isler et al. (1987) raise the question, is parent-child conflict damaging families or does it reflect normal family life? This further raises the question, is conflict as a result of a purchase refusal any different to conflict experienced in any parent-child interaction? In relation to this question Ward and Wackman (1972) found a small but statistically significant correlation between requests and more general patterns of parent-child conflict. Atkin (1975a:5) noted if conflict occurs it is 'seldom intense or persistent'.

Isler et al. (1987) also report that not only do parents yield to children's requests to avoid potential parent-child conflict, but also to please and reward children; few parents 'punish' their children by refusing purchase influence attempts (Ward and Wackman, 1972). Adler (1977) concluded that more examination is required about the direct role of advertising in generating conflict; considering it is widely associated with pester power, and whether such conflict places significant strains on parent-child relations. According to Gunther and Furnham (1998) the contexts for conflict in parent-child purchase relationships vary according to product group, the nature of the parent-child relationship and the child itself. In summary, parent-child conflict surrounding the parent-child purchase relationship appears to be minimal. This however, does not discourage researchers disagreeing on this fundamental issue. Isler et al. (1987) suggest it is impossible to irrefutably 'resolve' the issue of child-targeted advertising and parent-child conflict for two reasons; the isolation of television advertising's influence in friends' homes and shops; the benchmark of 'frequent' or 'excessive' is subjective as is 'dysfunctional parent-child conflict' (Isler et al.,1987:28).

### *2.3.3 Disappointed Children*

Isler et al. (1987) also researched the effects of refusals on children. Table 2.4 details the main findings. 'Took it ok' is the most prevalent response, although reports of 'disappointed' are more characteristic of older children's requests. Once more these findings suggest that the alleged damaging effects of request refusals on children do not materialise. Some children are disappointed; however, the predominant finding is the majority of children (almost fifty two percent) accept refusals with no major consequences. Only a small proportion of children demonstrate 'tantrum-like' behaviour associated with request refusals as is evident from the minimal, (less than five per cent and two per cent respectively, 'argued a lot, kept nagging' and 'got really angry') responses.

**Table 2.4 Refusal to Buy Responses by Child's Age**

| MOTHER'S REPORT OF CHILD'S REACTION TO REFUSAL-TO-BUY RESPONSES-BY CHILD'S AGE | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Child's Age** | **3-4** | **5-7** | **9-11** | **Total** |
| **Child's Reaction to Refusal to buy** | **%** | **%** | **%** | **%** |
| Seemed to take it ok | 61.2 | 49.5 | 47.2 | 51.6 |
| Disappointed but didn't say anything more | 21.1 | 25.9 | 32.4 | 26.3 |
| Argued a little, then let it drop | 13.2 | 17.9 | 16.8 | 16.6 |
| Argued a lot, kept nagging | 3.7 | 5.4 | 2.4 | 4.3 |
| Got really angry | 0.8 | 1.3 | 1.2 | 1.2 |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| N= | (242) | (602) | (250) | (1094) |

*Source:* Isler et al. (1987) 'Children's Purchase Requests and Parental Responses', *Journal of Advertising Research* Oct/Nov p. 36.

Again, these findings repudiate previous research, particularly from critics of pester power and its resultant detrimental effects on children, namely disappointment, frustration and unhappiness. However, according to Atkin (1975a; 1975b) and Bandyopadhyay et al. (2001:110) 'many children can also experience anger, disappointment or even unhappiness even when they acquire the desired product and it does not match their expectations', suggesting that conflict can occur regardless of obtaining the desired product or not. Interestingly, Isler et al. (1987) observed no relationship between conflicts and yielding.

### *2.3.4 Exasperated Parents*

Furthermore, a moderately small proportion of refusals culminated in mothers getting angry with the child (almost thirteen percent), or arguing, and so mothers were asked to report their subsequent reaction (Isler et al. 1987). Table 2.5 highlights findings and negative responses. Almost one-fifth of these negative child responses were simply ignored; the prevailing subsequent response is to repeat the initial refusal. The majority of mothers (more than eighty percent) report simply repeating their refusal. Very few parents report any exasperation, as is evidenced by the low percentages of parents reporting getting angry with their, predominantly, older children. This suggests parental frustration or exasperation as a result of refusals seldom occurs.

**Table 2.5 Negative Responses to Refusals-to-buy by Child's Age**

| MOTHER'S REACTION TO CHILD'S NEGATIVE RESPONSES TO REFUSALS-TO-BUY- BY CHILD'S AGE | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Child's Age** | **3-4** | **5-7** | **9-11** | **Total** |
| **Mothers Reaction** | **%** | **%** | **%** | **%** |
| Ignored it | 16.3 | 19.6 | 11.8 | 17.4 |
| Repeated what she said before | 67.4 | 84.4 | 84.3 | 81.4 |
| Got angry with child | 4.7 | 14.9 | 13.7 | 12.8 |
| Made some compromises | 6.9 | 10.1 | 9.8 | 9.5 |
| Decided to buy what child wants | 6.9 | 6.8 | 3.9 | 6.2 |
| N= | (43) | (146) | (51) | (242) |

*Source:* Isler et al. (1987) 'Children's Purchase Requests and Parental Responses', *Journal of Advertising Research* Oct/Nov p. 36

Yet again the majority of these findings fail to reflect the total consumer perspective regarding the parent-child purchase relationship and often set out to prove or disprove previous research findings rather than attempt to gain an understanding of what is actually occurring.

## 2.4 Pester Power- The Pointless Debate and Phoney War

Despite much of the above research negating the construct, effects and even existence of pester power the subject is still a highly emotive debate characterised by much disagreement. These disagreements result in debate with claims and counter claims in numerous research studies including 'vested interest party' research (Martin, 1997). Vested interest parties consist of, on one side, public interest groups such as consumer, government and regulatory bodies intent on the protection of parents and children. On the opposite side are industry practitioners, including advertising and marketing practitioners, intent on protecting their industry practices and revenue. Public interest groups address pester power from an *accusatory* position as they fundamentally believe it is 'advertising's visibility, colour and intensity that evokes a "must have" philosophy in children' (Dresden, Barnard and Silkin, 2003:78). This 'must have' philosophy reportedly results in undue pressure on parents and children to purchase the coveted product, as a result of pester power. Conversely, industry representatives address the issue of pester power from a *defensive* position, defending their industry and practices from further allegations, sanctions and regulations (Young, De Bruin and Eagle, 2003). Ultimately, they position pestering and thus

pester power, as a *normal* part of parent-child interaction, essentially discrediting public interest group's argument. This viewpoint is somewhat supported by research from the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM United Kingdom) who claim 'pester power does exist, but it is an *inevitable part of family life* that parents see as their own responsibility to control' (www.cim.co.uk). Fletcher (2004:12) further states 'the idea that children did not insistently ask their parents for toys, sweets or some toothsome drinks in years gone by has only to be stated to be seen to be nonsensical'. Therefore, evidence that advertising encourages children to engage in pester power increasingly or more effectively appears nonexistent. Sauerman (2004:7) nonchalantly claims 'if you want to call it pester power you can, but I think kids know what they want, and they express that, and if that's pester power, well then that's pester power'. Essentially, research studies disagree on whether pester power exists and if so, is it a premeditated commercially driven phenomenon or a natural parent-child interaction. Again it must also be acknowledged that the majority of these studies neglect the consumer perspective of the phenomenon.

The disparity of academic, public interest groups and industry research regarding pester power has resulted in what can only be described as a pointless debate as no agreement or acceptance of findings between both sides appears likely. Salmark (2002:18) concurs and states that 'the issue of advertising to Europe's children had turned into a grim war of attrition with no sign of stalemate being broken or common ground being found'. This has lead to what can only be described as a 'phoney war' with neither party appearing to research the same issues and recognising each others position. Quinn (2002:12) best sums up the debate 'it involves not merely protection of children but also the notion of commercial communication and how to control advertisers so that they hit their predetermined target in a fair and consistent fashion'. In short, 'research has produced a plethora of results, but has hardly developed a comprehensive theoretical insight into the cognitive, psychological and social conditions that dictate how children react to and interpret advertising' (Bjurström, 1994:43). One must therefore question if the focus of the debate, namely television advertising, is misguided, resulting in what is tantamount to a pointless debate between the vested interest parties?

According to Bjurström (1994:45) answers to this question include 'categorical denials that children are influenced by advertising and some doubt'. Bjurström (1994:22) states 'in many

cases both those who defend and criticise advertising agree that advertising influences us, while disagreeing about the extent to which this influence is positive or negative'. Those in favour of advertising highlight its positive effects for the economy, whilst its opponents maintain that it makes us purchase unnecessary items or convey and reinforces 'unacceptable standards and values' (Bjurström, 1994:22; Pollay, 1986). Bjurström (1994) concluded that research into advertising provides only ambiguous answers regarding questions about the influence or effects of advertising, findings similar to Salmark (2002). The European Advertising and Standards Alliance (EASA, 2001) adopt a similar position and agree the effects of advertising on children have two components: social and political. The social concern involves consumer's beliefs that advertising affects children detrimentally. The political issue concerns the formation of public interest groups committed to protecting children from advertising. However, despite these criticisms 'no research findings are ever offered for this assumption….because no research into advertising anywhere in the world has ever come to this conclusion' (Stanbrook, 1993:189). However, industry practitioners are in no doubt of the political and public interest issues surrounding child-targeted campaigns (Fletcher, 2004).

Furthermore another complication of this apparent phoney war is the question of who qualifies to be called a child 'which is at times ambiguous and a recurring question throughout research' (Quinn, 2002:15) in addition, age classifications remain inconsistent (Quinn, 2002). Therefore 'demarcation between childhood and adulthood is not set' (Quinn, 2002:15). A further complication exists because uniformity of research approach is non-existent. Bjurström (1994) concludes that the majority of research concerning children and advertising, includes anyone aged twelve or under.

Finally, much of the research fails to focus on shifts in social and cultural practices. Children today are no longer the same 'innocent' and 'naive' children of previous generations. They are exposed to a proliferation of new media including the internet, have control of their own viewing and are exposed to a huge increase in promotional messages, both for child and traditionally adult-targeted products e.g. alcohol and cars (Preston, 2006). In addition they are far better financed than previous generations (Sabino, 2002). Finally, the old adage of 'children should be seen and not heard' is an outdated model of parenting. Contemporary parenting engages child involvement in family decisions, based on the belief that it is educating them as future

consumers. All of these issues will be explored in more detail in the next chapter. The dual perspective of this pointless debate will now be examined.

## 2.5 Public Interest Groups Perspectives of Pester Power

Public interest groups (including the National Consumer Council (NCC), Euromonitor, Independent Television Commission (ITC), American Psychological Association (APA) and the Office of Communications (OFCOM)) believe pester power is commercially driven, that industry practitioners target children directly, not their gatekeepers (parents predominantly) and therefore it is unfair (Stanley, 2004). In addition, public interest groups claim the use of increasingly influential advertising and the active encouraging of children to pester for purchases ultimately undermines parental authority, resulting in parental yielding to children's demands (Proctor and Richards, 2002). This suggests that these 'messages have a power and status that exceed parental guidance' (Stanbrook, 1993:189). Furthermore, research provides evidence that 'parents are aware of pester power and children identify the tactical framework it offers them to get their own way**'** **(**McDermott, et al., 2006:515). In addition, public interest groups criticise commercially induced pester power for misleading or harming children (Wiman, 1983; Hite and Eck, 1987; Rose, Busch and Kale, 1998; Zoll, 2000; Martino, 2004; Dens, Pelsmacker and Eagle, 2007) which culminates in damaging parent-child relationships.

'Several studies report that consumers perceive pester power as an uncomfortable reality and that it impacts negatively on their family relationships' (McDermott et al., 2006: 515). Middleton et al. (1994:56) report family life incurs 'an endless series of negotiations about money, which required determined resistance to financial demands from offspring'. Irish parents and children also supports the reality of pester power, however, this research involves the influence advertising *and* peers play in creating it (Hetherington, 2003). Warner (as cited in ITC paper (2002:8)) concurs:

> *Economic individualism has brought us to the ultimate nightmare-not just the child as a commodity, but the child as consumer….The child, as a focus of worship, has been privatised as an economic unit, has become a link in the circulation of money and desire.*

According to Mayo (2005:2) children 'are relentlessly targeted by companies and advertisers, operating on occasion with ethics of the playground bully'. McDermott et al. (2006:515) claim

advertisers adopt a 'cynical recruitment of malleable children as marketing's fifth columnists within the family decision-making unit'. Decades earlier, Pollay (1986:18) stated that 'advertising is without doubt a formative influence within our culture, even though we do not yet know its exact effects'. He continued 'advertising's unintended consequences are seen by many as a pollution of our psychological and social ecology' (p.19). Repeatedly, critics claim that advertising and marketing to children is damaging to parent-child relationships, but on what basis?

It is also claimed that practitioners are aware of these issues and report that some marketers talk about 'tapping into pester power' and appealing to children will result in 'tugs on mothers' or fathers' clothing and heart strings, closely followed by an appropriate purchase' (Procter and Richards, 2002:3). Wilson and Wood (2004) found ample evidence of the efficacy of pestering in achieving children's purchase requests; 'you just keep saying please mum, please mum, please mum and then she gets it' (p.334). Gelperowic and Beharrell (1994) report parents too have developed techniques; many parents postpone pestered-for purchases in order to assert their authority, but would eventually concede; similar to Isler et al.'s (1987) 'stalling' tactic. Technique development by both parties for purchases and refusals suggests request interaction not pestering, inferring children are not always successful in their requests; furthermore, none of these studies infer a conflictual relationship.

### *2.5.1 Damaging Effects on Children*

Public interest groups believe that advertising affects children detrimentally (Hite and Eck, 1987). These 'detrimental' effects are reported to include 'promoting materialism, stifling creativity and disrupting parent-child relationships' (Martin, 1997:205). It has also been suggested that any advertising directed at children is in fact 'bad because it exploits their vulnerability' (Adler, Ward, Lesser, Merringoff, Robertson and Rossiter, 1980:21). These criticisms are interrelated, culminating in the damaging effects of what they term pester power and are viewed by many to be potential negative effects of advertising to children (Young, 2003; Spungin, 2004). Further criticisms of these negative effects as evidenced in the literature are summarised and presented in Table 2.6.

**Table 2.6 A Summary of Negative Effects of Advertising on the Family**

| CRITICISMS OF ADVERTISING | AUTHOR(S) |
|---|---|
| Influences children in requesting and purchasing behaviour. | Goldstein, 1994; Quinn, 2002; Martino, 2004 |
| Influences children to put pressure on parents to purchase desired goods. | Dens, Pelsmacker and Eagle, 2007 |
| Parent child conflict. | Wiman, 1983; Isler et al., 1987; Spungin, 2004; Dens, Pelsmacker and Eagle, 2007 |
| Exploits vulnerable and disadvantaged children. | Rose, Busch and Kale, 1998 |
| Imposes stress and strain on low-income parents. | Spungin, 2004; Dens, Pelsmacker and Eagle, 2007 |
| Advertising makes false claims. | National Science Foundation (NSF) as cited in Pollay, 1986 |
| Confused assessment of products. | Hite and Eck, 1987; Dens, Pelsmacker and Eagle, 2007 |
| Misleading children as to its intent. | Hite and Eck, 1987; Lee, 1993; Rose, Busch and Kale, 1998 |
| Promotes materialism. | (NSF) as cited in Pollay, 1986 |
| Encouragement of inappropriate choices. | Rose, Busch and Kale, 1998 |
| Exploits children's fear of peer group exclusion. | Independent Television Commission (ITC), 2002 |
| Status anxiety and anxiety in parents | Lasch, 1987; Zoll, 2000 |

Fletcher (2004:12) states 'advertisers are not fools: if advertising did not work, that is, make children get more toys, or eat the wrong foods, advertisers would not do it, would they?' Advertisers, it implies, exploit this lucrative market and develop innovative efforts to infiltrate them, including previously untapped environments e.g. schools (Fletcher, 2004).

Furthermore, advertising practitioners increasingly aim commercial sales pitches directly at children employing child psychologists to help perfect their messages (Zoll, 2000). Psychologists want the practice declared unethical, and recommend educational campaigns to heighten public awareness of the dangers advertising can pose for children (Zoll, 2000). He states:

> *We don't see them as deliberately trying to harm kids, but I do think they are gravely mistaken. The amount of advertising aimed at kids hurts the way they feel about themselves. It's harmful to them and it inhibits their happiness (p.3)*

Despite the initial statement absolving advertiser's 'deliberate' harming of children, there are, nevertheless, concerns about the proliferation and effects of child-targeted advertising. Pilgrim and Lawrence (2001:1) claim 'in today's western society kids are not concerned about sustenance; their preoccupation is about personal gain with little or no concern for the needs of others'. This reportedly results in undue pressure on both parents and children (ITC Paper, 2002).

*2.5.2 The Influence Factor and the Intended Audience*

The effectiveness with which children influence their parents' spending is considered 'an advertisers dream' (ITC Paper 2002:5) allowing advertisers to influence the adult market through children. As such, advertisements are thought to exploit the relationship between parent and child. However, it could be an indicator of more democratic decision-making in families where parents seek input from their children (Sabino, 2002).

In relation to this Pilgrim and Lawrence (2001:1) identified that 'mothers strive to be the "perfect mum" and aim to please everyone in the family'. If products are beyond her budgetary constraints or are regarded as poor nutritionally, 'the purchase becomes more of a battleground should the child be expressing a desire for that product' (Pilgrim and Lawrence, 2001:1). However, far from mothers criticising pestering, they report mothers regularly encourage children's involvement in purchases' (Pilgrim and Lawrence, 2001). This insinuates that not all purchase requests result in the proverbial 'battleground' mothers seek to educate their children in relation to decision making and the actual purchase itself.

This further raises the issue of whom the advertising message is aimed at. Children are not only exposed to child oriented advertising (Preston, 2006). Three quarters of children's advertising takes place outside of children's airtime (Nielsen, 2003). One can surmise that the majority of

advertising children are exposed to is not explicitly directed at them but at their parents (Preston, 2006). As a result, the bulk of academic research is designed for adult reception, perhaps neglecting a large amount of children's experience of advertising (Preston, 2006). Similarly research also seems to neglect children's experience of the parent-child purchase relationship. In addition, children are receivers of a broad array of advertising types (Preston, 2006). Children's recall of advertisements for adult-specific products is on a par with child relevant advertisements, much to the consternation of consumer groups (Pilgrim and Lawrence, 2001). Furthermore, advertisements for adult products are generally mentioned first, but overall children were positive about advertising (Pilgrim and Lawrence, 2001).

Despite industry practitioners denying advertisements encourage children to want or request the products they see advertised a number of studies, although dated, identify a correspondence between the products children like and request, and those advertised on television (Caron and Ward, 1975; Atkin, 1975a; Galst and White, 1976; Sheik and Moleski, 1977). Furthermore, advertising's influence on children's attitudes towards advertised products are influenced in advertiser-intended direction with as little as one exposure (Goldberg and Gorn, 1974; Gorn and Goldberg, 1977b). Roberston and Rossiter (1974) conclude that younger children are more persuadable. However, a weakness of these studies is they only include mothers' attitudes to television advertising, although this is only to be expected considering the time of publication. In addition, they also promote the belief that advertising makes children more interested in or concerned with consumer goods (De Bens and Vandenbruaene, 1992). According to Bjurström (1994:36) 'on the basis of this, the possibility that the studies reflect the mothers' positive or negative attitudes to advertising rather than the actual values or behaviours of their children cannot be ruled out'. Therefore, is it possible that parents, particularly mothers, assume advertising as the stimulus leads to pestering, rather than actual pestering taking place? If one is to explore the contemporary consumer perspective then both parents must be included in this study to inform the research.

## 2.6 Industry Practitioner Perspectives on Pester Power

Industry practitioners vociferously defend and discredit these accusations and consider pester power a natural interaction between parents and children. They loathe the term pester power and prefer the phrase 'family forces' which infers an *interaction* taking place between parents and

children, because it is 'the interaction that is important not just the child's desires' (Neville, Thomas and Bauman, 2005:105). Neville et al. (2005) claim pester power is portrayed as a one-sided process where children actively pester for purchases, whereas family forces imply a negotiation process. If the interactions taking place between parents and children is a 'negotiation' can it truly be classified as 'pestering'?

Furthermore, 'marketing practitioners display what appear to be contradictory views on the phenomenon' (McDermott et al., 2006: 515). One perspective suggests pester power is a childhood feature not a creation of advertising (Brown, 2004). Proctor and Richards (2002) state that pester power is over rated, claiming instead the crucial success factor for promoting products and sales is word of mouth. Bergler (1999:412) on the other hand has little trouble disproving this claiming; 'advertising leads to a constant increase in children's desires, after which they can get their own way if necessary with weeks of "psychoterror" despite great opposition from their parents'. **'**Psychoterror' is extremely loaded terminology and appears unfounded. Despite such opposing views there is evidence that practitioner's discourse positions children as a route to adult purchase behaviour. Stephen Colgrave of Saatchi and Saatchi Advertising Agency (as cited in ITC paper, (2002:4)) states 'children are much easier to reach with advertising. They pick up on it fast and quite often we can exploit that relationship and get them pestering their parents'. This statement, from an industry practitioner essentially agrees with consumer groups concerns, and appears to provide an impetus for their argument in the debate, however, industry practitioners still continue to defend their practices.

### *2.6.1 Pester Power is Natural*

Defenders of advertisers' right to 'commercial free speech' continue to present pester power as a myth propagated by misguided and unrepresentative activists (Earnshaw, 2001). However, industry practitioners argue along two inconsistent paths (McDermott et al., 2006). The first absolves advertising and marketing activities by emphasising 'the commercial nature of modern life', and maintains that responsible parenting, including saying no to purchase requests, is the key to successful socialisation of children as citizens and consumers (Bas, 1998:1; Furnham, 2000). This positions advertising as an inevitable fact of life, part of the environment in which children naturally grow and develop (Hite and Eck, 1987; Fletcher, 2004; McDermott et al., 2006) weakening the argument for its accountability and alleged consequences.

Paradoxically, the second line of advertising's defence depends precisely on the acknowledgement of its power to stimulate requests (McDermott et al., 2006). Industry advocates in Europe, the UK and Ireland refer to extensive codes of self regulation (e.g. ICC 1997, Article 14 Social Value B; CAP 2003, 47.4; Broadcasting Act, 1991, Section 19) which governs the conduct of advertising to children: A common theme of such codes is an embargo of direct attempts to pester adults. Therefore, McDermott et al. (2006) question how it is possible for advertisers to claim that pester power is a characteristic of childhood not advertising and simultaneously forbid itself from it? Alternatively, it indicates advertisers positioning their practices in a responsible manner, one which attempts to discourage any unintended consequences, while simultaneously protecting their industry from outside influences. In relation to this issue Preston (2000:8) notes 'regulation itself seems unusual given the nature of advertising, and children's relative economic disadvantage'.

Concerns about the ethics and appropriateness of advertising to children have also been a contentious issue. Consumer groups believe children are so impressionable these advertisements should be banned or at the very least heavily restricted. In contrast Pilgrim and Lawrence (2001) claim arguments put forward by lobbyists are invariably weak and not properly researched. Pilgrim and Lawrence (2001:2) state:

> *Our work …shows without a doubt that kids today are indeed very aware of the commercial world as a whole and to cut them off from its influences, be it a ban on advertising, or a ban on sales promotion campaigns to prevent so-called "pester power", would be impossible and potentially damaging…. To suddenly launch them into the real world after "protecting" them from commercial reality until a certain age would certainly render them unprepared, unaware and vulnerable.*

In essence, children today are far more media or commercial 'savvy' than previous generations. Therefore, protecting them from the commercial world is potentially more damaging to them than exposing them to commercial messages. On this point Bandyopadhyay et al. (2001) note that policy makers should still consider the vulnerability of children to exploitation, if parents, as suggested, are unable to filter the their children's exposure to advertising. However, moderate concerns of parents suggest strict regulations are not called for by everyone; parents are not strongly in favour of rigid regulations on children's television advertising (Dens et al., 2006; Spungin, 2004). According to McDermott et al. (2006:537) 'regulation, has not worked to date,

perhaps because pestering is frequently an *unintended* consequence of advertising rather than a calculated marketing strategy'.

*2.6.2 The Influence Factor and the Intended Audience*

Disagreement also permeates the influence element of the pester power construct. This appears to occur because the focus of much of the research concerning pester power commenced from an examination of the influence factor of its construct, primarily television advertising. Some research studies, including public interest groups, address the argument from a position of children's inability to manage advertising; a view of 'child-as-innocent, advertiser-as-seducer' (Young, 1990:58). Piaget's theory of child development is believed to be culpable for such opinions (Buckingham, 1993). However, industry practitioners reject these claims as fabrications created by pressure groups to limit their activities. In relation to this Furnham (2000) (as cited in Dresden et al. (2003:80)) states categorically that 'there is no respectable intellectual argument for the view that advertising *alone* creates false wants and parental conflicts'. Thereby suggesting that pester power originates from other influences along with advertising. Goldstein (1994) suggests that peer influence creates desire and more considered requests from children. Alternatively, many believe (Furnham, 2000; Sauerman, 2002) a mixture of peers and family along with advertising creates pester power. Quinlan (2002:8) supports this view and states:

> *Pester power is as much about the environment children are brought up in, as the kind of advertising they are exposed to. Pester power doesn't just come from children; they are being influenced by their parents and the environment, and from a marketing and advertising viewpoint.*

It appears that the emphasis placed on television advertising and its role in pester power research is too simplistic or misguided an approach to understand this phenomenon in its entirety. If as researchers (Goldstein, 1994; Furnham, 2000; Sauerman, 2000; Quinlan, 2002) suggest, the influence component of pester power is misrepresented, is it possible that other research concerning pester power, its existence, nature and construct share a similar misrepresentation? Is it possible that something other than pester power is occurring?

The fact that advertising is able to attract children's attention can be regarded as a form of influence, and a precondition for advertising having influence over them. According to Bjurström (1994:25):

> *If advertisements fail to attract their attention, it is not likely that they will influence them in other respects. On the other hand, a television commercial that succeeds in attracting children's attention does not necessarily influence them in other ways.*

In other words, there is no direct link between the attention children give to advertising and the influence it has on them for purchase requests. If advertisements cannot attract children's attention then how can they possibly influence them to pester for products?

This is supported by Bas (1998) who claims that removing televisions from households had not isolated children from its commercial effects: 'What they ask for tends to be the kind of things their friends are buying, so advertising itself doesn't seem to me to be a particular issue' (Bas, 1998:7). This statement suggests that television advertising is not responsible for pester power, but more importantly it highlights the issue that others see the advertisements, namely peers. Goldstein (1994) concurs and suggests that instead of advertisements as the major influence on children's demands, it is actually peer influence that creates desire, leading to selective viewing of advertisements and more considered requests. As such this reattribution of influence from advertiser-generated request behaviour to peer-generated 'word of mouth' positions pester power as a societal rather than a managed phenomenon resulting from promotional activity (Pilgrim and Lawrence, 2001; Proctor and Richards, 2002). Isler et al. (1987) also disagree that advertising *alone* is solely to blame for pester power, suggesting 'it can emerge naturally, as a result of societal influence and/or can be the after-effect of a specific advertisement or advertising campaign' (p.38). In addition, none of the definitions of pester power include television or advertising which is surprising considering that advertising is purported, by some, to be the main driver of pester power. Yet despite all of these protestations both McCann Erickson and Saatchi and Saatchi international advertising agencies, introduced children's divisions highlighting the importance attached to this commercial activity (Quinn, 2002).

The investment advertising and marketing practitioners make in relation to specialised children's divisions and campaign seems peculiar considering children are not the 'bread winners', nor are they the main purchasers for their individual households, so the question remains, are they really worthy of targeting? Consumer protection groups believe children should not constitute a consumer market to be targeted for financial gain, instead they should be viewed as consumers' offspring 'passive and naïve' (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2001:100). Advertising, while appealing to children, should be aimed at parents 'for they make the purchasing decisions' (Bandyopadhyay et

al., 2001:103). Opposing this argument is the reality that children are a significant audience who cannot be ignored and are influential players in family purchasing decisions (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2001; Sabino 2002).

Bandyopadhyay et al. (2001) raise an interesting point regarding the intended audience and eventual purchaser for advertised products. Crosier (1999) identified three different audiences; the micro, macro and meta audiences. Micro audiences (children) are the intended target for the advertising messages. The macro audience (parents) refers to those not overtly targeted, but are recognised by advertisers as an inevitable recipient of the message and whose brand attitudes are taken into account by advertisers. The final audience, the meta audience (general public) encompasses all of those not prevented from exposure to the advertisement.

Parents believe exposure to all forms of commercial messages are unavoidable, but there are possible solutions. Advertisers suggest parents can simply turn off the television (Quinn, 2002). This option may seem simplistic; however, it too may lead to serious parent-child conflict (Palan and Wilkes, 1997). It is further complicated by the fact that the number of televisions per household has increased significantly over the last number of decades, from one set per household in 1987, to two or more sets in almost half of households in 2000, with the majority of children having a television in their bedrooms (Quinn, 2002). Family viewing patterns have also changed, with many children now watching television on their own in their bedrooms (Quinn, 2002). Therefore, it is difficult for parents to mediate their viewing habits. Parents may wish to move the focus away from them and onto advertisers however, their inability or reluctance to say no for whatever reason must also be addressed. In addition, it is in the interest of the parent who makes the purchasing decision to mediate the advertisements' influence and filter the child's request (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2001). According to Quinn (2002:9):

> *Blaming advertising is relatively easy, they can pester, they can nag, but in the end it is the parents that make and should make the ultimate decision to buy. The role of parents and the dynamics of the child-parent relationship in each instance come into play here vis-à-vis the relative strength and persistence of pester power.*

### *2.7.3 Unintended Effects*

Regardless of these points, the connection between advertising and pester power is very clear in the minds of some parents (Quinn, 2002). However, whether the interest in an advertised product

persists past the initial request has not been examined. Therefore, the influence and effects of television advertising are inconclusive. Furthermore, the actual extent and strength of pester power resulting from advertising has not been proven to any definitive degree (Jarlbro, 2001). On this point Jarlbro (2001:72) notes 'we find that none of the studies included in the survey actually measures the effects of television advertising, long or short-term'. In addition, some argue that the strength of pester power as a result of television advertising has been greatly exaggerated. Quinn (2002:8) states 'children in Western Europe are exposed to thousands of television commercials per year. But no child asks for thousands of products'.

### *2.7.4 The Vulnerability Issue*

Advertisers do not ignore the lucrative and influential children's market, but targeting children directly raises issues of child vulnerability and exploitation (Quinn, 2000). However, Liebert and Sprafkin (1988:46) present advertising in a more positive light:

> *Is television advertising harmful for children? According to expert scientific opinion…commercials have few effects, if any, either helpful or harmful, on the mental health or emotional development of the viewing child. Further, the right kinds of advertisements can add some positive value to viewing. Children like adults, enjoy good commercials. To be sure there are commercials they dislike, and others they hate, but many find them interesting and highly engaging. They develop favourites and consider many of them delightful, irrespective of whether or not they wish to buy the product.*

Moore and Lutz (2000) concur; in that children enjoy advertising as a form of entertainment; they are active and involved rather than passive recipients of advertising, although it is age related. This does not suggest vulnerability on the part of children; quite the opposite. Children report they are familiar and comfortable with the role of advertising in their lives and are equally aware that advertisements exist to sell products (Duff, 2004). Maclean (1996:5) states 'children are not stupid; pointing out that research has shown that children do in fact understand television advertising better than adults do'. Bartholomew and O' Donohoe (2003) concur with these views and report previous research as 'replete with descriptions of children as "vulnerable", "naïve" and "powerless", the literature…conjures emotive images of meek children at the mercy of the mighty advertisers' (p.433). In support of industry practitioners Bartholomew and O' Donohoe (2003:437) state that far from being 'powerless victims of ideological manipulation, children emerged as active and cynical in relation to advertising'.

According to Pilgrim and Lawrence (2001:4) children report actively avoiding advertisements; 'reflecting their sense of being in control, the children often presented themselves as ad avoiders'. Many advertisements were 'rubbish' or 'boring' but they also concede that advertising often 'makes you laugh'. Consistent with Pollay's (1986) 'myth of personal immunity', they share the view with Buckingham's (1993) informants, the belief that advertising influenced others rather than themselves. If children can view advertisements from both viewpoints, can it really be stated that they are being harmed by or are vulnerable to advertising? Furthermore, if children are indeed cynical, dislike, distrust and avoid advertisements can it really be held accountable as the main influence in purchase requests?

In summation, the literature suggests 'that little common ground exists between many of the results proposed...for every finding there is evidence available by which to contradict it' (Quinn, 2002:1). According to Jarlbro (2002:5) 'it would seem that there are research results which would suit the specific purpose of each and every political or financial interest'. Salmark (2002) concurs and claims research results depend on *who* conducts the research. These oppositional perspectives are further complicated by the fact that existing research into pester power is considered flawed and tainted (Campaign, 2002*).* The positivistic leanings and industry perspective adopted in many of these studies may be accountable for the lack of agreement reported.

### *2.7.5 Pester Power Does Not Exist?*

Ultimately, previous research suggests that the very existence of pester power can be called into question. Kurnit (2005:10) (as cited in Dens et al., (2007)) states 'the children's industry has done itself no favours by referring to kid product influence with the expressions "nag factor" and "pester power". They suggest a manipulative relationship between marketer and child'. Kurnit (2005) identifies an essential aspect to this 'phoney war'. On the basis of the majority of previous research it appears that pester power is *an expression,* a media created buzz word used to perpetuate the debate. However, this expression has gained credence among public interest groups, yet the majority of research conducted from an objective perspective does not support its manifestation.

MacDonald (1980) (as cited in O'Donohoe, (1994:55)) disparages the 'myth of causality' which implied that each advertisement had its own 'electric charge to be 'transmitted to its victim on

impact'. She argues 'that the consumer is not passive, but rather chooses to pay attention, and that an advertisements only value is that which the consumer gives it' (McDonald, 1980:55). Information of this type leads some researchers to conclude that the power or influence of children on adult purchasing is overestimated. Children know what they want; advertising directly to them prepares them for advertising sales pitches they will encounter as adults. Materialism, and increasing materialism in children, may be viewed as part of society, a consuming society, while advertising can be seen as facilitating its existence (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2001). However, this thinking was negated decades earlier by Pollay (1986:30) who stated that 'historians recognise the complexities of our evolution as a society and point out that our culture had materialistic leanings long before the emergence of modern advertising'.

### 2.7 Summary and Conclusions

Pester power and its many factors have been examined and re-examined from a number of different viewpoints, including industry advocates, industry critics and academics, yet findings are replete with inconsistencies and remains inconclusive. Definitional ambiguity appears to be the cause of much of the inconsistencies, along with the narrow focus and emphasis on the influence factor adopted by many of the researchers. All studies appear highly credible, in-depth and rigorous, nevertheless, for every claim there is a counter claim depending on the research focus implemented. This results in what can only be described as a pointless debate or 'phoney war' based on ideological positions adopted by vested interest parties. However, the focus of the research appears to narrow and does not address the very *nature* of the entire parent-child purchase relationship as experienced by consumers.

The main manifestations of pester power's construct appear easily identifiable including: influence, request strategies, parental responses and subsequent effects and behaviour of both parties. Yet these elements and their existence are also an area for disagreement. A main issue concerning this area is a failure by the majority of researchers to address the phenomenon from the consumer perspective, which is not understood. This review raises a number of questions regarding the literature that requires further examination in this vein.

The first question relates to the matter of influence. As mentioned, television advertising is reputedly the main driver of children's requests, however, other influences mentioned including,

parents, peers and in-situ shopping requests have been largely ignored, or at the very least not examined to the same degree as advertising in relation to pester power. Advertising as a focus on the underlying issue is inconclusive yet, it is positioned as the scapegoat in this 'phoney war' despite the majority of academic literature clearly indicating it is not. These other influences must therefore be understood in order to define the construct and to further inform the debate.

Furthermore, vested interest research has failed to address societal changes. In contemporary society, children have more power, influence and finance at their disposal, yet researchers continue to address the issue primarily from a parental perspective rather than a total consumer perspective. Pestering also conjures up images of persistent requests delivered in an inappropriate manner. However, if children do not have the cognitive and social ability to articulate their requests in an appropriate manner are their purchase requests misconstrued as pestering? Similarly, are purchase requests any different to any other type of request made to parents? It is also reported that pester power results in parent-child conflict. However, the question remains, does this conflict emerge and if so is it as prevalent as one is lead to believe? Studies report that it is not, and is conflict pertaining to a purchase request any different to conflict experienced by parents and children?

This calls for an understanding of the contemporary parent-child purchase relationship, not just the pester power aspect of the purchase relationship, from the consumer perspective. Interpretive studies have proved very successful in attempting to understand such phenomenon from the consumer perspective and their usefulness will be further detailed and explored in Chapter Four. This should move the focus away from the positivistic industry perspective prevalent in similar studies. But firstly, the next chapter will attempt to identify how changes in contemporary society, again ignored in the majority of studies, particularly changes in families, have impacted on the parent-child purchase relationship.

# 3.0 Chapter 3: The Child as Consumer

## 3.1 Introduction

The preceding exploration of the research literature reveals much of its focus concentrates on an industry perspective, both advertising and marketing, rather than a consumer perspective; calling into question its very existence and suggesting that there is more involved in the parent-child purchase relationship than just pester power. Therefore, if the pester power portion of the parent-child purchase relationship is debateable, what exactly is the nature of contemporary parent-child purchase relationships? It is therefore imperative that some research concerning parent-child interactions be included if the consumer experience of the phenomenon is to be understood. This will provide a more rigorous grounding in the theoretical framework in order to aid the interpretive approach to be adopted.

Social norms and patterns of family formation are rapidly changing (McDermott et al., 2006) yet, the majority of research is dated neglecting changing family patterns (instead relying on the traditional family unit) and family interactions including communications and decision-making in relation to its impact on the parent-child purchase relationship. Therefore, to better understand and explore contemporary parent-child purchase relationships it is imperative that their interactions and relationships be understood in order to address the consumer perspective of this phenomenon.

Furthermore, children's lack of cognitive and social development is cited as being of major importance in their purchase request relationships. Young (2005:22) claims 'it is important to include some theory that will guide and inform research on children and the commercial world'. Spencer (2004) argues that a scientific understanding of children's development is *fundamental* to understanding children. Children's consumer behaviour research is typically based on one of two types of theoretical models of human learning: cognitive-developmental models and socialisation models (Gunther and Furnham, 1998; Roedder-John, 1999). Studies based on cognitive-developmental models primarily investigated age differences in children and their response to advertising, whereas studies conducted from the socialisation perspective attempt to explain children's consumer socialisation as a function of environmental influences (Valkenburg and Cantor, 2001). If children are to be included in this research then an understanding of their

development as consumers needs to be addressed. This will provide a justification for their inclusion in a research area where they too are central actors in order to address the total consumer perspective.

The industry perspective adopted in the literature by many vested interest parties holds television advertising accountable for driving child purchase requests, although the majority of research states it is not. As a result other influences including parents, siblings, peers and in-store influence have been primarily ignored. Therefore, in order to fully understand the parent-child purchase relationship an exploration of the consumer understanding and meanings associated with these influences in their purchase relationship must be explored and understood.

This chapter will commence with an examination of the two conceptual views of consumer socialisation summarising the theoretical frameworks of cognitive and social development in order to understand how children develop as consumers. This is followed by an exploration of the main influences involved in consumer socialisation including, families, peers, mass media, shops and co-shopping (parents and children shopping together). These influences will be addressed and critiqued in relation to their impact on parent-child purchase relationships. As previously mentioned changes in families have been largely ignored, in previous research; therefore an emphasis will be placed on family influence including the changing composition of families, parent-child interactions, including communication and decision-making, along with their effects on the parent-child purchase relationship.

### 3.2 Cognitive Development

A main goal of children's cognitive development research is to understand how children's behaviour is influenced by their environment (Mussen, Congor, Kagan and Huston, 1990). Valkenburg and Cantor (2001) integrated theoretical perspectives from cognitive development, parent-child interactions and marketing along with children's preferences to highlight stages of consumer competence. They believe this process of consumer competence is grounded in cognitive development and consumer socialisation. Consumer power depends on the development and deployment of knowledge and skills, while age-oriented improvements in cognitive and social development also aid the development of decision-making skills (McDermott et al., 2006).

Piaget's (1970) and Vygotsky's (1978) research has long been identified by academics (Buckingham, 1993; Bartholomew and O' Donohoe, 2003) as the most influential and widely adopted theoretical approaches to children's cognitive development. However, their work appears to provide the foundation for much of the debate concerning children's vulnerability in relation to the commercial world. The work of Piaget is referred to for his comprehensive theory of human development and is renowned for constructing a highly influential age-based model of child development and learning. Furthermore, his framework is regularly cited in research concerning child-targeted advertising (Ward, 1974; Wackman and Wartella, 1977; Ward et al., 1977; Roedder, 1981) and indirectly in relation to its effects on the parent-child purchase relationship. Critics believe Piaget's methods and interpretations led him to underestimate or misinterpret children's competence at younger ages (Donaldson, 1978; Wood, 1988); that he theorised that children's thinking differs from adults (Bartholomew and O'Donohoe, 2003) and as such it is essentially considered a theory of deficits (Wartella, et al., 1981). As a result Piaget's dominance within marketing literature has 'not been particularly healthy, offering a partial and perhaps pessimistic picture of children's powers with respect to advertising' (Bartholomew and O'Donohoe, 2003: 435). These criticisms of Piaget's work provide an impetus for the adoption of consumer research in relations to the parent-child purchase relationship. However, despite criticisms of Piaget, Young (2004) believes many are unwilling to abandon his theories completely. Piaget's insight into children's thinking, growing up occurring in stages, and younger children's judgements being dominated by what they see are still relevant. However, Roedder-John (1999) provides a broader perspective which will be discussed in Section 3.4. Unlike Piaget, Vygotsky (1978) suggested that social interaction is of fundamental importance to child development and those children are functions of the people they grow up amongst, predominantly families. Piaget argues that children develop cognitively; Vygotsky (1978) argues that they develop through social interaction which is dependent on adults' or older peers' guidance in order to solve a problem (Metz and Campion, 1996). According to Vygotsky (1978) full development depends on full social interaction. The Vygotskian view specifically assists in understanding the gap in knowledge which may exist in a child's mind and helps to uncover how parents, peers, television, shopping and co-shopping can help to overcome this gap.

### 3.3 Consumer Socialisation

'Socialisation' is the process by which people move from the biological to the social and adopt the values, standards and skills that permit them to function as social beings' (Roedder-John, 1999:185). According to Hill and Tisdall (1997:4) children are linked into a set of informal relationships 'a personal, social network which evolves over their life span'. A child's personality, interests and activities develop through interactions between a child and networks of social relationships to which they belong (Hill and Tisdall, 1997).

Furthermore, consumer socialisation has been defined as 'a development process by which young people acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace' (Ward, 1974:2) In the 1960's, explorations into children's consumer behaviour gained impetus as researchers explored children's understanding of marketing and retail functions (McNeal, 1964); influence on parents in purchasing decisions (Berey and Pollay, 1968; Wells and LoSciuto, 1966) and relative influence of parents and peers on consumption patterns (Cateora, 1963). In the 1970s, marketing and advertising practitioners gained interest in children's socialisation. This largely concerned public policy issues about marketing and advertising to children, which surfaced as consumer groups such as Action for Children's Television (ACT) in the US began vocalising their criticisms of child-targeted advertising (Roedder-John, 1999). It therefore appears timely to return to consumer research to understand the contemporary parent-child purchase relationship.

The marketing and advertising perspective dominant for several decades lead many researchers to start from the assumption that advertising contributes to providing children with knowledge and expertise that is important for them as consumers (De Bens and Vandenbruaene, 1992; Pilgrim and Lawrence, 2006). Studies completed from the consumer socialisation viewpoint argue that advertising contributes to children's knowledge about different products, consumption behaviour, and how various markets work (Smith and Sweeney, 1984). Preston (2006) concurs and states that children's exposure to advertising is an expression of a socio-economic system, one where they learn the rules of social interaction to facilitate self expression and social conformance.

Consumer socialisation also involves learning and adopting motives and values relevant to consumption activities (Roedder-John, 1999). Consequently, the focus of consumer research

concerns undesirable outcomes of the socialisation process, those often associated with pester power, including orientations towards conspicuous consumption, materialism and non-rational impulse-oriented consumption (Roedder-John, 1999).

### 3.4 Stages of Consumer Socialisation

Roedder-John (1999) states consumer socialisation progresses in three stages, capturing major shifts from pre-school years through to adolescence. These are summarised in Table 3.1. This framework describes the characteristics of children's knowledge, skills and values, at each stage, specifies the approximate age at which children move from one stage to the next and capture important shifts in knowledge development, decision skills and purchase influence strategies (Roedder-John 1999).

**Table 3.1 Consumer Socialisation Stages**

| Characteristics | Perceptual Stage, 3-7 Years | Reflective stage, 7-11 Years | Analytical Stage, 11-16 Years |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Knowledge Structures**: | | | |
| Orientation | Concrete | Abstract | Abstract |
| Focus | Perceptual features | Functional/ underlying features | Functional/ underlying features |
| Complexity | One-dimensional<br>Simple | Two or more dimensions<br>Contingent ("if-then") | Multidimensional<br>Contingent ("if-then") |
| Perspective | Egocentric<br>(Own Perspective) | Dual perspectives<br>(own + others) | Dual perspectives in social context |
| **Decision making & Influence strategies:** | | | |
| Orientation | Expedient | Thoughtful | Strategic |
| Focus | Perceptual features | Functional/ underlying features | Functional/ underlying features |
| Complexity | Salient features<br>Single attributes<br>Limited repertoire of strategies | Relevant features<br>Two or more attributes<br>Expanded repertoire of strategies | Relevant features<br>Multiple attributes<br>Complete repertoire of strategies |
| Adaptivity | Emerging | Moderate | Fully developed |
| Perspective | Egocentric | Dual perspective | Dual perspectives in social context |

*Source:* Roedder-John (1999) 'Consumer Socialisation of Children', *Journal of Consumer Research* Vol. 26 Issue 3 (December) p.186.

Roedder-John (1999) identified movements from the perceptual to the reflective stage, highlighting knowledge development in moves from concrete to abstract representations, perceptual to underlying features of objects and events, simple to more intricate representations,

accompanied by multiple dimensions and contingencies, along with an egocentric to a socially aware perspective. Decision-making and influence strategies share similar change dimensions, moving from expedient to strategic orientation, from an emphasis on perceptually salient features to more relevant underlying features, from a limited repertoire to a more complete repertoire of strategies capable of handling multiple attributes and from limited to more developed abilities to adapt strategies to tasks and situations (Roedder-John, 1999).

## 3.5 Socialisation Influences: Familial

Roedder-John's (1999) theoretical framework highlights an age focus in the majority of research concerning cognitive and social development. However, other factors must also be considered. Important among them is the social environment in which children learn to become consumers, including parents, siblings, peers, mass media, television, shopping and co-shopping (Bandura and Walters 1963; McNeal, 1964; Ward, 1974; Moschis and Churchill, 1978; Carlson, Laczniak and Muehling, 1994). Despite a plethora of research, significant gaps remain in developing a precise understanding of the exact role the social environment and experiences play in consumer socialisation (Roedder-John, 1999). Research also suggests that children have their own ways of thinking, including differing priorities to parents (Hill and Tisdall, 1997). Piaget (1971) also includes social influences as a factor in cognitive development, stressing the role of social interactions with peers and others on transition between stages. Vygotsky (1978) represents an even stronger position, arguing that learning takes place only in the midst of social interaction with others within a specific culture. These theoretical views of cognitive development provide a basis for understanding several important aspects of the social environment in which consumer socialisation takes place. These environments and influences associated with consumer development will now be addressed to enhance an understanding of their importance in the parent-child purchase relationship.

### *3.5.1 Family Influence in Socialisation*

Families play an important role in developing children as effective consumers through consumer socialisation, whereby young people learn the skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to their successful functioning in the marketplace (Ward, 1974; Moschis, 1987; Carlson and Grossbart,

1988). The influence of family can further be broken down into two distinct influences: parents and siblings.

Hill and Tisdall (1997) claim that families are no longer regarded as the sole means of instilling parental and societal knowledge and values. 'Children now contribute in major ways to the nature and variety of family life through *reciprocal interactive processes'* (Hill and Tisdall, 1997:90). Thus parents influence a child's economic education (Bas, 1996; 1998) but reciprocally, parents absorb information and norms (often about new technology) from their children (Ekstrom, Tansujah, and Foxman, 1987). This changed academic view corresponds with legal and social developments towards less dictatorial and more negotiated parent-child relationships (Dahlberg, 1996) thus suggesting more egalitarian and 'open' parent-child relations. Therefore, if parent-child relations are indeed more open and negotiated, what impact does this *now* have on the contemporary nature of parent–child purchase relationships?

*3.5.2 The Changing Family*

Family dynamics are changing, therefore, it is pertinent to explore their effects on parent-child relationships in general, purchase relationships more specifically. Typical research, to date, concerning families focused on the traditional family unit. Hill and Tisdall (1997:66) state:

> *Traditional patterns of family formation have given way to greater flexibility but less stability…the idea of family is to some degree a fluid one', with a mix of concepts at its core; direct biological relatedness, parental caring role, long-term co-habitation and permanent belonging.*

But families are still an important element of socialisation (Pringle, 1980). Roedder-John (1999:199) notes that although these historical notions concerning families have provided a beneficial overview of the family 'another useful analysis is to look at the family unit at a more disaggregate level'. She further stresses that 'it is rare for consumer researchers to break down the family communications process into discrete units, such as father-son or mother-son communication' (Roedder-John, 1999:199). It is possible that these individual relationships have as much, if not more influence on consumer socialisation than general family characteristics.

These observations are useful when one considers the changing demographics of contemporary families. McNeal (1992) and more recently Valkenburg and Cantor (2001) identified trends and

state that an increased economic power and influence on family decisions of today's children can be explained by several socioeconomic changes in recent decades. Parents have larger incomes, higher educational attainments; often postpone having children and have fewer of them; more single-parent families and dual-working-parent families (McNeal, 1992; Gunther and Furnham, 1998; Geuens, De Pelsmacker and Mast, 2003; Ekstrom, 2004). The most recent (Irish) statistics support these trends with the current average gross income approximately €1000 per week; 34% of all 25-64 year olds possess a third level education; predominant household types consist of couples with children accounting for 35% although single parent families now account for 16.2% of all Irish families; the average number of children per household is currently 1.4 children with the average age of first time mothers approximately 31 years of age (CSO, 2007).

These changes result in parents having less contact time with their children, thus they delegate responsibilities to other members of the family including children (Sabino, 2002). Overcompensation and indulgence is also frequently witnessed in these families, resulting in greater child influence in decision-making (McNeal, 1992; Sabino, 2002; Geuens, et al., 2003). Furthermore, 'the amount of communication is less in these families due to the lack of time spent together' (Geuens, et al., 2003:58). This poverty of time implies that everyday interactions between parents and children become an opportunity for sharing information (Sabino, 2002). Sabino (2002:12) further highlights:

> *As a result of children having access to more information and their time-stressed parents needing help, wanting to raise empowered, happy children and gaining pleasure from their family interactions, it is logical that there is a profound increase in the influence children are having in the family decision-making process.*

Parents are also aware of the impact of other information sources such as peers and media and therefore may be more accepting of children's input into decision-making. Sabino (2002:11) also states that nine out of ten parents actively discuss child requests and purchases with the child, where '"kids-as-consumer-consultant" extends to the whole family as well'. The liberalisations of parent-child relationships in western societies may also explain these changes in decision-making (Valkenburg and Cantor, 2001). Decades ago, child-rearing models were characterised by authority, obedience and respect (Torrance, 1998). In contemporary families understanding, equality and compromise are considered pertinent, the parent-child relationship is therefore no longer regulated by authority and command but negotiation (Torrance, 1998). As a result,

children have never been as emancipated, articulate and market savvy (Gunther and Furnham, 1998). These issues, including family decision-making and family communications will be examined in greater detail later to facilitate an understanding of the parent-child purchase relationship.

Sabino (2002) commenting on research results polled in the Millennium Mom Survey (2001) (See Table 3.2) notes these demographic shifts have resulted in changes in ideas of contemporary successful parenting. A child's happiness was rated highest by mothers (seventy percent) closely followed by a child's self esteem (sixty-nine percent). This may partly reflect a mothers desire to provide her child with requested products and to ensure her child is accepted by their peers regarding 'must have' items. Some of these responses, particularly child's happiness, self esteem, popularity and developing independence may be associated with purchase behaviour.

**Table 3.2 Successful Parenting**

| SEEN AS STRONG EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS AS A PARENT | FREQUENCY % |
|---|---|
| Child's happiness | 70 |
| Child's self esteem | 69 |
| Child's comfort in discussing sensitive issues with parents | 68 |
| Child's manners | 68 |
| Child's behaviour in public | 67 |
| Child developing independence | 66 |
| Child's popularity | 66 |
| Child's academic success | 62 |
| Balancing work and parenting responsibilities | 62 |
| Child's empathy for others | 60 |

*Source*: Millennium Mom Survey (2001) as cited in Sabino (2002) 'Changing Families, Changing Kids', A*dvertising and Marketing to Children,* Oct-Dec:12

In addition children's happiness, self esteem and popularity can be associated with reasons parents accede to their children's purchase requests. Developing independence could possibly relate to three issues: Firstly, parent's inaccessibility to children as a result of work and time pressures. Secondly, it could also relate to developing the child's ability to be an independent consumer. Furthermore, parents themselves are also concerned with their role as providers. Again this may result in the overcompensation described earlier as parents try to address their work-life

balance. Parents understand their need to work for financial stability but their concern also lies with parenting responsibilities. This is evident in concerns for raising independent happy, well mannered, successful children. Thirdly, parents are concerned with communicating with their children. Sixty eight percent of parents stated that an ability to discuss sensitive issues with their children of paramount importance, this indicates a more discursive relationships. It is possible therefore, that these discussions include decision-making and purchase requests.

### *3.5.3 The Parental Influence*

Parents as socialisation agents affect many key consumer behaviours, including brand preference and loyalty, information search, reliance on mass media, price sensitivity, purchasing habits, values and attitudes (Ward, 1974; Moschis, 1987; Childers and Rao, 1992; Hill and Tisdall, 1997; Neeley and Coffey, 2002; Cotte and Wood, 2004). Children learn these behaviours either directly, as parents teach them and/or indirectly through observation of their parent's behaviours (Ward, 1974; Ward et al., 1977; Moschis, Moore and Smith, 1984). This is linked to general parenting style (Carlson and Grossbart, 1988) and its purported influence on child behaviour which will be examined later.

McNeal (1964) reports that as children mature they have an increasing desire to assume independent purchasing activities, coupled with an increasing parental permissiveness with this behaviour. Children gradually take responsibility and are encouraged and cautioned by adults whose dual aim is to develop abilities while avoiding harm (ITC Paper, 2002). This is linked to the debate concerning purchase requests and child-targeted advertising, where parents aim to teach children to be responsible consumers, while simultaneously trying to shield them from any potentially harmful influences such as television advertising.

McDermott et al. (2006) argue that advertising directly to children could be perceived as interrupting the parent-child relationship by avoiding or undermining the filtering role of parents, a view adopted by public interest groups. Valkenburg and Cantor (2001) claim commercial messages have made children less dependent on parents in learning consumer values. They further state the possibility that entertainment and advertising aimed at children shortens the period where parents are the primary socialising force in their lives. Children today may have the spending power to utilise their consumer skills, but they still often lack the maturity to carefully

analyse buying decisions (Valkenburg and Cantor, 2001). Thus parents are still considered hugely important in the socialisation of children.

### *3.5.4 Parental Socialisation Styles*

Regardless of family composition, parents adopt various socialisation styles which influence their children's social development. They serve as role models providing purposive training and opportunities to learn (Ward, Wackman and Wartella, 1977) but most socialisation occurs through 'subtle interpersonal processes' (Ward, 1974:3). Carlson and Grossbart (1988:79) note 'socialisation methods differ among groups employing distinct parenting styles'. Hill and Tisdall (1997:78) state 'fortunately most parents, regardless of their parental styles, adopt approaches which combine rules, guidance, flexibility and negotiation'.

A typology of six parental socialisation types have been identified, these include: authoritarian, rigid, controlling, organised effective, indulgent and neglecting parents (Carlson and Grossbart, 1988; Carlson, Grossbart and Stuenkel, 1992). Similarly Baumrind (1991a) identified four prevalent parental types these include: neglecting, indulgent, authoritarian, and authoritative. Neglecting parents are more detached from their children, do not encourage children's autonomous development and give their children little attention; consequently they may be influenced more by other socialisation agents. Indulgent parents tend to be more permissive and attempt to remove as many environmental constraints as possible without endangering their children's welfare (Baumrind, 1978) providing children with adult rights as opposed to adult responsibilities. In contrast, authoritarian parents are more restrictive than permissive when interacting with children; they discourage verbal exchanges and maintain high levels of control over children. Consequently their children are expected to obey rather than question parental authority and they also tend to be more hostile toward children (Crosby and Grossbart, 1984). Authoritative parents on the other hand are most likely to balance parents' and children's rights and responsibilities (Gardner, 1982) and they encourage self expression (Baumrind, 1968). However, authoritatives are restrictive; they expect children to act maturely and in accordance with family rules as they mature. Authoritatives expand children's boundaries and promote autonomous development (Baumrind, 1978).

Neeley and Coffey (2002) also examined parental socialisation styles particularly those of mothers, on the basis of parents being 'permissive' or 'restrictive'. Both these styles have similar properties to those of Baumrind's (1991a) indulgent and authoritarian socialisation styles. Restrictive mothers make decisions for her child, expects her child to conform to pre-established rules, are less likely to allow their children to influence decisions and purchases, exhibit a higher level of control over their children, are more deliberate decision-makers, more purposeful shoppers and less responsive to outside influences, to the point of 'resenting influences on themselves and their children' (Neeley and Coffey, 2002:59); thus they are less responsive to their children's requests. They expect conformity, rigid standards of conduct and expect more mature behaviour from their children. Permissive mothers are more likely to allow and encourage children in decisions and even consider bad decisions as learning opportunities, allow children 'equal power in decision-making on household purchases and will often submit to her child's requests' (Neeley and Coffey, 2002:58). They are more responsive to outside influences such as other people, media and brand images, are more indulgent with their children, allow more freedom in requests and are more responsive to their children's requests. 'They expect their kids to act as 'kids' and to be more impulsive and immature' (Neeley and Coffey, 2002:58). It is therefore apparent that parents who adopt different parental styles and communications techniques affect children's socialisation as consumers and impacts on the their parent-child purchase relationships.

### *3.5.5 Family Communications*

In addition, family communication patterns are considered pivotal in child consumer socialisation with the communication style adopted by parents playing a role in the subsequent purchase influence of children (Caruana and Vassallo, 2003). Interactions occur between both parties when parents and children communicate about purchases and consumption (Ward et al., 1977). 'Given the more subtle nature of family influences, researchers have turned their attention to general patterns of family communication' (Geuens et al., 2003:57). Geuens et al. (2003:56) state **'**parents who satisfy children's requests encourage children to be attentive to advertising and to ask for things more frequently; while parents, who discuss children's requests, encourage them to develop skills in selecting and interpreting product information (Ward, et al., 1986). Furthermore, the method of communication between parent and child has a more significant impact on

consumer socialisation than frequency or amount of interaction between parent and child (Moschis and Moore, 1979; Moschis, et al., 1984; Moschis and Mitchell, 1986). 'Family communication patterns are instrumental in the amount of influence that children exercise on family decisions in the present, and the way children will behave as consumers in the future' Geuens et al. (2003:57). However, limited evidence to date suggests that the family serves as an important buffer against undesirable media influences (Roedder-John, 1999). For example, in Moschis and Moore's (1982) study of materialism, television exposure was positively related to materialistic values except in those families with strong communication patterns. In addition, Roedder-John (1999:187) states 'much of the criticism of advertising and marketing to children might be informed by a better understanding of how these influences operate and are mediated by the family environment'.

Carlson and Grossbart (1988) identified four patterns relating to 'parent-child communication about consumption'. These are concept and socio-orientation; frequency of co-shopping; the child's influence and amount of family communication. Concept and socio-orientations lead to a fourfold typology of family communication patterns: Laissez Faire, Protective, Pluralistic and Consensual (Moore and Moschis, 1981; Moschis and Moore, 1979b; Moschis, Prahasto and Mitchell, 1986; Rose, Busch and Kale, 1998). Figure 3.1 summarises the main characteristics associated with these communications patterns.

The socio-oriented communication dimension is intended to produce obedient children and to encourage harmonious and pleasant social relationships at home; it is based on monitoring and controlling the behaviour of children and is motivated by social conformity. Children are encouraged to make consumer decisions that lead to the liking and acceptance of others; they are taught to avoid controversy and to repress their feelings for the sake of not arguing or offending others (Rose et al. 1998).

In contrast, the concept-oriented parental communication dimension encourages children to develop their own views about the world; parents encourage the child to weigh alternatives before making a decision possibly exposing children to controversy by discussing issues openly (Moschis and Moore, 1979; Moschis et al., 1986; Ekstrom, et al., 1987; Rose et al., 1998).

**Figure 3.1 A Typology of Family Communication Patterns**

| | | Socio-Orientation | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Low** | **High** |
| **Concept-Orientation** | **Low** | ***Laissez-Faire***<br>Little communication with children<br>Little parental impact on consumption | ***Protective***<br>Stress vertical relationships<br>Obedience and social harmony<br>Children's exposure to outside information is limited |
| | **High** | ***Pluralistic***<br>Stress horizontal relationships<br>Issue-oriented communication<br>Children are encouraged to explore ideas and express opinions | ***Consensual***<br>Maintain control over children's behaviour<br>Stress both issue-oriented communication and the consideration of others |

*Source*: Rose et al. (1998) 'The Influence of Family Communication Patterns on Parental Reactions towards Advertising: A Cross-National Examination', *Journal of Advertising*, 27(4):74.

According to Geuens et al. (2003) children of concept-oriented parents, in general, have an influence on purchase decisions, while those with socio-orientation parents, in general, do not. Since concept oriented parents encourage children to develop their own skills and competence as consumers they are likely to yield to children's demands more frequently. Furthermore, Neeley and Coffey (2002:57) state 'the parenting/communication style adopted greatly affects how they establish rules of power and influence'. This suggests concept oriented parents adopt a more balanced approach to power and influence with both parties contributing, while socio-oriented parents retain power and ultimate decision-making regardless of other influences.

*3.5.5.1 Formal and Informal Communications*

Thompson (2003) researched family communication patterns and categorised them along formal and informal dimensions. He claims formal discussion is encouraged by one or both parents; children do not initiate formal discussions, but instigate informal methods which are conversational and unplanned and may arise without prior intention (Thompson, 2003). According to Thompson (2003:27) 'with informal communication there may not be a specific

outcome in mind for discussion and communication may be fairly broad in nature'. He suggests children may be taught consumer skills through both informal and formal communication methods. Families who predominantly use informal communication cite this as one of the reasons for involving children in decision-making (Thompson, 2003).

Thompson (2003) further claims that communication between parents and children may be two way. Furthermore, he identified that whatever method of communication children use they are aware of their parent's interest in purchases and tailor their communication accordingly: 'They would discuss the purchase with the parent who had the most interest and whom they felt they would be able to influence' (Thompson, 2003:32). This highlights the child's ability to engage in considered discussion with parents and to tailor the discussion to the most appropriate parent in order to *influence* not *pester* them. None of his findings suggest any conflictual relationship between parents and children in relation to purchase requests or decisions.

### *3.5.6 Conflict and Negotiation*

However, according to Kilme-Dougan and Kopp (1999) parental styles and parent-child/family communication can and do result in conflict situations, not just in relation to consumption but also regarding everyday activities and interactions between parents and children. Conflict includes simple opposition and refusals to reasoned arguments (e.g. negotiation) which may be comprised of complex exchanges. Ultimately the desired outcome is a negotiation between both parties resulting in a favourable outcome for both (Kilme-Dougan and Kopp, 1999). This suggests that all conflict patterns are the same regardless of the stimulus.

#### *3.5.6.1 Conflict*

When people communicate and interact as closely as families it is inevitable that some situations may result in conflict (Kilme-Dougan and Kopp, 1999). Furthermore, conflict is not the same as aggression and may be positive in development (Shantz, 1987; Kuczynski and Kochanska, 1990). A wealth of data attest to first an increase and then a subsequent decrease in negativism and parent-child conflict during the toddler and preschool years (Dunn, 1988 and Wenar, 1982). A decrease may also result from children's growing ability to negotiate (Valkenburg and Cantor, 2001). The development of negotiation strategies in children originates in the 'terrible twos', when children start to exhibit explicit uncooperative and noncompliant behaviour, temporarily,

until they recognise this behaviour is less effective than negotiation (Dunn and Munn, 1987; Kuczynski, Kochanska, Radke-Yarrow and Girniusbrown, 1987; McNeal, 1992; Valkenburg and Cantor, 2001). Conflict decreases by age four (Kilme-Dougan and Kopp 1999; Cummins and Davies, 1994); by the age of five particularly in homes where negotiation plays an important role in family communications, children possess a sophisticated range of negotiation strategies (McNeal, 1992). Conflict is thought to decline during this age period as children become more amenable to adult direction and more socialised to standards of behaviour (Gralinski and Kopp, 1993). This may occur for a number of reasons. Firstly, children hear their parents talk about prioritising expenses and they see which products are bought and used (Ward et al., 1977; Hill and Tisdall, 1997). Secondly, there is an interaction between both parties; they communicate about purchases and consumption (Ward et al., 1977) so conflict is not always prevalent. In addition, young children also have disputes with siblings (Dunn and Munn, 1987; Shantz and Hobart, 1989; Ross, 1996) and peers (Hay, 1984; Shantz, 1987). Therefore, conflict is not just limited to parents and children.

#### *3.5.6.2 Negotiation*

Negotiation occurs within an interpersonal context and involves persuasion (Putnam and Jones, 1982). According to Yeates and Selman (1989:75-76) negotiation is:

> *The means by which an individual tries to meet personal needs via interaction with another individual when both participants' needs are in conflict… Interpersonal negotiation strategies serve to resolve the felt conflict, or intra-and interpersonal disequilibrium, that sometimes arises in interactions with other individuals when trying to accomplish a personal goal.*

Kuczynski et al. (1987) provide a more general definition of negotiation as 'attempts to reach a new mutually agreed upon parental directive' (p.802). Negotiation strategies include bargaining, proposition of alternatives, compromising and excuses. Negotiation occurs as children become aware of multiple viewpoints simultaneously, their own and parents Roedder-John (1999). This is characteristic of older children in the analytical stage (seven to eleven) as identified by Roedder-John (1999). Results indicate that use of sophisticated negotiation strategies is associated with social status and effective peer interactions (Burleson, Applegate, Burke, Clark, Delia and Kline, 1986; Yeates, Schultz and Selman, 1990).

Children assume a more active role in purchase discussions following years of listening to their parents describe why certain requests can or cannot be facilitated (Palan and Wilkes, 1997) in effect learning to reason, persuade and negotiate for what they want. Finally, extended discussions become more necessary as children shift purchase requests from inexpensive to expensive items (McNeal, 1992). By the time they reach early adolescence, and move into the reflective stages (11-16) children have an entire repertoire of negotiation strategies available to them (Kim, Lee and Hall, 1991; Manchanda, Moore-Shay, 1996; Palan and Wilkes, 1997). These strategies are more sophisticated and used in a flexible manner suitable to the situation or parental objections, thus reducing the number of conflict episodes experienced.

### *3.5.7 Sibling Influence*

Siblings are an important role model for each other and may also act as a relevant peer group for comparison and modelling (Cotte and Wood, 2004). Siblings may socialise with each other in many households more than with their parents. These interactions are characterised as intra-generational and allow siblings to become an important reference group influencing behaviour (Bearden and Etzel, 1982). Attitudes and interests are also similar among siblings (Hoffman 1991). Variables such as the number of siblings or birth order have been examined, but 'significant findings have yet to emerge' (Roedder-John, 1999:206). Possibly, siblings that are far apart in age or a different gender have little influence, or that siblings exert influence in some areas but not others (Roedder-John, 1999). The overall conclusion points to the fact that family influences operate differently for different children within the same family (Roedder-John, 1999).

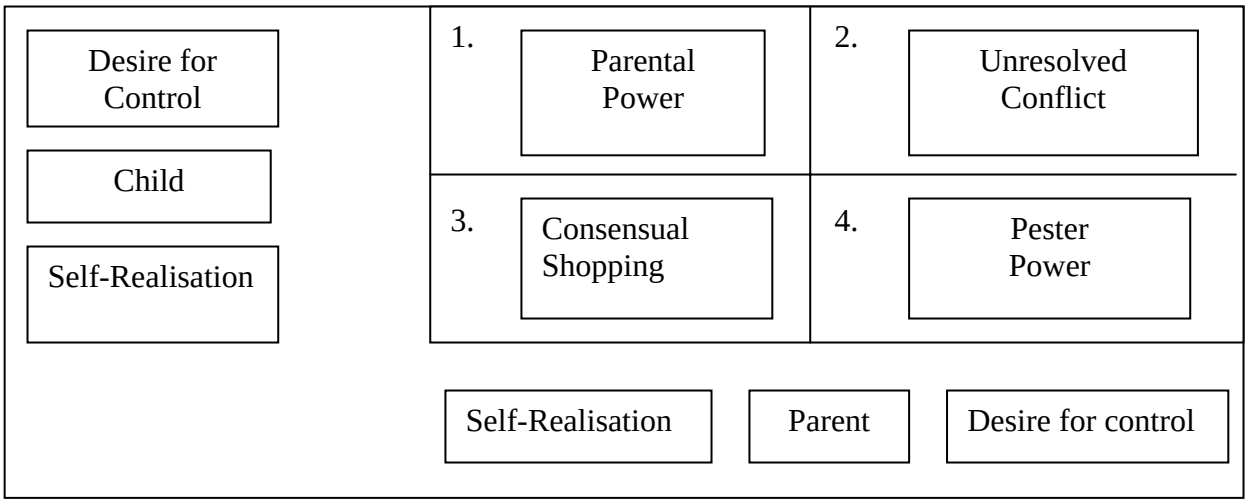
### *3.5.8 Decision Making in Families*

Lindstrom (2004) suggests that this generation of children differ greatly from previous ones in their ability to influence parental expenditure. As previously mentioned, decision-making within households has become more open, parents and children making joint purchasing decisions. Despite this, differences in priorities remain. Children are more likely to be brand-focused while parents are feature-or benefit-focused, but the overlap between them is growing fast (Preston, 2006). The result of these differences could produce parent-child conflict for purchase requests. Inter and intra-generational influences affect family decision-making, yet, family purchasing research often neglects the important role children play in purchase decisions (Lackman and

Lanasa, 1993); thus the role of children as active participants has gained credence (Hill and Tisdall 1997). Furthermore, this provides an impetus to include children in this study.

Purchase behaviour contributes to a child's socialisation process and helps develop the child's sense of itself (Nicholls and Cullen, 2004). Prout (2000) (as cited in Nicholls and Cullen, (2004)) claims contemporary consumption patterns are crucial for a child's identity and social relations with other children. Thus children's right to participate in purchase decisions become even more pronounced (Nicholls and Cullen, 2004). Nicholls and Cullen (2004) also identified an ethical framework for conceptualising the parent-child purchase relationship, The Child-Parent Consumption Matrix.

**Figure 3.2 The Child-Parent Consumption Matrix**




*Source:* Adapted from Nicholls and Cullen (2004) 'The Child-Parent Purchase Relationship: 'Pester Power', Human Rights and Retail Ethics', *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol.11, Issue 2, p.81.

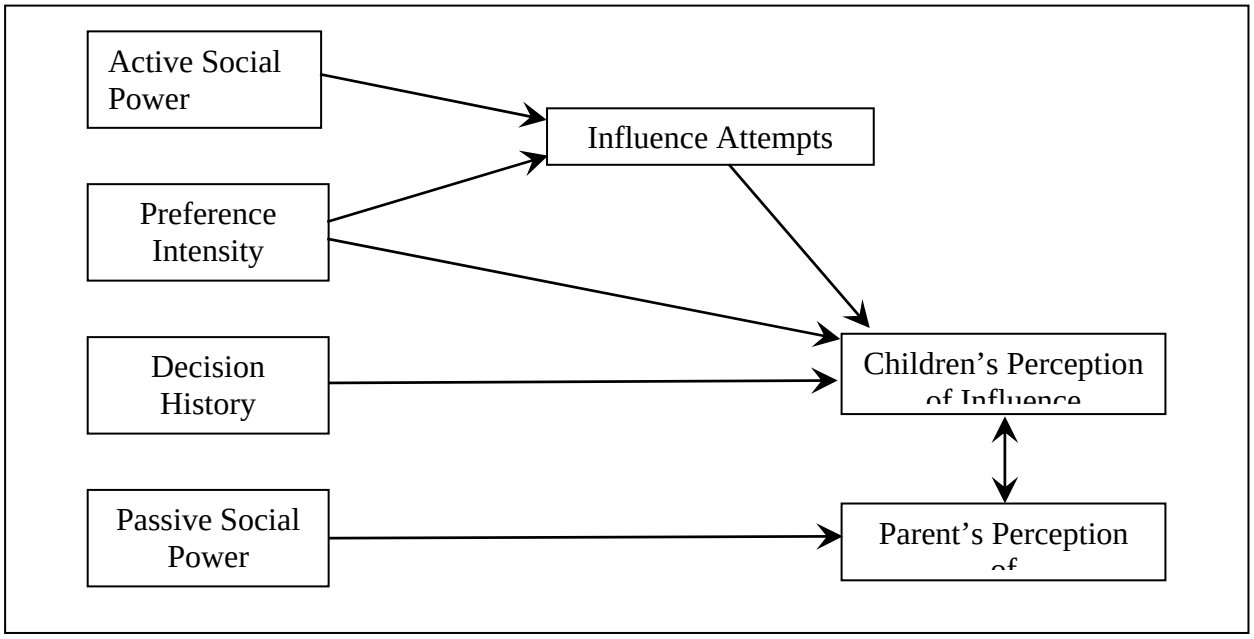
This framework focuses on the dynamics of desire for control and self realisation between parent and child in the retail context. While retail purchases are not necessarily the focus of this research, but purchases in general, it nevertheless provides a useful insight into parent-child decision-making. Quadrant 1 acknowledges children's desire to control parents' purchases, which conflicts with parents' need for self realisation; thus parents may exert their power and direct the child towards more appropriate purchases (Nicholls and Cullen, 2004). Quadrant 2 identifies both parties' attempts to control the purchase situation (Nicholls and Cullen, 2004). Various strategies mentioned may be used by the child to gain control but above all, they are persistent (McNeal, 1992). However, this often results in no purchase at all (Nicholls and Cullen, 2004). (Quadrant 3

relates specifically to a shopping scenario and is not of direct relevance to this research, again because this study concerns purchases in general.) Quadrant 4 acknowledges a child's need for self-realisation through consumption, in opposition to a parent's need to control 'unnecessary' or inappropriate expenditure (Nicholls and Cullen, 2004). At this stage attempts to block a child's request may result in conflict (Nicholls and Cullen, 2004).

*3.5.8.1 Social Power Theory*

In relation to influence and power evidence exists that children exert varying degrees of influence on the family decision-making process. This influence varies by product, decision stage, child, parental and family characteristics but are not properly researched (Flurry and Burns, 2005). They further developed a theoretical framework (See Figure 3.3) based on active and passive social power theory, to describe children's influence in family purchase decisions. It includes preference intensity and decision history in order to understand a child's influence power.

**Figure 3.3 Conceptual Model of Children's Influence in Purchase Decisions**




Source: Flurry, L.A. and Burns, A.C. (2005) 'Children's Influence in Purchase Decisions: A Social Power Theory Approach', *Journal of Business Research*, 58:593

Social power theory is useful in explaining differences in children's influence on purchases and distinguishes between influence derived from active and passive power, compatible with direct and indirect influence (Flurry and Burns, 2005). Power bases pertinent to exercising influence include: expert (e.g. children possess detailed knowledge about toys, games etc.); legitimate (e.g.

children and products they consume including food, toys and clothing); referent (identifying with peers); reward (children exhibiting good behaviour) and coercive power (e.g. children threatening negative or bothersome behaviour, complaining or even pestering) (Flurry and Burns, 2005).

Furthermore, social power theory further suggests the five power bases may be utilised in two ways: actively and passively (Flurry and Burns, 2005). Power used to influence is an active and intentional action; passive, when the mere presence of power is influential (French and Raven, 1959). Both contribute to a person's potential to direct a preferential outcome (Flurry and Burns, 2005).

*3.5.8.2 Children's Active and Passive Social Power*

Active social power is perceived and directly controlled by the child (Flurry and Burns, 2005). A child's power base results in influence attempts directed to control the decision outcome and include asking, pleading, bargaining, persisting, using force, telling, being demonstrative, sugar-coating, threatening, and using pity (Atkin, 1978; Isler et al.1987; Palan and Wilkes, 1997; McNeal, 1992; Williams and Burns, 2000). A child's influence may also be passive, speech or overt actions are not utilised and parents simply infer its presence (Flurry and Burns, 2005). It is influence attributed to the child by parents or parents' perception of a child's unstated preferences (Wells, 1965; Isler et al., 1987; and Pilgrim and Lawrence, 2001) therefore the purchase is made automatically rather than through any overt influence. Parents learn their children's likes and dislikes and make purchase decisions accordingly (Roedder-John, 1999).

*3.5.8.3 Decision History*

In addition, a child's decision history can influence how, and possibly to whom, they request products. Decision history is defined as a person's perception of their past success in a similar exchange (Flurry and Burns, 2005). According to Flurry and Burns (2005) historical decision outcomes play a part in influence and children learn the types of behaviour appropriate for the situation suggesting a person will repeat rewarding behaviours until they are no longer successful (Corfman and Lehmann, 1987; Flurry and Burns, 2005). In essence this advocates that if children are aware persistent requesting works they will continue to do so and vice versa. This could possibly account for the pestering or nagging criticisms associated with the notion of pester power. However, it appears that children have more strategies, such as those already mentioned, for requesting, not just pestering.

*3.5.8.4 Preference Intensity*

Preference intensity is a motivational construct that reflects the extent to which a person desires to achieve a particular outcome or purchase, similar to persistence nagging (Dolliver, 1998; Brandweek, 1998: and Ruskin, 1999). The more important the purchase decision the more effort exerted to influence the decision (Scanzoni and Szinovacz, 1980); thus children with more intense preference, or who strongly desire a product, are more likely to exhibit less socially acceptable behaviours such as pestering (Flurry and Burns, 2005). However, parents are unwilling to acknowledge this influence strategy because they would have to acknowledge that the children possess reward and coercive power. They would have to admit susceptibility to manipulation by their children, suggesting parents may lack a parenting style or skills (Flurry and Burns, 2005) or more appropriately are perceived by society to lack such skills.

These power bases appear to afford children more control in the decision-making process. This suggests that children are aware that using strategies such as exhibiting knowledge about the product, rewarding parents with 'good' behaviours and selecting parent approved items are the most effective strategies to positively influence purchase decisions and that sanctioning parents via negative actions may also be useful (Flurry and Burns, 2005), suggesting that pestering for products does not always occur and furthermore, is not as successful as other attempts. This research demonstrates that children are aware of their social power bases and match their power resources with appropriate influence attempts to yield the greatest return (Flurry and Burns, 2005).

## 3.6 Other influences: Non Familial

Singh and Ingham (2003) report more than a third of respondents believe advertising is the most important factor influencing children's desires. Friends too are an ascribed influence across the broadest range of products (Moschis and Moore, 1979), with thirty seven percent of people believing children's friends are the most significant factor, just fifteen percent citing parents as the deciding factor (Singh and Ingham, 2003). Schools are believed to be an influence by a mere nine percent of the population although it is not stated if school refers to teachers or classmates. Classmates could also be categorised as peers, so it is assumed that school refers to classmates, thus peers. These influences will now be examined in relation to their socialisation and influence effects.

### *3.6.1 Peers*

Peers are a significant source of influence on children's consumer behaviour (Campbell, 1969; Piaget, 1971; Vygotsky, 1978; Moschis and Moore 1979). Hill and Tisdall (1997:5) note 'peer relationships offer opportunities for children to acquire different kinds of knowledge compared with parents or teachers'. At a young age children begin to orient actions and motives towards peers and siblings rather than parents alone (Rogers, 1969; Ward, 1974; Moschis and Churchill, 1978). From this point on, the child's ongoing interactions with their peers, along with parents, shapes their emotional and social development (Kagan 1969; Rogers, 1969).

Peer influence susceptibility is positively related to materialistic attitudes, and concerns of this nature have escalated, as evidence points to a heightened level of materialism among children (Easterlin and Crimmins, 1991; Achenreiner, 1997; McDermott et al. 2006). Children place value on material possessions to elevate their status above others or to fit into a social group, particularly those of peers. In particular, materialism is higher in children who more frequently communicate with their peers (Churchill and Moschis, 1979; Moschis and Churchill, 1978). The causal direction of this materialism remains unclear, peers and television might encourage materialism or materialism might encourage a search for information such as peers and television advertising (Achenreiner, 1997). Roedder-John (1999) calls for research to break down peer relationships along the lines of age and gender parity. Consistent findings of this type relate to gender, with males reporting higher levels of materialism than females (Achenreiner, 1997; Churchill and Moschis, 1979). Children become more critical about media offerings as they mature, and their sensitivity to peer influences is at its peak in this period (Valkenburg and Cullen, 2001). Therefore, norms and values created in particular peer groups may function as a filter for other socialising forces, including advertising (Valkenburg and Cullen, 2001).

### *3.6.2 Mass Media and Advertising*

Despite these studies mass media, particularly television advertising is still believed to act as a major influence in children's purchase requests. According to McQuail (2000) different agencies influence children's reasoning and perception. These alternate between parents, family and social groups on one side and a child's exposure to media on the other. Berman (1981:13) states 'the institutions of family, religion and education have grown noticeably weaker over each of the past

three generations. In the absence of traditional authority, advertising has become a kind of social guide'. Hill and Tisdall (1997:250) note that 'young people's access to modern technology and media provides a means of socialising them that is increasingly out of the control of the three traditional socialising agents (parents, schools and community)'. This may in part be due to the limited time families spend together. Parents often seek restrictions to such technology, through regulatory and physical means of censorship; however, they fail to recognise that modern technology cannot be controlled successfully in this way (Hill and Tisdall, 1997).

According to Valkenburg and Cantor (2001) socialisation studies are based on a stimulus-response perspective, where exposure to a socialising agent (e.g. advertising) directly influences children's consumer attitudes. Pollay (1986) examined advertising in general and its effects on the wider population and stated 'commercial persuasion appears to program not only our shopping and product use behaviour but also the larger domain of our social roles, language, goals, values, and the source of meaning in our culture'(p.22). Bell (1968:69) concur and state:

> *…..advertising begins to play a more subtle role in changing habits than merely stimulating wants…sooner or later they began to affect more basic patterns: the structure of authority in the family, the role of children and young adults as independent consumers.*

Pollay's (1986) research concerns adults. But if such views expressed relate primarily to adults, what effects must they have on children who are considered less cognitively developed than adults and thus more vulnerable?

A common argument used by advocates of advertising is that advertising has considerably less effect on children's behaviour than families and peers. Communications researchers agree that methods of mass communication are more effective when it comes to enhancing awareness of a phenomenon or products, as opposed to bringing about long-term changes in peoples attitudes and behaviour (Jarlbro, 2002). Goldstein (1998) reports that surveys illustrate children are influenced more by their parents and classmates than by mass media. Jarlboro (2002) concurs that 'children's interest in various products does not come from advertising, but is disseminated by means of interpersonal communication' (p.21). However, these studies do not question where children find out about the product in the first place. For example, if I hear from a friend that I should buy a product which they have seen in an advertisement, is it the friend or the advertisement which has had the effect?

Research appears in agreement with the fact that family and friends are a greater influence factor in the lives of children than mass media in general and television advertising in particular (McNeal, 1992; Gunther and Furnham, 1998). According to Nicholls and Cullen (2004:76):

> *academic analysis of pester power has largely consisted of a rebuttal of the moral (and, to a degree, practical) case against advertising to children, arguing the main influence on children's buying behaviour is in fact, familial and peer group, rather than marketing.*

Therefore, it would appear interpersonal communication is considerably more effective than mass communication when it comes to influencing children's attitudes, notions and behaviour.

Furthermore, children today are marketed at from every angle, not just advertising. In-store influences include point of sale displays and packaging, banners and competitions on the internet, publications their parents read (Pilgrim and Lawrence 2001) product placement in movies, direct mail, magazines, and product samples (McNeal, 1992). Schools, as a socialisation influence, are gaining in importance and interest amongst researchers, but there is limited research exploring this area at present. However, marketers can reach large numbers of children as current consumers and influence them as future consumers through school relations programs. It is clearly stated (Euromonitor, 2001; Minitel, 2001) that advertising agencies target previously exclusive 'childhood environments' such as schools. However, industry practitioners deny this. McNeal (1992:58) identifies that 'kid targeted promotion could do more than just clinch a sale. Promotion could also be used for developing brand and seller identity among children and for building preferences and loyalty towards a firm and its products'. These programs include sponsorship of sports and information technology equipment currently experienced in Ireland. Tesco run 'Computers for School' and 'Sports Equipment for School' campaigns annually, as part of their corporate social responsibility, Tesco benefit by having branded computers sitting in the corners of classroom. Other retail outlets such as Super Valu are also adopting such programs. Marketing and advertising tactics have grown increasingly divergent over the last number of decades as the above examples demonstrate.

### *3.6.3 Television as an Agency of Socialisation*

Despite divergent findings television, more specifically television advertising, as an influence, is predominantly considered the main influencer for pester power by public interest groups. Therefore, efforts to understand the influence of television program content and television

advertising should be considered. Evidence to date provides strong support for the influence of television advertising on children's product preferences and choices (Galst and White, 1976; Atkin, 1981; 1982; Roedder et al., 1983; Goldberg and Gorn, 1990; Valkenburg and Cantor, 2001). However, as mentioned, this focus appears misplaced and ignores the consumer perspective. Television exposure rivals many traditional socialisation agents (Pitzer, 1989; O'Guinn and Shrum, 1997; Quinn, 2002). Yet, research concerning Irish children's viewing habits, conducted by the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (BCI) (Quinn, 2006) suggests a *decrease* in the number of hours Irish children watch television over several years. Regardless of these findings, television viewing is an activity occupying a large part of children's daily activities, considering the number of hours spent at school and sleeping (Quinn, 2002). This suggests that it is indeed a relatively important socialisation influence. Furthermore, if the BCI statistics are to be believed it is becoming less important.

According to Bjurström (1994) the question of whether television advertisements *alone* influence demand has not been answered. Some researchers claim with relative certainty that advertisements alone are responsible for influencing children (Young, 1990; Goldberg, 1990). Bjurström (1994) reports a number of studies discredit these findings and the number of factors which contribute to influencing children's requests for products. Caron and Ward's (1975) findings claim that children's product information comes primarily from television, followed by friends, in store shelves and finally catalogues. Furthermore, parents and peers, as noted, are also believed to contribute to strengthening the influence of advertising and in other cases weakening its influence (Young, 1990; De Bens and Vandenbruaene, 1992). Furnham (2000:8) categorically states that there is 'no respectable intellectual argument for the view that advertising alone creates false wants and parental conflicts'. This concurs with Frideres (1973) earlier work claiming children make use of various sources of brand and product information because child-oriented products are made popular through word of mouth and many sales are the result of peer pressure influences. Furthermore, children make use of television for information for product decisions in conjunction with other sources (parents and peers) to gain, counter or confirm claims made in commercial messages (van Evra, 1995). Despite an increasing number of channels and corresponding programme diversity, some researchers (Fiske, 1987) argue that the basic structure and thematic centre of television has not changed much over the years. Therefore it would appear consumer groups are misguided in their absolute certainty that television and television

advertising results in increased children's requests if television's basic function has not changed over the years.

Isler et al.'s (1987) findings also suggest that television advertising is not the main influencer of children's purchase requests and relegate it to second and third position, depending on the child's age.

**Table 3.4 Mother's Perception of Main Reasons for Child's Request- By Age**

| **CHILD'S AGE** | **3-4** | **5-7** | **9-11** | **TOTAL** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Mother's perception of main reason** | **%** | **%** | **%** | **%** |
| Saw in store | 37.4 | 28.8 | 15.9 | 26.3 |
| Saw television ad | 26.0 | 18.1 | 9.2 | 16.8 |
| Sibling/friend has it | 12.0 | 23.6 | 19.2 | 19.8 |
| Saw other ad (not television) | 2.8 | 3.9 | 3.8 | 3.7 |
| Don't know | 11.7 | 6.1 | 7.8 | 7.8 |
| Other | 12.3 | 30.8 | 42.6 | 32.0 |
| N= | (682) | (1600) | (1092) | (3374) |

*Source:* Isler et al. (1987) 'Children's Purchase Requests and Parental Responses', *Journal of Advertising Research*, Oct/Nov, p. 37.

Less than seventeen percent of mothers believe it to be the main influence. In-store requests are reported as the main influence suggesting many requests are impulse requests. Peers and siblings are considered the second most important influence with almost twenty percent of mothers believing them to be a key influence. This provides further evidence that the focus of children's purchase request influence appears misplaced. In addition, little evidence has been found on the extent television advertising influences intra-family interaction and behaviour. According to Ward and Wackman (1972) despite many research attempts to relate mass media exposure to aspects of consumer behaviour little effort examines parent child interaction intervening between media exposure and behaviour. Society and parent-child interactions have changed considerably since these times and therefore they must be addressed from a contemporary perspective.

### *3.6.4 Shops and Co-Shopping*

Consumer experiences such as shops and co-shopping, although not considered a *main* influencer of socialisation, also deserves exploration. Early work in this area focused on children's knowledge of money as a medium of exchange (Strauss, 1952). However, other factors, such as brand names, are far more salient and important to children (Roedder-John, 1999). Co-shopping is considered a primary method of socialisation with children observing their parent's consumer behaviour and taking part in the purchase process (Blackwell et al., 2001). Children are exposed to the marketplace at a young age when they accompany their parents to the supermarket. They are exposed to a variety of stimuli and experiences including, aisles of products, shoppers examining labels and making decisions, thereby aiding the development of cognitive abilities, resulting in an understanding of marketplace transactions (Roedder-John, 1999). Neeley and Coffey (2002) claim that co-shopping is a passive activity rather than an active educational activity between parent and child 'because the parent and child are together when the activity takes place, rather than directly instructing the child in selection and purchase of an item' (p.57). Therefore, the child is an observer to the process of selecting, decision making and purchasing. Mothers may allow or encourage their children to offer opinions but the child still primarily acts as an observer to the process (Neeley and Coffey, 2002).

Demographic and societal changes have lead to an increase in co-shopping in recent decades; firstly, working mothers take children shopping more often than non-working mothers, secondly, it is coupled with the declining number of children per family (Carlson and Grossbart, 1988). Balogh (2002) reports a quarter of thirty-something parents take their children shopping with them and more than half of this age group take their children shopping with then at least every other time, providing ample opportunities for children to influence their product choice. However, Nicholls and Cullen (2004:79) believe parents are accompanied by an 'unavoidable companion, rather than a pre-selected choice maker'. In other words, parents are not actively seeking their children's opinions when shopping, but must include them in the shopping process as no other alternative maybe available.

Isler et al. (1987) examined the location of requests to provide a deeper understanding of parent-child purchase interaction. Table 3.5 summarises their main findings into request location. Younger children (three to four years old) make most requests in store suggesting mothers take

younger children shopping with them more often. Older children (nine to eleven years of ages) accompany their parents less often, therefore, they are not as 'available' to make product requests as their younger counterparts as only twenty percent of mothers report older children making in-store requests. But, it also suggests most requests, more than fifty percent, are made at home because this is where children view most advertisements. In relation to this McNeal (1992) suggests that sophisticated 'pestering' is not only confined to stores but also occurs at home before the shopping trip begins. Isler et al.'s (1987) research also indicates more than one location (e.g. at home and then at the store) for product requests, however, this 'cumulative asking' is infrequent. In-situ requests, such as those in shops, therefore appear highly influential in children's requests.

**Table 3.5 Location of Requests –By Child's Age**

| **CHILD'S AGE** | **3-4** | **5-7** | **9-11** | **TOTAL** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Location of Request** | **%** | **%** | **%** | **%** |
| Home | 45.0 | 55.5 | 63.4 | 55.9 |
| On way to store | 6.9 | 5.4 | 6.7 | 6.1 |
| At store | 39.3 | 32.4 | 20.1 | 29.8 |
| Other | 10.4 | 9.6 | 10.4 | 10.0 |
| N= | (682) | (1600) | (1092) | (3374) |
| **Percentages total over 100% because mothers could indicate more than one request location for a given product request.* | | | | |

*Source:* Isler et al. (1987) 'Children's Purchase Requests and Parental Responses', Journal of Advertising Research Oct/Nov p. 34

Research concerning co-shopping unobtrusively observed mother-child pairs in supermarkets and reported children make an average of fifteen purchase influence attempts during a shopping trip; sixty four percent of the requests happen in front of the product, and children are successful in almost half the requests (Atkin, 1975a; Galst and White, 1976; McNeal 1992). However, 15 or so requests made on an average shopping visit, is in fact, a small number in comparison to the plethora of products on display in an average supermarket (McNeal, 1999). He further suggests that this highlights a growing sense that retailers and their marketing tactics have set up conflict situations between parents and children. But, Nicholls and Cullen (2004) surveyed retailers and found that twenty five percent of retailers take positive steps to minimise 'pester power' in-store,

including removing confectionery from checkouts and training staff to mediate children's demands, on the other hand about fifteen percent of retailers positively exploit it.

Furthermore, in relation targets and success while co-shopping, Liebeck (1994:41) reports that 'mothers who shop with their kids wind up spending thirty percent more than they originally intended and fathers spend seventy percent more'. This suggests a child has a direct influence on in-store purchases, moreover, it suggests that fathers are more receptive to these requests. This raises an interesting point. Fathers have previously been ignored in relation to purchase request research. With dual-income families, much of the traditional household chores, including shopping, are shared between couples, suggesting that if this phenomenon is to be explored from a contemporary consumer perspective fathers too must be included in the research.

### 3.7 Summary and Conclusions

This chapter examined and integrated theoretical perspectives from cognitive and social development, changing families and socialisation influences, helping to enhance and inform this research on children and highlighting their development as consumers.

Families, particularly parents, were identified as an important influence in developing the child consumer. This was an important area for consideration, considering changing social norms and patterns of family composition and communication reflected in concerns about the parent-child purchase relationship. Family formation is indeed changing but it does not appear to affect the development of a child consumer. What appears more pertinent to this research is changes in family communication and decision-making. Both have become much less autocratic and more discursive with two-way communication and decision–making now the norm for the majority of families. This may in-part be due to changing social norms where parents are not afforded as much time with their children as previous generations. It could also be construed that contemporary parents recognise their children as important participants in all things family thus recognising the contribution they make to family interactions. Including and encouraging children to vocalise their opinions in a more constructive manner parents aid their development in all aspects of life, not just in relation to matters of consumption. Furthermore, these studies suggest that conflict is a natural occurrence when people, including family and friends, interact closely on a regular basis, an issue that much of the research literature fails to report.

Other reported influences on the development of the child as consumer were also explored. The most general conclusion to be drawn from the studies is that television advertisements are an important but not *the* most important factor in determining children's purchase requests. The majority of studies position parents and peers as the major influences in a child's life, not just in relation to purchase requests. As such it is evident that the focus on television advertising as the main precursor to children's purchase requests is misguided therefore the whole parent-child purchase relationship needs to be re-examined. It is clearly evident that television advertising is not the key issue in this research, but other factors including age, socio-economic and cultural background, family interaction, peers, and direct experience, through shopping are potentially more important to an understanding of the parent-child purchase relationship.

Therefore an interpretivist consumer research approach will be utilised to drive this research in order to understand the *consumer experience* of the phenomenon. The next chapter details a methodology designed to uncover the meanings consumers hold in relation to the parent-child purchase relationship.

# 4.0 Chapter Four: Methodology

## 4. 1 Introduction

The parent-child purchase relationship in its totality has been neglected in previous studies, instead research has focused on a specific aspect of this phenomenon, namely pester power, its influences and effects. Furthermore, the evolution of parent-child relationships in general, including purchase relationships, has not been captured. This evolution includes the manner in which parents and children interact and communicate with each other. As noted, this relationship has become more democratic with children now more involved in many purchase decisions. In addition, and most importantly, it has been identified that the majority of research studies concerning the parent-child purchase relationship have been dominated by vested interest perspectives rather than the consumer perspective, despite parents and children being central to this phenomenon. The chosen methodology must therefore reflect these issues placing the main actors of the phenomenon, parents and children, at the centre of the study.

To reiterate, the main objective of this study is to explore the nature of the parent-child purchase relationship from a *consumer perspective* in order to enhance and inform understanding. Both parents and children will be included in the study in order to capture the full consumer experience. The focus of this research lies in *their* stories, narratives and experiences surrounding purchase and consumption behaviour.

This chapter details the use of phenomenology as a paradigm and methodology to uncover consumers' experiences of the parent-child purchase relationship. Phenomenology as a method of interpretive inquiry leading to the emergence of knowledge is presented as the most suitable approach for this study. In addition, this chapter examines the philosophical issues essential to an understanding of phenomenology. The philosophical issues also relate to the hermeneutical techniques utilised to analyse respondents' experiences, hermeneutical philosophy is also detailed.

In addition, the nature of phenomenological interviews with parents and focus groups with children are detailed at the methodological level. The utilisation of these research tools and the nature of the resultant data sets are also addressed. Data generation and analysis to uncover and

aid thematic development through the use of both hermeneutics and interpretive groups are also described. Furthermore, recruitment of respondents are detailed along with data collection and criteria used to evaluate the chosen methodology.

Paradigm choice must always reflect the nature of the problem and the audience the research is aimed at (Creswell, 1994). Any methodologies importance lies in the underlying paradigm, incorporating axiological, ontological and epistemological assumptions about the nature of reality and inquiry and knowledge generated. The interpretivist approach is detailed to contextualise the chosen methodology.

As previously mentioned, an exploration of the literature highlights the lack of consumer perspective concerning the parent-child purchase relationship. Existing literature also tends to be more positivistic in its approach concerned with cause and effects of the parent-child purchase relationship. Consumers' voice, experiences and meanings are primarily ignored. As such, this emphasises the need for this study to embrace a more consumer centred approach.

## 4.2 The Interpretive Paradigm

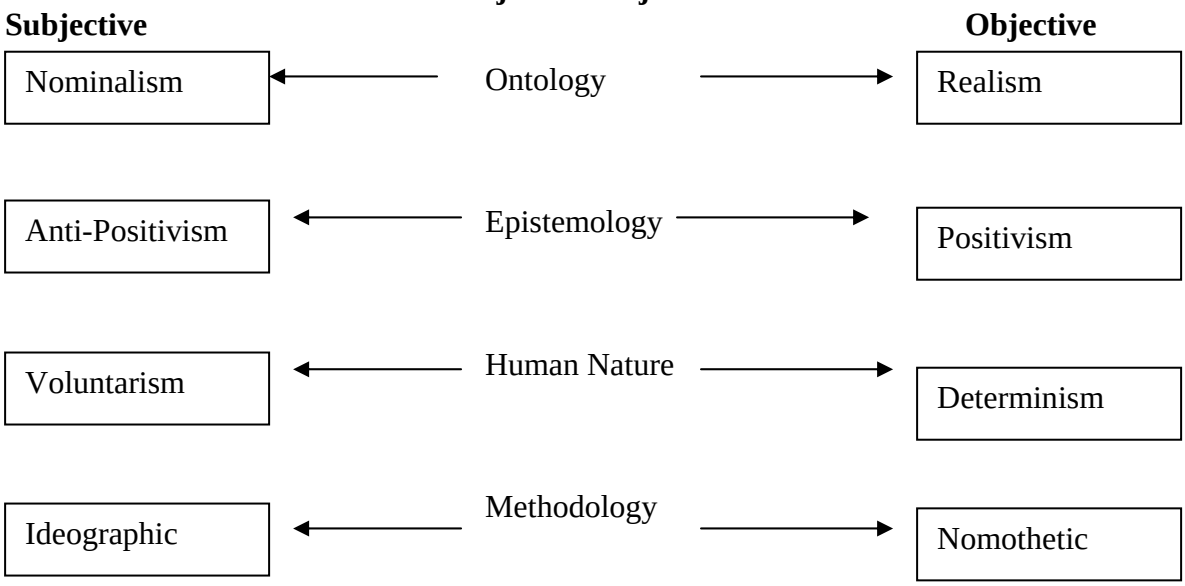
The interpretivist paradigm advocates the importance of seeking out meaning; *understanding* and interpreting the phenomenon under study (Carson, Gilmore, Perry and Gronhaug, 2001). Furthermore, interpretivism acknowledges the importance of researcher involvement in the phenomenon under investigation along with a researcher's pre-understanding and experiential learning which 'influences the focus and progression of the research and the development of interpretive analysis' (Carson, et al., 2001:10). In order to understand the purchase process, interpretative researchers must interact 'dialogically' with the participants (Cantrell, 1993:82). Therefore, phenomenology is employed to seek a first person's description, the consumer perspective of the parent-child purchase relationship in this study, and to identify recurring experiential patterns (Ritson, Elliott and Eccles, 1996).

According to Burrell and Morgan (2000:23) a paradigm refers to 'a group of researchers sharing common assumptions about the nature of reality, utilising common methodologies and dealing with similar problems'. Historically, consumer behaviour was predominantly influenced by the positivist paradigm, viewing consumers as rational decision makers; however, in recent decades

many have embraced the interpretive paradigm, which stresses 'the subjective, non-rational aspects of consumption' (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; 1992) and the underlying meanings of those acts.

Figure 4.1 illustrates that interpretivism approaches social science from a nominalist, anti-positivist, voluntarist and ideographic perspective (Burrell and Morgan, 2000). It further illustrates that the world is observed as an emergent social process created by individuals concerned. The methodological issues of importance are the concepts themselves, their measurement and the identification of underlying themes (Burrell and Morgan, 2000).

**Figure 4.1 A Scheme for Analysing Assumptions about the Nature of Social Science**
**The Subjective-Objective Dimension**




*Source*: Burrell G. and Morgan, G. (2000) Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis p.3

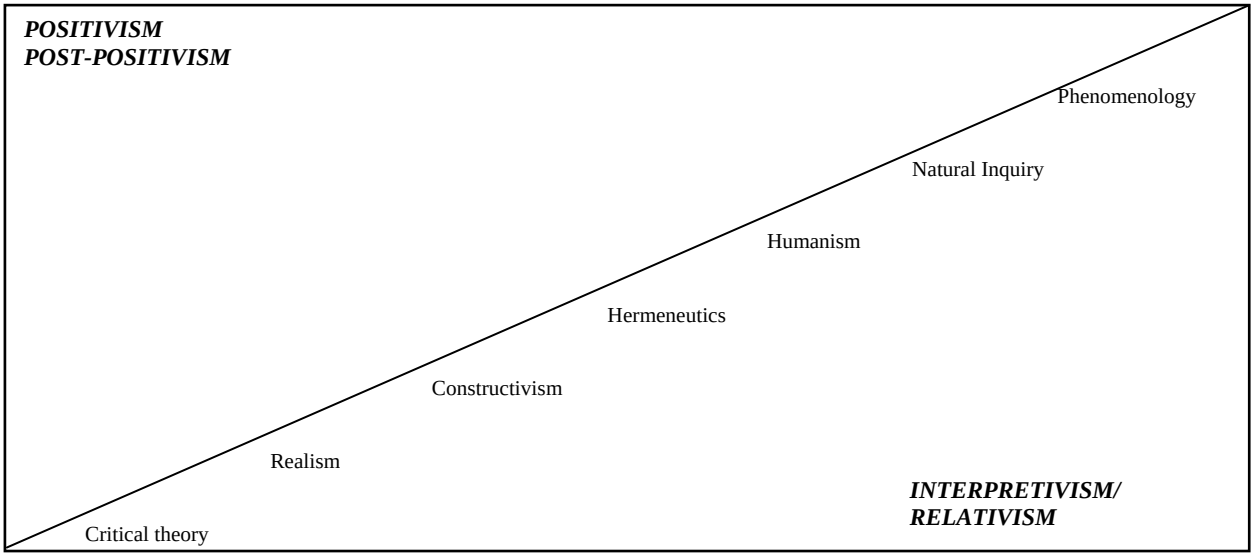
An interpretive approach is best suited to this study because of the axiological, ontological and epistemological premises established by such a paradigm. An explanation of the interpretivist paradigm follows to contextualise the chosen methodology, demonstrating its suitability for this research, as opposed to positioning it as being *superior* to any other paradigm (Hudson and Ozanne, 1998). A plethora of alternatives exist for gathering and justification of knowledge in the social sciences. Considering the controversy of methodological superiority, it seems appropriate to suggest the main requirement of social science is 'fidelity' to the phenomena under study, not methodological principles, regardless of how strongly supported by philosophical arguments

(Atkinson and Hammersley, 1995 as cited in Goulding, (1999)). Nonetheless, 'while there exists no privileged epistemological platform from which to assess competing knowledge claims, relative judgements can be made between competing programmes on the basis of social and cognitive aims, metaphysical beliefs and preferred methodologies' (Anderson, 1986:156).

*4.2.1 Interpretivism*

Interpretation can be defined as 'the critical analysis of a text for the purpose of determining its single or multiple meaning(s)' (Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy, 1988:400). Furthermore, interpretivism is concerned with an understanding of the way individuals create, modify and interpret their worlds (Burrell and Morgan, 2000). According to Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy (1988) the interpretive approach could be classified as part of the post-positivist movement and it is important to comprehend the differing positions of the paradigms available and the wide gap between positivism and interpretivism, as illustrated in Figure 4.2. Interpretivism stresses the importance of 'micro' relations such as phenomenology, existential-phenomenology, or ethnography, all of which are variants on its approach (Hirschman, 1986).

**Figure 4.2 Continuum of Research Philosophies**




*Source*: Carson, Gilmore, Chad and Gronhaug (2001) Qualitative Marketing Research: p.8.

According to Carson et al. (2001:9) the key criteria differentiating the positivist and interpretivist paradigms are:

- In positivism the researcher is independent but in interpretivist research the researcher is involved;
- In positivism large samples may be used whereas interpretivist research uses small numbers;
- In positivism, testing theories (deduction) pervade whereas interpretivist research focuses on generating theories or 'theory building' (induction).

Interpretive researchers reject the notion that consumers can be studied like the physical world and instead, believe that researchers must consider the meaning of the phenomena from the consumers point-of-view (Ozanne and Hudson, 1989); essentially the subjective experience of the social world of an individual (Burrell and Morgan, 2000). This is of paramount importance in this study as consumers' experiences are fundamental to understanding the parent-child purchase relationship. Knowledge gained will consist of 'facts-only-as interpreted, that is data as socially, linguistically, or personally constructed' (Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy, 1988:398). Table 4.1 contrasts divergent approaches to positivist and interpretive approaches to research and is detailed below.

**Table 4.1 A Summary of the Positivist and Interpretive Approaches**

| | **POSITIVIST** | **INTERPRETIVE** |
|---|---|---|
| **Axiological:** | | |
| *Overriding goal* | Explanation<br>Under general laws prediction | Understanding |
| **Ontological:** | | |
| *Nature of reality* | Objective, tangible, multiple, fragmentable, divisible | Socially Constructed, single, holistic, contextual<br>Voluntaristic |
| *Nature of Social beings* | Deterministic<br>Reactive | Proactive |
| **Epistemological:** | Nomothetic | Idiographic |
| *Knowledge Generated* | Time free<br>Context dependent<br>Real causes exist | Context bound<br>Context dependent<br>Multiple, simultaneous |
| *View of Causality* | | Shaping |
| *Research Relationship* | Dualism, separation<br>Privileged point of observation | Interactive, co-operative<br>No privileged point of observation |

*Source:* Hudson, L. A and Ozanne, J.L. (1988) Alternative Ways of Seeking Knowledge in Consumer Research, *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol.14 (March) p.3

*4.2.1.1 Axiology*

The main purpose or axiology of interpretivism in this study is *understanding*, enabling the researcher to focus on understanding what occurs in a given context. In this study the parent child purchase relationship from the consumer perspective. It incorporates multiple realities including, different *actors'* perspectives (parents and children) and researcher involvement, taking account of the contexts of the phenomena under study and the contextual understanding and interpretation of data (Carson et al., 2001:5).

Furthermore, it allows patterns and themes to emerge at an emic and etic level. An 'emic' descriptor derives from participants, an 'etic' from the researcher to describe the phenomenon being studied. Interpretivists do not trust that *the* understanding can be achieved, reality is constantly changing, but *an* understanding can be achieved, from a subjective viewpoint (Hudson and Ozanne, 1998). The world is relativistic; everything has to be contextualised from the viewpoint of individuals directly involved with the phenomenon under investigation. In this study the consumer understanding, *their* narratives and stories are of paramount importance and will remain the focus for uncovering *an* understanding of parent-child purchases.

*4.2.1.2. Ontology*

It is important to interpret the phenomenon, but more importantly to develop an understanding of the meanings ascribed to a particular phenomenon (Cantrell, 1993). The researcher is looking to discover what Remenyi et al. (1998: 35) call 'the details of the situation to understand the reality or perhaps a reality working behind them'. The researcher's responsibility is not only to gather facts and measure how often certain patterns occur, but to appreciate alternate constructions and meanings people place upon experiences. 'Ontology and epistemology is that we believe reality is socially constructed rather than objectively determined… to appreciate the different constructions and meanings that people place on their experiences' (Carson, et al. 2001:7). In this study the researcher is ultimately trying to understand the meanings consumers ascribe to the parent-child purchase relationship as they live and experience it.

*4.2.1.3 Epistemology-Knowledge Generated*

In this study knowledge generated from interpretivism is ideographic in nature, literally writing about individuals and their experiences. The researcher can only understand the social world by obtaining first-hand knowledge of the topic under investigation (Burrell and Morgan, 2000). This approach emphasises the analysis of subjective accounts enabling the researcher to understand the situation from the 'inside-out' while understanding the phenomenon in relation to other facets of the individuals' life (Burrell and Morgan, 2000). In this study in order to reach an in-depth understanding of the parent-child purchase relationship it is necessary to access parents and children's personal knowledge and experiences surrounding purchase requests. They are the experts; they have first-hand knowledge regarding these relationships, their stories and narratives must remain the focus of the knowledge generated.

Furthermore the epistemology of an interpretive approach is particularistic (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988) so that it is context bound and context dependent knowledge. The data accrued will be from a particular time and place. This immediately raises questions about the generalisability of the research. However, generalisabilty is not of fundamental importance to interpretivists. They do not stipulate rigid relationships that are tested in a fixed design, as positivists would. Therefore, no attempt is made to generalise the findings of the entire population, however, the approach does allow generalisations within the context of the case (Hudson and Ozanne, 1998).

#### *4.2.1.4 Epistemology-View of Causality*

Interpretivism allows multiple realities to emerge, as a result of different individuals having different perceptual bases of the world. The context of each world is important because the framework in which a behaviour or event arises influences the meaning of the phenomenon (Cantrell, 1993). Therefore, reality must be viewed as a whole; it cannot be separated from its natural setting or studied on its own (Ozanne and Hudson, 1989) as positivism tends towards. Interpretivism avoids the rigidities of positivism, instead of trying to explain causal relationships by means of objective 'facts' and statistical analysis, interpretivism involves a more personal process in order to *understand reality* (Carson et al. 2001).

#### *4.2.1.5 Epistemology- Researcher Relationship*

Furthermore, in this study the interpretive approach recognises the importance of researcher involvement. The researcher is often referred to as 'the human instrument' (Fetterman, 1989). Sherry (1991) argues that the future of interpretive inquiry is dependent upon developing the

researcher-as-instrument, not upon techniques. The researcher serves as an instrument in observation, selection, coordination and interpretations of data (Sanday, 1979). In this study the researcher is heavily immersed in the research process, not only in the selection of respondents and conducting the research, but also trying to 'draw out' the reality of what the purchase relationship means to the respondents. Carson et al. (2001) also state that the experience from the individual's approach or the experiential knowledge of the researcher, in relation to the research area, will impact on how the researcher structures an understanding and may simultaneously prevent them from seeing a certain aspect of the problem.

The researcher, devoid of expert knowledge of the individual viewpoints, must study and interact with all those concerned leading to an emergence of knowledge and understanding. Respondents are paramount to the research process, they are the experts. It is their perceptions the researcher attempts to understand, and as such researcher-respondent interaction will help this process. Data generated is co-constituted by the interviewer and respondents, the discussion, where appropriate, is one in which both parties contribute. The researcher's responsibility is to uncover the respondent's story in relation to the phenomenon.

## 4.3 Phenomenology

Interpretive research can incorporate naturalistic and humanistic inquiry, phenomenology, hermeneutics, semiotics and literary criticism (Murray and Ozanne, 1991), and each can be viewed as a distinct way of seeking knowledge. Interpretivism is concerned with perspective, the consumer perspective (Ozanne and Hudson, 1989) seeking to facilitate a deeper *understanding* of the phenomenon being studied, not to aid in its prediction. This perspective is the very foundation of consumer research. From an axiological, ontological and epistemological approach to data generation through an interpretive approach, phenomenology was considered the most suitable methodology for this study.

Phenomenology may be defined as the study of structures of experience, or consciousness, the study of 'phenomena': appearances as opposed to reality (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP), 2003). Phenomenology studies structures of conscious experience as experienced from the first-person point of view, parents and children in this study, along with relevant conditions of experience. Classical phenomenologists practice three methods (SEP, 2003). First, they achieve

an experiential description similar to Husserl's (1970) pure description of the lived experience. As parents and children are central to this phenomenon, it is their 'lived' experience which is of paramount importance in this study. Second, they interpret these experiences by relating them to relevant features of context. Third, concerns analysis of the type and form of experience. Furthermore, 'phenomenology is concerned with understanding human behaviour from the researcher's frame of reference' (Carson et al., 2001:7).

The development of specific methods for studying human experience is one of the primary contributions of phenomenology. Husserl believed phenomenology meant the rigorous and unbiased study of things as they appear, so that one might come to an essential understanding of human consciousness and experience (Valle et al., 1989). Husserlian or descriptive phenomenology attempts to disclose the essential meaning of human behaviour. It relates to the question, 'How do we know?' and its aim is to study and clarify the essential structure of the lived world of conscious experience by reflectively meditating on the origins of experience (Goulding, 1999).

Furthermore, phenomenology is the study of subjective mental experiences (Giorgi, 1997) in this study those of consumers. It is a philosophy that places and emphasises consciousness and all the objects, events and processes that a person becomes aware of through their consciousness (Giorgi, 1997). In its simplest form phenomenological philosophy attempts to comprehend how individuals interact with external objects to achieve an understanding of their 'self-concept' (Thompson, et al., 1989). Experience is private and internal and the focus is on the individual rather than the social group, culture or subculture (Ihde, 1986; Thompson et al., 1989; Hirschman and Holbrook, 1992**)**. This may be considered limiting as it seems too individualistic, however, as previously mentioned interpretivists are not concerned with generalisability and the focus of this study is on *respondents' experiences*, therefore they are individual by nature.

Methodologically, phenomenology involves taking as little for granted as possible (Hudson and Murray, 1986). Phenomenologist put aside or 'brackets' all theoretical presuppositions and starts from the beginning, seeking to obtain a genuine and true form of things themselves (Baker, Wuest and Stern, 1992). Therefore, in this study while the researcher has explored and examined previous research literature regarding the phenomenon, this must be 'bracketed' away to gain an understanding of the phenomenon from the consumer perspective.

Rich phenomenological description or interpretation far outweighs simple descriptions, however, simple descriptions bring out the basic form of intentionality (SEP, 2003). It is acknowledged that parental respondents are capable of rich phenomenological descriptions, although child respondents may not, this will be discussed later in the chapter. As phenomenological description is further interpreted, the relevance of the context or experience is assessed. This may lead to wider conditions associated with that type of experience. Therefore, the practice of phenomenology classifies, describes, interprets and analyses structure of experiences, in this study the consumer experience, in ways that answer to our own experience (SEP, 2003).

### 4.4 Research Tools

As mentioned the objective of this study is to further an understanding of the parent-child purchase relationship from the consumer perspective. The parent-child purchase relationship involves two main participants or experts, parents *and* children and therefore *both* parties' perspectives are considered paramount. The majority of previous research focused on one parental perspective, predominantly mothers, ignoring fathers' perspectives. The child's perspective too has been primarily ignored. *All* participants will be researched in this study to provide a more complete understanding of the research objective. Furthermore, it should provide a much enriched data set to uncover the multidimensional nature of the purchase and consumption process as experienced by parents and children. Children now have a legal right (Powell and Smith, 2006) to be included in decisions that affect them, and their *vulnerability* is an issue raised in previous research studies (Adler et al. 1980); therefore their contribution to the research objective should prove beneficial. In addition removing the traditional power distance between parents and children should allow the phenomenon to be fully explored.

In order to achieve this understanding phenomenological interviews will be utilised to uncover parents' experiences of the parent-child purchase relationship while focus groups will be employed to uncover children's understanding of the phenomenon. It is acknowledged that the use of two different research tools, phenomenological interviews and focus groups, will result in, by nature, two different data sets. However, both tools result in a data set that essentially describes experience albeit to a different degree. While children's descriptions may not be as 'rich' or 'thick' as those of parents, they will nevertheless provide useful insights for interpretation and understanding of the parent-child purchase relationship through the eyes of a

child. Also as previously mentioned interpretation involves the critical analysis of texts (Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy, 1988), it does not stipulate 'rich' texts and furthermore is concerned with understanding the way individuals create, modify and interpret their worlds, the subjective experience of this social world by obtaining first-hand knowledge of the topic under investigation (Burrell and Morgan, 2000). Children's descriptions of their experiences facilitate these stipulations. Therefore, these tools will therefore provide 'both sides of the consumer story'. Furthermore, phenomenological interviews were not deemed appropriate for children due to their nature which will now be discussed.

### *4.4.1 Phenomenological Interviews*

The goal of a phenomenological interview is to describe experience in 'lived' rather than conceptually abstract and theoretical terms (Thompson et al., 1989:135). These interviews provide the researcher opportunities to step 'into the mind' of another and experience the world as they do, to see the content and pattern of respondents' daily experiences and thus understand the importance of the studied phenomenon, relative to the rest of their life-world (McCracken, 1988). It was therefore imperative in this study that parents' lived experience be accessed to understand what the parent-child purchase relationship means to them and what effects, if any, it has on their parent-child relationship. These interviews employ relatively few pre-planned questions. Instead, the course of the interview dialogue emerges from the experiences and meanings expressed by the interviewee (Goulding, 1999) therefore in this study respondents lead the dialogue.

Interpretivism allows the research design to evolve as the researcher becomes more immersed in the subject under study through the use of phenomenological interviews (Hudson et al., 1989). Interviews provide an opportunity to 'probe' experiences, where respondents can expand their responses, essential for understanding (Kvale, 1983), and are the most powerful means of attaining an in-depth understanding of another person's experiences (Kvale, 1983). Children's limited cognitive development deemed them inappropriate for phenomenological interviews as they may be unable to articulate or 'expand' on their experiences. Furthermore, 'probing' with very young children is intrusive and should be avoided (Glasgow Centre for Child and Society, 2007).

The researcher's responsibility is to keep the interview focused on experiences, without influencing the respondent towards certain opinions about them (Kvale, 1983). It was not the remit of the researcher to ask 'why' but to get an explanation or description from consumers of their lived experience. Therefore, discourse should be kept at the respondent's level at all times with no abstraction or introduction of academic vocabulary which may confuse or distort the path of the discourse, thus the dialogue is predominantly set by the respondent (Thompson et al., 1989). Again children may not be able to facilitate in-depth discussion of their experiences due to lack of maturity, development and articulation. The interview is intended to be a conversation, therefore, the researcher must provide the respondent with a context they are happy to discuss and describe in detail. Parental respondents in this study were happy to discuss their experiences of the parent-child purchase relationship which resulted in detailed rich data sets. Children on the other hand may only be capable of describing their experiences on a superficial rather than an in-depth level, therefore focus groups were deemed more appropriate to facilitate their inclusion in this research. In addition the researcher should not engage in the interview with a premise that their knowledge of the subject is superior to that of the respondents but with the assumption that they know less than respondents about the experience (Thompson et al., 1989). In this study the dialogue was in the hands of respondents; they are the experts. Apart from initial opening questions, referred to as 'grand tour questions', the researcher had no *a priori* questions. Examples of grand tour questions utilised in this research include: Tell me about the products your child/children most frequently request? Are you aware of where they here about these products?

It is not uncommon for respondents to change the description and meaning of their experience during an interview, these changes may uncover new aspects and understanding of the experience (Kvale, 1983). It was therefore acknowledged that this could happen in this study, but it is considered a normal occurrence in this type of research. Emphasis or omissions of events, creates a framework from which the researcher can uncover the underlying meanings concerning the respondents experience of the phenomenon (Kvale, 1983). It was imperative in this study to pay particular attention to any such instances occurring and to adapt the interviews to these occurrences as it would aid in an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

*4.4.2 Data Quality Issues and Phenomenological Interviews*

A number of data quality issues are inherent in the use of phenomenological interviews (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2006). While these issues are normally linked to positivistic research, they have also been used as a broad template in the development of evaluative criteria for interpretive research, and are now termed: credibility; transferability; dependability and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Previously applied to humanistic enquiry (Hirschman, 1986, Erlandson, Harris Skipper and Allen, 1993) it can be argued that they also represent evaluative criteria for all interpretive research.

1. *Credibility* is established by determining if the results of the research reflect reality. It requires a respondent's reconstruction of their experiences, not an attempt to verify if it is fact. Thompson et al. (1989) offer guidelines to establish credibility. Firstly, ensuring themes identified capture key features of respondents' experiences; a 'thick' description of their experiences rather than an exhaustive one. Second, credibility should result in anyone viewing the findings accepting them as believable (Sherlock, 1999). The use of interpretive groups aids this criterion.

2. *Transferability* relates to findings generalisable to the wider population. Respondents employed in this research, and their experiences are not purported to be representative, but this does not imply that they are not indicative or applicable of the greater population. Techniques used in interpretive research to ensure representation include hermeneutical circles and autonomy of the text and will be employed in this study.

3. *Dependability* refers to replication of results. However, it is important to note this does not necessarily imply a similar interpretation, rather an improved one (Thompson et al., 1989). Insight gained from one research study should help to enhance future studies.

4. *Confirmability* relates to the objectivity of the study. As the interviews are co-constituted and the researcher is heavily involved in the generation of data it may appear impossible to reduce their influence, but all attempts were made to do so in this study.

### 4.5 Interpretation of Data

According to Spiggle (1994:492) 'inferences result from the processes of analysis and interpretation investigators use to generate conclusions, insights, meanings, patterns, themes, connections, conceptual frameworks and theories, their representation of the reality described by

the data'. She further states that there is no conventionally recognised vocabulary for describing inferential processes nor are there conceptual distinctions between analysis and interpretation; these are frequently used interchangeably. Furthermore, both terms refer to the process of arriving at conclusions as well as the final product, the output of these conclusions (Spiggle, 1994). 'Investigators use both analysis and interpretation employing them in a linear or circular way, discretely or in tandem, in a more or less systematic fashion, with more or less conscious deliberation, and with more emphasis on one than the other' (Spiggle, 1994:492). Analysis breaks down or divides some complex whole into its constituent parts (Spiggle, 1994). Through analysis, researchers dissect, reduce, sort and reconstitute data. Through interpretation an understanding is achieved, it asks what something means, or grasps the sense of it (Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy, 1988; Spiggle, 1994). As part of this research process analysis was utilised to aid in the sorting and reduction of the data set as a precursor to and simultaneous to interpretation to provide an overview of what is occurring in the data set and to uncover the nature of the parent-child purchase relationship as understood by respondents.

Furthermore, Spiggle (1994) classifies qualitative data manipulation operations into the following: categorisation; abstraction, comparison, dimensionalisation, integration, iteration and refutation. She further states that these operations do not necessarily occur in isolation of each other nor as a as a sequential process, they are not to be viewed as stages in the process but are open to a researcher to use at various stages of analysis. These operations enable researchers to 'organise data, extract meaning, arrive at conclusions and generate or confirm conceptual schemes and theories to describe the data' (Spiggle, 1994:493). Unlike analysis, interpretation is not a series of operations and because of;

> *The intuitive, subjective, particularistic nature of interpretation renders it difficult to model or present in a linear way. In interpretation, the investigator does not engage a set of operations. Rather interpretation occurs as a gestalt shift and represents a synthetic, holistic, and illuminating grasp of meaning, as in deciphering a code.....interpretation results from an emergent holistic, extralogical insight, or understanding*' (Spiggle, 1994:497).

Through analysis and interpretation an understanding of respondents is achievable 'we may grasp their meanings and experiences by translating between their "text" and our own experience, knowledge and ideas…..points of correspondence between their expectations and our own' (Spiggle, 1994:499). However, this may lead to subjective interpretations because different

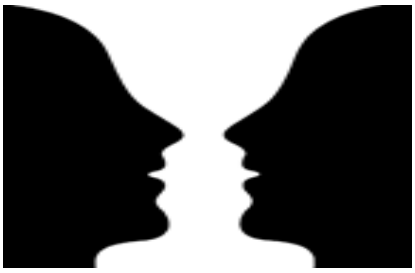
researchers have a different knowledge base from which to draw inferences from the texts (Spiggle, 1994). The researcher is fully aware that such a situation may arise, but will strive to provide the most appropriate interpretation based on the data set or 'text' as it emerged from the respondents**.**

*4.5.1 Interpretation and Theme Development*

The interpretation of the phenomenological interviews in this study is based on the practice of hermeneutics, the hermeneutical circle and the employment of an interpretive group. Employing an interpretivist paradigm allows identification of themes and commonalities as well as emerging revelations from the texts (Mick and DeMoss, 1990; Spiggle, 1994). Here the researcher remains close to the meanings of informants, grasping commonalities and parallels in their idiographic perspectives. This occurs through grounding and continuous adherence and reference to the data set as identified (Spiggle, 1994). Data generated through the phenomenological interviews and focus groups in this study remain the focus of descriptions and experiences to be interpreted. This form of interpretation surpasses the grasping of the meanings of informants. Through pattern recognition it constructs a representation of meanings recurring themes producing an 'interpretation of interpretations' (Spiggle, 1994:499).

'A useful means to explain the structure of narrative framing is to interpret textual data in terms of binary themes' (Thompson, 1997:446; Spiggle, 1994). Thus, allowing researchers to organise a multiplicity of textual details from consumers' narratives into a manageable set of underlying thematic dimensions (Spiggle, 1994; Thompson, 1997). A particular form of binary relations based on the gestalt theory of figure-ground perception can be useful for representing the holistic qualities of narrative framing (Thompson et al., 1989, 1990). This representation holds that the perceived characteristics of a 'figure' emerge in a codetermining relationship to a contextual background. This is clearly demonstrated when a perceptual reversal occurs in a figure-ground diagram e.g. the well known face-vase image.

**Figure 4.3 Figure and Ground Phenomenon**



***Source:*** **Gestalt*:* D Hothersall (1984). History of Psychology, p.168**

Here the perceptual totality is neither one form nor another; rather it is a dynamic perceptual relationship that presents multiple configurations of part-to-whole relationships (Kohler, 1947). Applied to textual meanings, the figure-ground metaphor conceptualises a 'theme' as a dynamic meaning relationship constituted by contrasting thematic aspects. This enables the researcher to identify, alter and move between emergent themes (Thompson et al., 1989).

### *4.5.2 Data Criteria*

Once primary research has been carried out and the data transcribed the texts become 'the tool' from which interpretation begins (Kvale, 1983). The use of interview transcripts provides the researcher with three methodological processes for phenomenological interpretation (Thompson et al., 1989): the emic approach, autonomy of the text and bracketing, ensuring interpretations are not removed from respondents' experiences, thus keeping them as true as possible. It must also be noted, as previously mentioned the use of focus groups with child respondents does not necessarily follow the phenomenological philosophy or produce as 'thick' a description or data set as those of phenomenological interviews with parents. Nonetheless the children's data set is crucial to this study. Focus groups remain under the category of qualitative research suitable for interpretation and as such were also transcribed verbatim. Also as Spiggle (1994) stated the inferences process of analysis used in interpretation allows investigators to generate conclusions, insights, meanings, patterns, themes and so on which represents the reality *described* by the data. This type of interpretation does not have to be viewed as a set of procedures as pure phenomenology dictates, but can be viewed as a set of procedures resulting from an emergent, understanding (Spiggle, 1994). Therefore, data generated from focus groups with children is suitable for an interpretive inquiry and furthermore, for phenomenological interpretation. On this basis, as with the phenomenological interviews, focus groups transcription were used as the tool for interpretation, enabling children's experiences to be utilised and understood to facilitate the parents-child experience of purchase relationships to emerge. Similarly the emic approach, autonomy of the text and bracketing were applied in the phenomenological interpretation of the focus group transcripts.

#### *4.5.2.1 The Emic Approach*

Through an emic approach the researcher utilises the respondent's own terms and descriptions as they appear in texts. Verbatim transcriptions enable the researcher to 'stay close' to the respondents' 'lived' experiences (Thompson et al. 1989) ensuring that the respondents' experiences is conveyed as lived in this study. Remaining at the respondents' level should lead to a reduction of abstraction occurring. Therefore, it was essential to take a look at the 'bigger picture' to reveal what statements and descriptions mean from the respondents' perspective at all times (Sherlock, 1999).

#### *4.5.2.2 Autonomy of the Text*

There are two aspects to this criterion. Firstly, no effort is made to substantiate the respondent's description with external corroboration; autonomy is an attempt to remain true to the text (Kvale, 1983) therefore whatever description the respondents provided, in this study, were viewed as sacrosanct. Second, the interpretation of the text should not incorporate hypotheses, inferences and conjectures that exceed the evidence provided by the transcript (Thompson et al., 1989) as such no data other than those provided by respondents were used in their interpretation.

#### *4.5.2.3 Bracketing*

Goulding (1999) calls for the use of bracketing in order to treat the transcript as an autonomous body of data. The 'text as tool' was adhered to at all times throughout this study. Osborne (1994) described bracketing as identifying one's presuppositions about the nature of the phenomenon and then attempting to set them aside to see the phenomena as it really is. When bracketing, the researcher relates to respondent reflections in a non-assertive manner and attempts to understand rather than impose meanings emerging from the dialogue of the interview (Thompson et al., 1989). However, bracketing does not necessarily imply a neutral view; researchers must always see and describe the world from some perspective (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), thus enabling researchers to identify common themes and allowing respondents to present interpretation. Furthermore, all previous theoretical knowledge was 'bracketed' away by the researcher in order to remain true to the data generated.

## 4.6 Interpretation of Phenomenological Interviews

### *4.6.1 Hermeneutics*

Hermeneutics involves the interpretation of pre-given, finished texts (Kvale, 1983). Texts generated by phenomenological interviews are appropriate to hermeneutic analysis (Kvale, 1983; Thompson, et al. 1989; McCracken, 1988) and have been used in this study. Its purpose is to obtain a valid and common understanding of the meaning of a text (Kvale, 1983) as such texts derived from focus groups with children are also considered suitable as the basis for interpretation. Hermeneutics main advocate, Paul Ricoeur, describes it as a link between the hermeneutic problem and the phenomenological method, a recapturing of an impartial sense of the text and an 'existential appropriation of its meaning into understanding' (Arnold and Fischer, 1994:56). The hermeneutical processes through which researchers interpret qualitative data is often characterised as a subjective and largely intuitive experience (Holbrook, Bell and Grayson, 1989). Spiggle (1994:500) described textual interpretation as 'playful, creative, subjective, particularistic, transformative, imaginative and representative'. This description provides further justification for the use of child generated focus groups data sets to be utilised in this study.

From a hermeneutic perspective, interpretation is an improvisational process where the researcher draws from their stock of background knowledge (etic level) although as mentioned in Section 4.2.1.1 in this study emphasis is placed on the respondents personal experience (emic level) to derive insights from textual data. The improvisational and creative properties of textual interpretation reflect general characteristics of understanding that is accentuated as a person becomes more expert in their knowledge about a given domain (Neisser, 1987).

According to (Thompson 1997:452) 'hermeneutic interpretation exhibits a player-in-the-game quality in four ways'. (1) It involves a patterned movement that emerges in tandem with the construct of the textual data. (2) It is an emergent process 'of creative adaptation to the flow of the consumer stories interpreted over the course of the research' (p.452). (3) The interpreter is required to exercise 'improvisational, intuitive and creative capabilities' (p.452) within the arena composed of various iterative movements between the textual data and the framework provided

to structure and guide the interpretation. (4) These interpretations should be intelligible to all those concerned with the area under investigation 'as constituted by the logic of the interpretative framework, the research goals being pursued, and the nature of the textual data' (p.452). Hermeneutical analysis is concerned with the concepts of (pre-) understanding, the hermeneutic circle, and the fusion of horizons, self understanding and the ideal of the dialogic community.

*4.6.2 (Pre) Understanding*

Phenomenological hermeneutics is positioned between an attempt to recapture an objective sense of the text and an existential appropriation of its meaning into understanding (Ricoeur, 1973). In this study data generated from research carried out with respondents remained the tool used by the researcher at all times to interpret and understand the phenomenon at hand. According to Thompson (1997:439) the stories consumers tell about their experiences are a 'prime locus of discovery'.

Hermeneutic interpretation emphasises (pre-) understanding (Arnold and Fischer, 1994) similar to that of 'bracketing' used in existential phenomenology (Thompson et al., 1989). The interpreter must recognise their position in the world (Heidegger, 1962). Interpretations are evaluated with the intention of understanding the respondents' perspectives as opposed to 'deciding whether the statements and texts move the research any nearer or further from the truth' (Valdes, 1987:55). In hermeneutic understanding, there must be an observed shift, change or expansion of the horizon or frame of reference of the interpreter or researcher (Arnold and Fischer, 1994). In this study the frame of reference is to understand the consumer perspective of the parent-child purchase relationship as opposed to the vested interest perspective of previous studies. Hermeneutic interpretation also seeks to highlight the often 'unspoken' background of meanings by which a person interprets their experiences and to show how these cultural viewpoints are adapted to the person's unique life situations (Dreyfus and Rainbow, 1982).

This stage in the interpretive process draws more explicitly from the researcher's immersion in a background of historical literature relevant to the research domain. The literature review engaged in as part of this study highlighted the importance and relevance of some of the historical literature relevant to this study. More importantly it highlighted the need for this phenomenon to be explored from a consumer perspective along with the application of phenomenology as

methodology and the hermeneutical process for interpretation. This interpretive movement is neither a case of deriving a theory that is 'in' the data waiting to be discovered nor a matter of a researcher 'projecting' an *a priori* framework onto the text. Rather the process is a dialectical one in which a researcher's developing knowledge of the cultural and historical background provides an orienting frame of reference from which to interpret narratives, and conversely, the engagement with the textual data enables these initial conceptions to be modified and extended (Thompson, 1997). Therefore, consumers' experiences of the phenomenon should help to aid an understanding of the parent-child purchase relationship not captured in previous research.

### *4.6.3 The Hermeneutic Circle*

Hermeneutic research is premised on the metaphor of the researcher-as-instrument (Sherry, 1991; Hirschman and Holbrook, 1992). The quality of findings is contingent upon the in-depth knowledge of background information (pre-understanding) the researcher brings to allow insightful linkages to be forged between this background knowledge and the data set (Thompson, 1997). Furthermore, 'the cultivation of a socio-historical perspective on the research domain coupled with sensitivity to textual nuances is probably the most critical aspects of hermeneutic interpretation' (Thompson, 1997: 442).

When utilising hermeneutics as a research tool the interpretation of data will proceed through a series of part-to-whole iterations (Arnold and Fischer, 1994; Thompson et al., 1994). The hermeneutic circle or iterative spiral of understanding is central to hermeneutic philosophy (Arnold and Fischer, 1994). This iterative procedure entails two distinct stages. The first is an intra-text cycle in which a text (such as an interview transcript) is read in its entirety to gain a sense of the whole (Giorgi, 1989); an ideographic reading to gain an often vague and intuitive understanding of the texts as a whole (Kvale, 1983; Giorgi, 1997). The intra-text cycle of the texts occurred on numerous occasions throughout the months of interpretation and is described in more detail in Section 4.9.1. Further readings were then undertaken to develop an integrated understanding of the meanings conveyed by the text. The second part-to-whole movement is an inter-textual one whereby the researcher looks for patterns (and differences) across different interviews. Also there are interactive movements between the intratextual and intertextual interpretive cycles (Thompson, 1997). At this stage the researcher is looking for emergent themes within the texts. A theme is a pattern or 'commonalities' (Thompson et al., 1990) that continues

to occur throughout the text and has an impact on the experience as a whole. The researcher must then return with certain themes to the data in an attempt to develop their meaning and relate them to the more global meaning of the interviews (Kvale, 1983; Arnold and Fischer, 1994; Thompson et al., 1994). This interpretive process is achieved through a hermeneutic circle which moves from the parts of experience, to the whole of experience and back and forth again and again to increase the depth of engagement with the understanding of texts (Polkinghorne, 1983; Annells, 1996). This method has been undertaken by various interpretive researchers seeking to explain and describe their specific-general-specific movements of interpretation (Arnold and Fischer, 1994) and is an appropriate method for the interpretation of the texts of both parents and children in an attempt to understand the meanings they associate with the parent-child purchase relationship. As a holistic understanding develops over time (Giorgi, 1989) the implementation of a hermeneutic framework must also occur over time; the scope of the entire framework cannot be implemented in a single reading of a text (Thompson, 1997) therefore the interpretation process in this study was a lengthy process. As themes evolve and more of the texts are interpreted, the researcher must ensure that nothing is taken out of context, in other words staying close to the texts at all times and that it relates to the individual interview at hand and also to the theme as a whole across all of the interviews. See Section 4.9.1 for a description of how the hermeneutic circle was employed in this study.

In principle, such a hermeneutical explication of the text is an infinite process; it ends in practice when one has reached ‘a sensible meaning, a valid unitary meaning, free of inner contradictions’ (Kvale, 1983:185). This can only be achieved as a more integrated and comprehensive account of the specific elements, and the text as a whole emerges (Arnold and Fischer, 1994) themes make sensible patterns and fit together consistently (Kvale, 1983). It is not uncommon at this point that certain sections original meanings will have changed quite markedly (Bernstein, 1983).

### *4.6.4 Themes and Fusion of Horizons*

Hermeneutic interpretation emphasises that an understanding of a text always reflect a fusion of horizons between the interpreter’s frame of reference and the texts being interpreted (Polkinghorne, 1983; Holbrook and O’Shaughnessy, 1988; Gadamer, 1993; Arnold and Fischer, 1994; Thompson et al. 1994). Each interview text is independent, and as such, common themes between them are not intrinsic. Commonality is not an inherent part of texts; it exists

independently of its interpretation. Rather, an interpreter must see different situations as similar (Thompson et al., 1990). The phenomenological researcher must show where participant descriptions support the thematic interpretations (Giorgi, 1983; Thompson, 1990) and are consistent with the objectives of the study and provides an insight into the phenomenon being investigated (Thompson et al., 1989; Thompson, 1990; Giorgi, 1989). In this study verbatim descriptions of respondents' experiences were used precisely in this manner to highlight the emergent themes. Koch (1995:835) states 'understanding occurs through a fusion of horizons, which is dialectic between the pre-understandings of the research process, the interpretive framework and the sources of information'. Furthermore, themes should be visible and understandable to other readers, but not necessarily the only possible interpretation of transcripts (Thompson et al., 1990). A focus in this study was always to provide a 'best' interpretation of the consumer experience, but it was acknowledged that other possible interpretation may also exist.

It is through the progressive iterations of the hermeneutic circle that a fusion of horizons occurs (Arnold and Fischer, 1994) determined through the various understandings and interpretations through the hermeneutics, back-and-forth iterations. The interpreter's horizon is finite, but is not limited or closed (Arnold and Fischer, 1994). Thompson (1997) further explains that the engagement with the textual data can sensitise the researcher to new questions and revisions in their initial interpretive standpoint. As the researcher understands more of the text, and changes or moves their position through interpretation, their horizon will move as well. Thus a hermeneutic interpretation seeks to be open to possibilities afforded by the text rather than projecting a predetermined system of meanings onto the textual data (Ricoeur, 1981; Gadamer, 1993). Fusion of horizons implies that the horizon of the interpreter comes to incorporate and integrate the horizon of the text. But anyone attempting to evaluate a hermeneutic interpretation must accept that there may be a number of equally good or better readings than their own (Arnold and Fischer, 1994). Understanding and interpretation are bound together and interpretation is an evolving process, thus a definitive interpretation is likely never possible (Annells, 1996). Again, a 'best' interpretation of the parent-child purchase relationship is the desired outcome.

### *4.6.5 Limitations of Phenomenological Analysis*

In phenomenological research, bracketing is one factor that is central to the rigor of the study, how interpretations arise from the data and the interpretive process itself are seen as critical

(Koch, 1995). Reliability in the context of the data collected in a qualitative study may be questioned on the basis of interview bias or leading questions. Crucially, the respondent must be allowed to air their own views in relation to the themes; otherwise interpretation of the data will become impossible.

When analysing the interviews, validity of the content may be a contentious issue, as there is no set of common methodological principles for the analysis of interviews (McCracken, 1988). Validity means whether or not the information collected through the interview is in fact that which the researcher originally sought. There is also a question of what aspects of a theme, or its larger context should be interpreted (Kvale, 1983). Traditional methodological requirements presuppose that the researcher knows what is to be investigated. However, a phenomenological approach involves an attempt to clarify the investigated phenomenon and its meaning to the individual, in this study parents and children. The validity of such a determination of meaning again depends upon the orienting interest which directs one towards the particular knowledge which will be developed (Kvale, 1983). In this study the consumer perspective has always been the driving force behind *an* understanding of the parent-child purchase relationship and what it means to the main actors of the phenomenon both parents and children. The implementation of phenomenology was deemed the most appropriate methodology to capture this understanding, preferably an enhanced understanding of the phenomenon, any new knowledge generated was always viewed as an additional bonus for the study.

Credibility is also mentioned in relation to the rigor of phenomenological studies. Beck (1993) viewed credibility lying in how vivid and faithful the description is to the experience lived. When this occurs, the insight is self-validating and if well done, others will see the text as a statement of the experience itself (Husserl, 1970). Lincoln and Guba (1985) described the goal of credibility as demonstrating that the inquiry was conducted in a manner to ensure the topic is accurately identified and described. The use of consumer description of experiences and interactions therefore needs to be embedded in the data and the final text in order to uncover an understanding of the phenomenon.

### 4.7 Recruitment of Respondents

Interpretive research seeks to select respondents who have ‘lived’ experience of the focus of the study, who are willing to talk about their experience and who are diverse enough from one

another to enhance possibilities of rich and unique stories of the particular experience (Polkinghorne, 1983; van Manen, 1997). Therefore respondent recruitment is planned and purposive (Goulding, 1999). Purposive sampling was employed to match respondents best suited to the research objective based on important characteristics under study including; parents, mothers *and* fathers, with children between the ages of five and eleven who have 'lived' experience of purchase request interactions with their children, in conjunction with children between the ages of five and eleven who have made purchase requests to their parents. In addition Erlandson et al. (1993) report that the principle concerning purposive sampling is to maximise discovery of heterogeneous patterns and not to generalise to the broad population, thus satisfying the lack of concern interpretivists hold for generalisability. As mentioned, the purpose of this research is to understand the phenomenon from a consumer perspective, mothers, fathers and children. Other studies do not appear to provide the 'full story' as a result of the omission of one or more parties, normally fathers and children.

### *4.7.1 Child Respondents and their Use in Research*

Historically children have been accorded little value in society; however, a paradigm shift in political and social thinking now recognises their contribution as legitimate (Porcellato, Dughill and Springett, 2002; Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell, and Britten, 2002). Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter Two children have a right to participate in decision-making on all matters that might affect them. If children have a (legal) right to be involved in purchase decisions (Nicholls and Cullen, 2004) then ultimately they have a right to be included in research regarding these decisions. According to Woodhead (2004:11) 'an emphasis on children as social actors, and empowering their participatory rights in all areas, of social life, including child research' must be considered. Furthermore children are regarded as valuable and relevant sources of information (Porcellato et al., 2002). It would be unwise to exclude their personal contribution and experiences from this research, where they are considered 'content' experts and the topic under investigation has a direct impact on their lives (Porcellato et al., 2002). However, their inclusion as respondents is not without challenges which will be discussed later. Also, as previously mentioned, the data set provided by children is less descriptive than that of the phenomenological parental data set, but is no less important or relevant to the understanding of the parent-child purchase relationship.

Researching children involves a number of ethical issues which need to be considered. These include involvement of children in research, consent and choice, possible harm or distress, privacy and confidentiality (Alderson 1995; Morrow and Richards, 1996; Hill, 1999; Mayall, 2000; Powell and Smith, 2006)[2]. Ethical ramifications were duly noted and adhered to closely throughout this study.

The issue of choosing appropriate child respondents was not without difficulties. Table 4.2 illustrates a summary of samples utilised in similar research studies and illustrates divergent sample ages ranging from three to fourteen years old.

Table 4.2 Summary of Child Samples Utilised in Previous Research Studies

| AUTHOR | SAMPLE AGE | RESEARCH AREA |
|---|---|---|
| **Ward and Wackman (1972)**<br>**Goldberg & Gorn (1974)**<br>**Goldberg & Gorn (1978)**<br>**Isler, Popper& Ward (1987)**<br>**Walsh et al. (1998)** | **5-12**<br>**8-10**<br>**4-5**<br>**5-7, 9-11, 3-4 (sub-sample)**<br>**3-6** | **Parent-child Purchase Relationship** |
| **Goldberg, Gorn & Gibson (1978)**<br>**Galst (1979)**<br>**Goldberg & Gorn (1982)** | **5-6**<br>**3-6**<br>**5-8** | **Advertising Persuasion** |
| **Ward, (1972)**<br>**Oates, Blade, Gunter & Don (2001)**<br>**Lawlor & Prothero (2003)** | **5-12**<br>**6-10**<br>**8-9** | **Advertising Intent & Understanding** |
| **Rossiter (1977)**<br>**Rieken & Samli (1981)**<br>**Gorn &Golgberg (1980)**<br>**Fox et al. (1980)** | **9-12**<br>**8-12**<br>**8-10**<br>**4-5** | **Children's Attitudes to Advertising** |
| **Reid & Leonard (1999)**<br>**Oates, Blade, Gunter & Don (2003)** | **5-11**<br>**3-6** | **Understanding Advertising** |

[2] For a full description of these issues, please see Appendix 1

From a marketing research perspective the Market Research Society (MRS) define children as those under the age of 16, further stating there is no recommended minimum age for research among children, but very young children will only be involved directly where it is and appropriate to the particular subject (See Appendix 1). The majority of research samples included children between the ages of five and twelve. Piaget's (1971) theory concerns the level of understanding and intellectual development a child acquires as it matures. However, he notes these age guidelines are not exact for each individual i.e. some children develop quicker than others within the same age group, similar to Spencer (2004). Furthermore, children's ages are characterised along a number of dimensions that capture important shifts in knowledge development, decision skills and purchase influence strategies. A three-year-old child's language abilities are underdeveloped and therefore difficult to research, a person over the age of 12 is not considered a *child*, thus providing justification for a sample range of children in the five-eleven age range for the purpose of this study. In addition, child respondents will be broken down into two distinct age groups, five to eight years (pre-operational) and nine to eleven (concrete operational) to explore any differences that may arise as a result of age.

## 4.8 The Research Process

### *4.8.1Parental Respondents*

No sample size is stipulated in research of this nature. Ten is typical, with three to ten employed by many researchers (McCracken, 1988b; Mick and Buhl, 1992; Thompson, 1996; Thompson et al. 1990). In accordance with these guidelines, three married couples (with children aged between five and eleven) were included in the parent sample. Furthermore, parental respondents are diverse regarding certain characteristics including: educational attainments, income, occupations, race (two of the respondents are Brazilian thus introducing some cultural differences), returned immigrants and have either been in full time employment since the birth of their children or have recently returned to work (mothers in particular). Furthermore, the respondents are typical of contemporary family demographics, i.e. both parents working outside the home, double income, mixed occupations and educational attainments, step children and so on. These parents have limited time available to them to spend with their children. Some children are presently in after school childcare, either professional childcare facilities or in the care of other family members,

particularly grandmothers. As such much of their family time is limited to evenings and weekends allowing child exposure to a wide variety of non-familial influences.

As mentioned previous research ignores social and family changes including the role adopted by fathers in contemporary families (Berey and Pollay, 1968; Ward and Wackman, 1972; Atkin, 1975(b); Galst and White, 1976; Popper, 1978; Goldberg and Gorn, 1978; Isler et al., 1987; Furnham, 2000) acceptable to a point, considering the dated nature of these studies. However, contemporary changes dictate a fresh approach to the choice of parental respondents. Few researchers (for example Goldberg and Gorn, 1978 and Palan and Wilkes, 1997) include fathers regarding similar research. Goldberg and Gorn (1978) concluded that fathers had very little influence in family decision making, particularly between parent-child purchase interactions, but that was 1978 when parenting was predominantly the mothers' domain. Palan and Wilkes (1997) employed a triad of adolescent-mother-father following the recommendation of Bell (1968) that parent child-relationships be examined bi-laterally. Taking into account changes in society including families, family communications and decision-making as discussed in Chapter Three it was deemed imperative that fathers *must* to be included for the purpose of this study. Contemporary parenting, dictates a sharing of all parental duties; fathers are now more actively involved in their children's upbringing and communicate with their children more than previous generations. Therefore, fathers are an important and suitable source of data for this research; indeed it would be remiss not to 'tap into' their experiences of parent-child purchase interactions, if one is indeed to examine this process from a consumer perspective.

### *4.8.2 Parental Respondents and the Phenomenological Interview*

Phenomenological interviews with parents were conducted over a series of consecutives weeks. All parental respondents have a number of children also participating in the research. This enables the researcher to provide a triadic approach, mother-father-child, in the research. Some respondents have both older children and/or step children. These children were not included as they do not fall within the age range specified. No attempt was made to generate a representative sample but all respondents matched the criteria stipulated. Table 4.4 and 4.5 Summarises parental respondents.

**Table 4.3 Summary of Maternal Respondents**

| Name | Age | Occupation | Children (Gender, Number & Ages) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Catherine **(C)** | 36 | Health Care Worker | Two daughters aged ten and fifteen, one son aged nine |
| Ann Marie **(AM)** | 37 | Administration | One daughter aged six, one son aged eleven |
| Helena **(H)** | 35 | Full time student | Step daughter aged fifteen, Twin daughters aged five, one son aged eight |

**Table 4.4 Summary of Paternal Respondents**

| Name | Age | Occupation | Children (Gender, Number & Ages) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Joe **(J)** | 42 | Butcher | Two daughters aged ten (biological) and fifteen (step daughter), one son aged nine |
| Wilson**(W)** | 41 | IT | One daughter aged six, one son aged eleven |
| Italo**(I)** | 44 | Proprietor | Daughter aged fifteen, Twin daughters aged five, one son aged eight |

The interview process works within an environment of safety and trust, and takes place within the context of a caring relationship and is central to what is ultimately created (Polkinghorne, 1983). The planned and purposive selection of respondents facilitated open discussion and put respondents at ease thus allowing them to feel more comfortable in expressing their experiences and stories of purchase interactions with children. In addition, the interviews were conducted in the family home in order to facilitate a relaxed atmosphere conducive to this type of research. Mothers and fathers were interviewed separately to gain an individual perspective. This approach was adopted as preliminary research[3] carried out identified that mothers are more likely to dominate discussions of this nature. Therefore, to provide fathers an opportunity to provide their input and to recount their individual experiences it was deemed necessary to interview them separately. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. All respondents were approached personally, informed of the purpose of the interview that it would be audio-taped, and confidentiality was assured. General conversation preceded the taping of the interviews to put respondents at ease. No predetermined discussion was envisaged, the exception being some grand tour questions outlined earlier. All subsequent discussion arose as the interview developed. All

[3] Preliminary research was carried out concerning pester power as part of a working paper submitted to the Academy of Marketing Conference 2005. The research comprised of focus groups involving married couples.

proceedings were summarised in order to clarify understanding of what transpired. Respondents were subsequently given the opportunity for additional comments and finally they were thanked for their time.

### *4.8.3 Child Respondents and Focus Groups*

To enable meaningful contribution a method which facilitates children's active participation must be employed to provide them with opportunities to express their unique points of view (Porcellato et al., 2002). 'Using qualitative methods that "engage" children directly are a meaningful way of giving them a voice, of gaining valuable insight into their thoughts and feelings' (Porcellato et al., 2002: 310; Mahon, Glendinning, Clarke and Craig, 1996). Furthermore, interpretive research studies the consumer experience and behaviour from data gathered from focus groups (O'Guinn and Faber, 1991; Thompson et al., 1990; Mick and DeMoss, 1990; Bergadaà, 1990; Schouten 1991; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991; Hirschman, 1992; Mick and Buhl, 1992). Therefore, to explore children's understanding of the parent-child purchase relationship focus groups were employed. Focus groups aim to be a systematic, transparent and rigorous process of data collection (Porcellato et al., 2002). In addition they facilitate researchers to capture children's perspectives in a reliable and ethical manner (Porcellato et al., 2002; Morgan et al., 2002). Focus groups have previously been used with children to explore understanding therefore they are considered an appropriate tool for researching children (Buckingham, 1987; Preston, 2000; Peattie, Peattie and Clarke, 2001; Oates et al. 2002; Lawlor and Prothero, 2000, 2003). Barbour and Kitzinger (1999:16) state that focus groups encourage children 'to generate their own priorities on their own terms, in their own concepts and to pursue their own priorities on their own terms, in their own vocabulary'. However, Peattie et al.'s (2001) research highlighted children's attention span as a major challenge. Their lack of attention span can be lessened if the topic is relevant, interesting and accessible. Furthermore, differing levels of competence and understanding, their eagerness to please and inherent egocentrism need to be contained (Porcellato et al., 2002). As discussed ethical implications must also be taken into account and research practice must reflect the rights afforded to them by law (Porcellato et al., 2002; Morgan et al., 2002; Powell and Smith, 2006).

Moderator choice is crucial to the success of focus groups; they must be relaxed working with children, have an awareness of how they think and act, encourage conversation, sense when group members are becoming bored, frustrated, uncomfortable and confused by the questions (Porcellato et al., 2002). Moderators should also be flexible, patient, and respectful, include all members, maintain a sense of humour, maintain control of the group and avoid any unsociable behaviour that may arise (Porcellato et al., 2002). In this study all focus groups were moderated by the researcher and all respondents were known to the researcher. Familiarity with the researcher appeared to reduce anxiety, encouraged children to relax, and allowed a rapport to be generated quickly and subsequently to unearth relevant information. Researcher familiarity has potential for bias, but it is believed familiarity proved to be advantageous in this study, and is supported by Porcellato et al. (2002).

#### *4.8.3.1 Child Respondents*

Small samples, characteristic of qualitative research, were utilised. Furthermore, the objective of such research is to obtain understanding and insights into the area concerned rather than establishing 'how many people share a certain opinion' (Ruyter and Scholl, 1998:8). Focus groups consisted of four single sex child friendship groups containing three to four children in each group. Same sex focus groups were employed in accordance with Gunther and Furnham (1998) and Vaughn, Shay-Schumn and Sinagub (1996) recommendations. Same sex groups reduce discomfort, distraction or influence caused by the participation of individuals of the opposite sex (Porcellato et al. 2002). Furthermore, single gender groups were utilised as boys have a tendency to be more competitive in a group situation and as such will strive to make their feelings known; girls tend to be more co-operative and considerate regarding each other (Porcellato et al. 2002). In addition same sex friendship groups 'reflect natural patterns of social interaction' (Bartholomew and O'Donohoe, 2003:440; Guba and Lincoln, 1982; Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999). Small friendship groups also help to put children at ease and to overcome any shyness that may be experienced (Gordon, 1999). Furthermore, talkative children also were also included as the emphasis on focus groups is discussion (Porcellato, 1998).

#### *4.8.3.2 Consent*

Prior to commencing focus groups with children, verbal consent was obtained from parents to allow participation, in accordance with the Market Research Society's (MRS) Standards and Guidelines (See Appendix 1).

Once parental permission was granted, predominantly from mothers, the children were approached to obtain their consent to participate, as stated in MRS guidelines: Consent from parents is not permission to interview the child, as the child must have their own opportunity to decline to take part in the research. The purpose of the research was briefly described to the children prior to seeking consent, or more correctly their assent to participate, all of the children agreed to be involved. It was also explained to parents and children the ground rules, procedures and the rationale for their involvement. Confidentiality issues were again conveyed to all. In order to increase the children's comfort, they were informed that they could say whatever they liked regarding questions asked and were reassured that it was not a 'test' where right and wrong answers existed. It was also explained that if they had nothing to say that it was 'ok'.

The moderator conducted four focus groups with the children over a period of consecutive weeks. These groups consisted of three to four children per group, predominantly the offspring of parental respondents. Where extra children were required to participate in the group, friends of the family-unit respondents were recruited. This resulted in a sample of fourteen children in total, consisting of eight siblings and all respondents are familiar with each other. Again no attempt was made to generate a representative sample. Table 4.5 and 4.6 summarises child respondents. Very little information is provided in relation to these groups in order to adhere to privacy issues associated with researching children.

**Table 4.5 Summary of Child Respondents –Girls**

| **Group One: 5-8 Year olds Name** | **Age** | **Group Two:9-11 Year olds Name** | **Age** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ally **(AA)** | 5 (twin) | Louise **(LL)** | 10 |
| Bronagh **(B)** | 5 (twin) | Kate **(K)** | 10 |
| April **(AN)** | 6 | Laura **(LB)** | 10 |
| | | Rebecca **(R)** | 10 |

**Table 4.6 Summary of Child Respondents –Boys**

| **Group One: 5-8 Year olds Name** | **Age** | **Group Two:9-11 Year olds Name** | **Age** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Christopher B **(CB)** | 8 | Philip **(P)** | 11 |
| Sean **(S)** | 7 | Thomas **(T)** | 11 |
| Christopher S **(CS)** | 7 | Alan **(A)** | 9 |
| Emmet (**E)** | 8 | | |

*4.8.3.3 Location of Focus Groups*

Porcellato et al. (2002) state the locations of the focus groups are also important to their success and recommend that the environment should be non-threatening and permissive and promote both openness and honesty. Based on these recommendations the research took place in a neutral, yet familiar, home environment to facilitate respondents. The focus groups lasted between 20 and 30 minutes with the younger children 30 and 45 minutes with older children.

As with most focus groups a number of key areas were prepared in advance in order to capture as much data as possible. These included pertinent areas to the study such as, do they request products, who do they make the requests to and to ascertain how refusals make them feel. It is important to note that as the interviews progressed and new areas were uncovered, further questions were added to facilitate greater understanding. With the permission of the children and parents, all interviews were audiotaped. Prior to ending the discussion, the moderator reiterated what had been discussed and the main points were summarised. The children were then invited to add any other comments or ask questions and finally they too were thanked for their time.

*4.8.3.4 Challenges of Conducting Focus Groups with Children*

Younger children's attention, as expected, started to decline relatively quickly once the discussion commenced, making some parts of the interview difficult to conduct and complete. At times they had difficulty understanding what was being asked, the moderator therefore had to rephrase questions to facilitate a response. In addition, despite separating groups by gender and age, it was felt some children were answering to conform, rather than expressing their true descriptions and experiences. This was particularly evident within both boy groups. Verbatim transcription also proved challenging as children regularly shouted out responses simultaneously

or talked over each other. In general, responses were brief, basic and one sentence in length, but this did not detract from the quality and value of their responses.

## 4.9 Hermeneutical Analysis

**In this study the process of analysis was a circular process requiring continuous returns to scripts and continuous playing of the interview tapes. This was necessary to ensure that emergent themes related to the respondent 'lived' experience and were not in any manner, theoretically abstracted. At all times the analysis remained faithful to the data set as transcribed from respondent interviews and focus groups, 'the words of the informants remain the primary source of data' (Goulding 1999:865).**

### *4.9.1 The Interpretive Process*

Once the research was completed the lengthy transcription process commenced, which resulted in excess of 125 pages of typed transcripts from both the phenomenological interviews and focus groups, which were both subjected to hermeneutic analysis. Careful attention was paid to the transcription process to ensure that the data set captured the language, stories and narratives as described by respondents. This facilitated the requirement of the phenomenological method of remaining true to the 'texts' or data set of respondents as the focus for interpretation.

The interpretive process employed in this study proceeded with a two tiered approach. Interpretive groups were employed to aid bracketing and thematic development along with a process of hermeneutical analysis over a lengthy period, whereby themes began to emerge. Both parents and children's texts were at all times treated as essentially one data set, although in nature they varied greatly. Parents' texts were 'thick' while those of the children were more descriptive, but nevertheless proved enlightening and important in aiding understanding of the phenomenon. The nature of the parental data sets meant that they were generally interpreted first in each session followed by those of the children. But as mentioned they were essentially treated as one data set. Appendix Two, Thematic Development, provides a tabularised diagrammatic synopsis of the interpretation processes and resultant themes ending in the emergence of the meta theme. The table provides only a synopsised account of thematic development as it would prove too lengthy to detail a 'blow by blow account' of every stage of the actual interpretation process

itself. Nevertheless it captures the nature of the systematic and thorough analysis conducted and a general description of how the data was reduced, fragmented and managed to arrive at the meta theme. Likewise what follows is a summarised written account of the interpretation process.

Thompson et al. (1989) stated that working in interpretive groups develops the researcher as interpreter and reduces the possibility of idiosyncratic readings. An interpretive group comprised of the researcher and other individuals familiar with phenomenological research (Thompson et al., 1989). According to Sherlock (1999) the interpretive group or dialogic community aids the researcher in a number of ways. They assist researchers 'see the woods for the trees', but more importantly, it serves as a check to keep the members attuned to the respondents' experiences and to 'purge' any preconceived theoretical notions and any theme identified is rooted in the text. The main involvement of individuals in the group was to assist bracketing by questioning the hypothesis that each member had employed, enabling the group to uncover other interpretations, gauge them and further improve understanding. Sherlock (1999:101) explains 'the group also serve an important role in seeing interpretations, assessing them and enhancing understanding'.

Several interpretive groups were carried out in this study, spanning several months and consisted of the researcher along with several other academic staff from various faculties, experienced in the purpose and mechanism of interpretive groups. Each member of the groups was provided with a transcript of the interviews in conjunction with airings of the interview tapes. Discussion ensued, thus aiding bracketing, where each member of the group voiced their interpretation of the data set. In the beginning this lead to the emergence of numerous possible themes, which encapsulated and helped to categorise a number of supporting 'sub-themes' or patterns in the text including: pestering occurs, parental capitulation, conflict is evident and so on. These themes were duly noted and further discussion in relation to each theme ensued in order to derive a greater understanding of respondents' experiences and to see where patterns or differences in themes were evident. This process ensured that each member's interpretation was explored, along with the groups overall interpretation, across individual and all transcripts in totality, but it was ultimately the researcher's responsibility and judgement to decide which themes best reflected the experiences of those involved. These were then presented to the groups in order to arrive at a consensus of themes and patterns for the transcripts in totality. This process was repeated on four occasions in total where themes and sub-themes identified initially were reduced, altered and

reconstructed throughout. Towards the end of the interpretive group process some themes evident initially had taken on new meanings and understanding, in effect the interpretations had taken on a 180 degree shift, which included for example: the balanced family theme and pestering is not a 'big deal' theme, again evidenced through a number of supporting sub-themes. The marked shift that occurred in interpretation as a result of the interpretive groups enabled the researcher the confidence to engage in further interpretation of the data set on a solo basis from there on in.

Therefore, prior to, concurrently, and subsequent to the use of interpretive groups, the researcher alone also engaged in multiple hours of listening to the interview recordings and numerous readings and re-readings of the texts in conjunction with conclusions arrived at from the interpretive groups. There was no order per se in relation to these readings, but as previously mentioned, parental data sets were generally dealt with first followed by the children's data set, although this frequently changed as new meanings emerged. This enabled the researcher to become immersed in the data, to gain an overall view and familiarity with the texts and furthermore, to refine and aid thematic development, which at times seemed unlikely. At all times the researcher strived to bracket away all preconceptions and enter into the interpretive process with no *a priori* ideas, this was not always an easy process. Over a protracted time frame all scripts were again read, re-read, analysed, interpreted and re-interpreted as further themes began to emerge, alter and develop. Initial solo readings resulted in superficial analysis; a plethora of possible themes, sub-themes and vague ideas of what was occurring in the data set kept occurring and included: pestering occurs, products requested, needs versus wants, television as the main influence, behavioural declines, denial and so on. However, concentrating on respondents' language, tone and verbatim descriptions and a return to Thompson's (1997) article 'Interpreting Consumers: A Hermeneutical Framework for Deriving Marketing Insights from the Texts of Consumers' Stories', the 'bigger picture' began to emerge. Essentially this was the key, in this study, to unlocking and understanding thematic development. This back and forth process, with individual transcripts and across all scripts in totality, while time consuming and frustrating, assisted in mining the data, in an attempt to 'bottom out'. The process was continual so as themes emerged they were examined, discarded, merged, and refined as the fusion of horizons began to merge from both the researcher and respondents perspectives. This process resulted not only in altering themes and sub-themes, for example pestering occurs changed to requesting not pestering, denial to reticence, conflict to balance, but also the number of themes varied greatly

throughout the process. At its highest eleven themes were considered relevant, until such themes including requests granted and children and advertising were discarded. At one point two 'core' themes which were considered core as a result of the collapse of numerous other themes and sub-themes including: requesting not pestering and the self perception perspective themes. These two core themes were later altered on the basis of prior analysis and expanded to reflect a more appropriate interpretation of what occurred. These then resulted in what were considered 'key' themes which included: requesting not pestering, the balance act and the 'soft' target. These themes were considered 'key' as they most adequately reflected the meanings respondents held for the parent child purchase relationship. However, the interpretation process was not finished at this stage and the key themes identified continually changed until horizons finally merged, the researcher had 'bottomed out', and a meta theme became obvious. Reynolds, Garretson-Folse and Jones (2006) defined a meta theme as a common theme found in all of the interviews; or representations of the *totality* of the phenomenon being researched (Tesch, 1987) essentially the 'bigger picture'. The arrival at the meta theme can only be described as a 'eureka' moment in this study and until the end of the process it appeared one did not exist. However, the whole process of interpretation, the interpretive groups, the back and forth iterations, the readings and re-readings, theme and sub-theme alteration, disposal, merging and expansion and an arrival of what was considered 'best' interpretation in the three key or core themes resulted in the emergence of what was happening overall or in this phenomenon in this study, the meta theme. It was at this point that the researcher had finally bottomed out and a best interpretation occurred. However, it was always acknowledged by the researcher that emergent themes, including the meta theme were *an* interpretation not necessarily *the* interpretation. The final themes will be named and detailed in the next chapter.

### 4.10 Summary

This chapter provides justification for the use of phenomenology as a paradigm and methodology to uncover consumers' experiences of the parent-child purchase relationship utilising the interpretivist paradigm to contextualise the chosen methodology. The very essence of interpretivism is one of perspective as such methodological choices were employed to best uncover an understanding of the parent-child purchase relationship from the consumer perspective, in their own words. Phenomenology further enhanced an ability to understand these

perspectives as they are lived and experienced by those concerned, essentially their story. The majority of previous research focused on an industry or vested interest perspective, this methodology set out to readdress this issue.

Phenomenological interviews were the natural choice of research tool for parents as they address the issue of 'the lived experience' associated with phenomenology. Focus groups best suited the research agenda in relation to children; they facilitated their inclusion and captured children's perspectives in a reliable and ethical manner, despite their descriptive as opposed to phenomenological nature.

Hermeneutics was employed as the most appropriate interpretive process as it concerns an interpretation of understanding. It also focused on the researcher and their ability to re-experience and re-think what the respondents experienced. This was further advanced through the use of hermeneutical interpretation which allowed the researcher to arrive at a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon using both data sets generated. Interpretive groups were employed to clarify that an appropriate interpretation was being advanced, and aided the researcher to identify the most salient aspects of the data set for interpretation.

Respondent choice and justification thereof was also provided in a detailed and rigorous manner. The chosen respondents reflected a total consumer perspective of the phenomenon under investigation. In order to advance the research agenda their experiences remained the focus of the research to capture the 'full story'. Issues concerning respondents, particularly child respondents, including ethical ramifications and conducting research with children, have been addressed and adhered to, while the process of conducting the research itself was detailed. Challenges associated with this process have also been identified and commented on. Finally, the interpretation process employed resulting in the meta theme is summarised. This will now be detailed and evidenced in the following chapter.

# 5.0 Chapter Five: Analysis and Findings

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the findings of the research including the emergent meta theme followed by supporting 'key' themes. The key themes were identified first and initially considered the most appropriate interpretation for this study, but through further interpretation it became evident that a meta theme permeated them all. As such the key themes identified provided the evidence for the existence of the overall meta theme. All themes emerged following a lengthy interpretation process utilising an interpretivist approach with phenomenology as a paradigm and methodology to uncover consumers' experiences of the parent-child purchase relationship. Hermeneutics was employed as the most appropriate interpretive process and focused the researcher's ability to re-experience and re-think what the respondents experienced which allowed the researcher to arrive at a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon. It was only following this process that the identification of the meta and key themes became clearly evident in this study.

The meta theme will be described first, followed by an integration of key themes with supporting extracts from respondents' narratives. For the purpose of clarity, findings of both sets of respondents will be presented consecutively under each key theme. This is not to be viewed as a matter of comparison but complementary description illustrating both sets of respondent's experiences regarding the phenomenon.

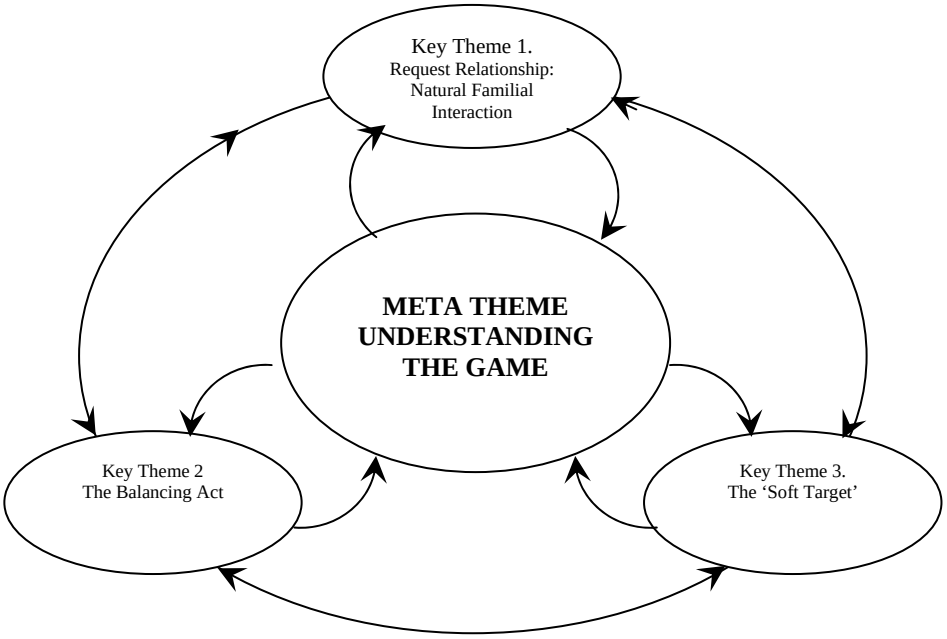
Primary research resulted in over 125 pages of transcriptions providing a rich data set to be interpreted. At all times respondent narratives remained the focus of the analysis in order to stay true to the 'lived experience' of the parent-child purchase relationship as understood by them. Respondent willingness to engage in this process provided a data set which resulted in a plethora of revelations and resultant themes which will be evidenced in the findings. *All* of their narratives provided a deeper understanding of the parent-child purchase relationship.

## 5.2 Meta Theme: Understanding the 'Game'

The emergent meta theme was *understanding the 'game'*, moreover, an understanding of each others respective roles in the parent-child purchase relationship game. Both parents and children

acutely understand their roles in the purchase process and its game-like qualities, which were evident in the verbatim descriptions contained in the three key themes, identified first, which contributed to and substantiated the existence of the meta theme. Upon further interpretation it became evident that the key themes were not the end point in this interpretation process and upon further interpretation it became evident that 'understanding the game' meta theme permeated all findings. In addition the key themes to emerge were 1. The Request Relationship: A Natural Familial Interaction, 2. The Balancing Act and 3. The 'Soft Target. In addition, these key themes are comprised of and supported by a number of related thematic descriptions evidenced in respondent narratives. Figure 5.1 provides a representation of the meta theme construct including the three relevant key themes.

**Figure 5.1 Meta Theme Construct**




Parents fundamentally understand that children will request items, from time to time, as a result of a number of influences. Furthermore, they understand the children's role as requesters and their role as request target or facilitator;

***W*** *Yeah, basically sometimes it was a hint, hint, hint thing… Am well especially the kids, am, as you know yourself they do tend to get influenced by colleagues as well…their friends, and that's a natural thing.*

***J*** *…… you just have to sit back and laugh at some of the things they come out with.. I would be one step ahead of them like… most of the time. You know when something was leading to a question, you have a fair idea there's something coming and 'No you're not getting it'. I've noticed it and I'm sure Catherine* [his wife] *has noticed it as well. They want what they want, if they can get it But sure they're only kids they all ask, but they don't always get it.*

Through their narratives parents described an understanding of the parent-child purchase relationship and alluded to its similarity as a 'game' between them, '*Yeah, basically sometimes it was a hint, hint, hint thing*' and '*I would be one step ahead of them like… most of the time'*. They are aware and understand the intricacies associated with the game and are comfortable with the reality of it as a result of this understanding.

Children too described their understanding in relation to their role in the purchase request game. They understood that they make requests to their parents occasionally, again as a result of a number of influences;

***S*** *I would just ask them for Christmas or something.*
***T*** *You act really good for about an hour then you ask.*

The game portion of the phenomenon is also evident in the children's descriptions, particularly when they described the tactics they employed in order to achieve a purchase, for example '*You act really good for about an hour then you ask'*. This not only described when and how they made requests, it also illustrated their understanding and intelligence in relation to the intricacies of the game involved in achieving a successful outcome, and how their behaviour influenced a purchase.

There was also an understanding between respondents that not all requests could be facilitated and this too was understood as part of the game;

***AM*** *Well, he understands that they're fairly expensive and he knows he can't have it just off .just because he wants it there and then, he knows that he usually has to wait for some occasion to get it, or else what we do was we tell him to save his money himself and he'll buy it, and he appreciates it.*

The children concurred;

***T*** *Am, well it depends on if you're sensible about what you ask for.*

Parents also understood that the effects of refusals, namely disappointment and disagreements, necessitated more communication with their children. In addition, any disagreements that

occurred were considered inconsequential to their relationship, were part of the game and were of a relatively limited duration;

***W*** *Am she doesn't really kind of ahh hold it against us, she doesn't stay angry for long as such…ahh …for a minute as such, and am, but she doesn't really hold it against us..*
***AM*** *She can moan a bit about it but, am…..generally she's not bad. …..*
***C*** *but then again it would be forgotten about, you know, ah, both Louise and Alan wouldn't harp on about something.*
***I*** *Well if I say 'No' he* [his son] *gets a bit pissed off, but then afterwards I just play with him and that's you know, we get along well*

Furthermore, children too acknowledged and understood that requesting led to some disagreement between them and their parents and as a result they ceased requesting, understanding that not all purchases can be facilitated and so as not to upset the game;

***T*** *When they start to get annoyed I stop*
***AL*** *If you didn't want to get them into a fury*

They were acutely aware of such instances and more importantly understood that persisting in their requests would not alter the outcome. Therefore they adapted their behaviour to lessen any negative impact on their relationship with their parents.

As a result of the understanding of the purchase request relationship and its game-like qualities, both parties considered any disagreements as a natural occurrence and furthermore consider them to be no 'big deal' or detrimental to their relationship. This was evidenced when respondents described their experiences and results of these disagreements;

***W*** *Am but am… no major consequences.*
***T*** *Not too bad*
***LB*** *Ok, so it was.*
***P*** *not bothered*

Furthermore, in order to keep a status quo in the game parents understood the need to balance purchases and refusals as long as the purchases were justified. These justifications included price, special occasions, benefits and so on;

***J*** *It depends if there was a birthday or Christmas or whatever occasion they might have a good chance of getting it. Yea, they might have a good chance of getting whatever they were looking for. It depends, the price too as well.*
***C*** *'Ah yeah go on' as they are only 3 or 4 Euro.*

In addition it was considered an acceptable compromise as part of the game itself and also maintained a harmonious relationship between them and their children;

***W*** *as I said, from time to time, a nice little something won't do any harm.*

Children too understood a need to introduce a balance to the game which allowed them to achieve the desired product while maintaining the harmonious relationship referred to earlier;

***Q*** *So do you ask for expensive things?*
***R*** *Not really, because you know the answer was going to be 'No'. If it's really expensive.*

As with their parents, children understood how to balance the requests made. Financial and practical concerns dominated the children's attempts to balance their requests;

***T*** *Am, well it depends on if you're sensible about what you ask for.*

But overwhelmingly, the theme that predominates with both parties was an *understanding of the game* associated with the parent child purchase relationship. This meta theme will be further addressed and evidenced in relation to the three supporting key themes.

### 5.3 Key Theme 1: The Purchase Request Relationship: A Natural Familial Interaction

Parents and children have developed an understanding regarding purchase request interactions and resultant behavioural outcomes and consider them a natural familial interaction. They acutely understood each others roles, position, feelings and perspectives regarding purchase requests as were evident in their descriptions of parental awareness of impending requests, the purchase request itself, strategies employed, potential outcomes of request refusals and so on. Furthermore, many of these elements include game-like qualities for both parties. But overwhelmingly both parents and children understood that their purchase relationships were natural interactions and regardless of the outcome considered them inconsequential to their relationships in general.

This 'naturalness' of this relationship began to emerge when it became evident that children were simply requesting not pestering for products. This was evidenced in relation to the nature of requests parents and children experienced including; infrequent requests, limited repeat requests and the non-persistent nature of these requests. This thematic development will now be addressed along with their associated strategies.

Parents in this study experienced limited requests from their children and furthermore understood that it was a *natural* occurrence. However, they recalled very few instances when their children made purchase requests and furthermore, purchase requests for unwanted or, to be more precise, un-needed products. Initially parents were either of the opinion, or were reticent to reveal, that

these requests occurred but as the interviews progressed parents recalled some unwanted/unneeded requests. When these requests were made it was a straightforward direct purchase request from their child, with no pestering evident. Parents conceded to purchase requests, on occasion. However, there were a number of stipulations to these requests which were considered part of the game**.** Parents reported that they conceded to purchase requests if the child *needed* the requested product, rather than 'just wanted' it.

***I*** *I never buy them anything, like, I mean, unless I think it's important for them, like, ok, things like clothes or something important for them. Not any sweets or crisps or any bullshit crap, I don't buy it. If they need it, it will be with them already, if they don't need it, there's no need to buy it.*

Ann-Marie concurred and stated;

***AM*** *Well, …he* [son] *knows he can't have it just off.. just because he wants it there and then……*

In these instances parents distinguished between different requests, those of 'needs' as opposed to 'wants'. Furthermore, parents were more likely to accede to requests for essential items. In these situations parents not only exerted their authority but also educated children about consumption.

Initially, children too had difficulty recalling purchase requests made to parents. Both boy groups initially rejected that they engaged in such behaviour. However, as the discussion progressed they too divulged examples of requests made. Children of different age groups commented as follows;

***S*** *No I didn't….Oh I did. I did a few times.*
***T*** *Not really*
***P*** *No. Not really*
***AL*** *Yeah sometimes*

One of the most interesting comments regarding requests made came from Kate a ten year old girl. In relation to requests made she stated;

***K*** *….. sometimes I don't really need it.*

This implied an understanding on the part of the children, particularly older children, of a distinction between wants and needs. Nevertheless they still made requests for unwanted/un-needed products.

Once children recognised they did in fact make purchase requests, it enabled them to become more articulate in their description of the types of requests made and each age group recalled a specific item they had requested;

***CB*** *Those sponge yolks…yeeaahh…A spongey yolk that you can make a bike* [Christopher was referring to Floam]
***AN*** *Well I asked my Mammy can I get a ….a Bratz doll,. The Bratz Princess..*
***T*** *Toys and water-boards and am slides and all those.*
***LB*** *Well I've wanted an I-pod for ages, that's all really.*

Products requested by children in this study were the norm and typically age and gender dependent including: toys, dolls, trampolines, sports gear, Playstation consoles and games, I-pods, bicycles, sweets and sugary food. Furthermore, some of the products requested referred specifically to brand names. Initially it seemed the children attempted to portray themselves as non-demanding although it appeared likely to describe a truer reflection of requests experienced. Throughout sections of the discussion children, possibly unconsciously, related to other instances where they frequently requested items from parents. But they were still simply requesting**.**

In addition, parents experienced limited repeat purchase requests, but again there was an understanding that these too may occur as part of the game and this too was viewed as natural. When repeat purchase requests were made various methods utilised by their children in the game included: repeating a direct request immediately or on another occasion, engaging in discussion with parents, emotion-laden tactics including crying, evoking guilt and bargaining strategies.

However, a previously unreported request strategy used by children emerged from the data set from the experience of one parent. For the purpose of this study it was termed the 'sibling co-operation request strategy'. It occurred when siblings co-operated with each other and engaged in a 'pincer-like' approach to target parents for the requested item;

***J*** *Then if they really want it or they thought they have some chance of getting it, they would work it out, I'd say they would yeah…Even the two of them together I have noticed it they would come at you from different angles like.*
***A*** *The two of them would come together?*
***J*** *Oh yeah*
***A*** *So they work together, they can actually work in pairs?*
***J*** *Oh they can yeah, if it would be of joint benefit to the two of them yeah, they would Alan would say it to Louise, or Louise would say it to Alan*
***A*** *So it's a two pronged approach to get at you*
***J*** *Sometimes yeah*

This tactic proved successful and made a greater impact on the parent, who in turn was more likely to accede to the request if, it benefited his children. In this instance he considered the request in-depth as both children requested the product and felt there may have been some merit in their request. It also displayed intelligence, possibly manipulation or 'upping' the game, on the part of children whereby they understood that co-operation enhanced the probability of obtaining the product. Either way, Joe understood and it made him consider the request in more detail. There was no annoyance or frustration in Joe's tone regarding this experience. Furthermore, he appeared to admire their intelligence. Parents recognised and understood these tactical games, as did their children, but yet again these were a form of requesting not pestering.

Parents also stated that their children did not persistently make the same requests. Descriptions of pester power as part of the parent-child purchase relationship including frequent and persistent requests, were not evident in this data set. Therefore, while some research studies reported that pestering was considered prevalent in the purchase request process, parents in this study had difficulty communicating these occurrences, suggesting they did not occur in their lives. The language and stories of respondents in this study at no point reflected the multitude of definitions of pester power or pestering associated with this phenomenon (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2) Therefore, in their experiences pester power and pestering did not exist, instead it was understood to be a *natural occurrence*, or game. Wilson a father of two recalled some of his experiences regarding purchase requests by his daughter aged six.

***W*** *Well they, everything that they see on telly tends to am, draw their attention and make them want to come to us, myself or their mother as such, am, to discuss something, that something, usually leading towards getting something that they saw on the ad for them…..Am, there's a lot of that definitely, a lot of that. Yeah, and ah, she would say of course, she would say what she, what it does of course, how it will benefit her and…Am again, she would basically say that she saw this and she saw that and she would like to have it you know Am, I actually think it's a good thing because it shows that she's clever and am and she knows what she wants and goes about it the right way kind of way.*

At first it appeared that his daughter was quite demanding when Wilson described request attempts as '*there's definitely a lot of that'*, which suggested frequent requests. However, he clarified the interaction between him and his child as a discussion. His experience did not reflect the notion of pestering or any negativity between him and his child, a consequence often associated with pester power. He further believed this discussion, particularly his daughter's use

of benefits to obtain the requested item, reflected her understanding and intelligence or *'clever'* side. He viewed his daughter as skilful in making requests (the game); she addressed it in the *'right'* way. This 'right' way again was not indicative of pestering therefore, it is concluded it did not occur between him and his child. Furthermore, at the heart of these types of requests, children were still simply requesting not pestering.

Children also reported instances where they 'asked' their parents for typical items mentioned and further revealed that they had, on occasion, made repeat requests to their parents for the same items. When asked if they would repeat the request to their parents their descriptions included;

***R*** *Not really.....only if I really wanted it.*
***CS*** *I'd just ask them for it another time.*
***AL*** *Yeah sometimes. I asked her and she said 'No' and I asked her again and she said 'No.'*
***LB*** *I asked her the day after and she said no again.*
***T*** *You act really good for about an hour then you ask.*
***P*** *Give them time to think about it*

Again children ultimately described direct requests not pestering. In addition, they did not always repeat the purchase request, or repeated it just one more time; such episodes cannot be considered pestering. Rebecca stated that she would repeat the request but *'only if I really wanted it'*, similar to persistent requests. Furthermore, repeat requests were not necessarily made immediately, as part of the game they postponed them, perhaps to limit the appearance of pestering or in an attempt to reverse the initial refusal, However, it seemed more likely that they understood that not all purchases will be granted, and understood when to cease their attempts.

Laura's description of request episodes with her mother typified the game;

***LB*** *I asked her the day after and she said no again*
***A***[4] *She said no again. So, did you ask her again after that?*
***LB*** *No* (laughs)
***A*** *So you asked her twice that was it*
***LB*** *Yeah*
***A*** *Do you think you'll ask her again sometime?*
***LB*** *Probably not*
***A*** *Probably not. Why not?*
***LB*** *Because the answer will always be no.*
***A*** *That's it, she's made up her mind, has she?*
***LB*** *Yeah*

[4] A refers to the author's questions and comments

Laura laughed when asked if she will repeat the request to her mother, indicating she was astute and knew when to stop requesting. A child who laughed at the thought of repeating a request was not indicative of an unhappy child, nor did it imply a refusal having any adverse effect on them. She further stated she would not repeat the purchase request because the answer would remain unchanged thereby acknowledging her mother's decision and authority. Laura's description of the interaction was indicative of familiarity, a pattern or game she may have experienced before; she may have, on previous occasions, made repeat requests and received the same answer to no avail. Therefore, she understood and learned from experience that repeating the request would not change the outcome. Furthermore, these children understood and accepted they would not achieve the desired outcome every time, but this was considered natural and part of the game. As a result they withdrew their requests and did not 'pester' their parents any further.

Furthermore, in relation to these requests all respondents understood the possible sources of these requests and considered them a natural part of their lives. Both parents and children were clear in their understanding of request origins and influences and identified a number of sources including peers (predominantly), parents, shops and television.

From the parental experience peer influence predominantly featured, but regardless of the influence they understood it to be a natural occurrence in their lives and the lives of their children;

***H*** *They will have recognised it from maybe playing with say a friend*
***W*** *Am well especially the kids, am, as you know yourself they do tend to get influenced by colleagues as well…their friends, and that's a natural thing.*
***I*** *Oh I'd say, probably friends and telly*

Shops too also received a lot of attention by all parents and are best evidenced in Joe's description of what occurred in a typical shopping experience;

***A*** *Do you ever go shopping?*
***J*** *Yes, food shopping, yes.*
***A*** *Would you bring the kids with you?*
***J*** *Am not unless I had to [laughs]. Ah no, they are not too bad.*
***A*** *And tell me, what about when, I am going to take a supermarket as an example, what if you are in a supermarket with them would they ever make requests in a supermarket for something*
***J*** *Oh God yeah! All the time you'd be taking more stuff out of the trolley than putting into it*

*They would be going on 'Oh I want this'. You walk down and when you have your back turned something else has gone in...but you take that out and when you'd be doing that something else will be gone back into the trolley.*

***A*** *So in the supermarket they don't even bother asking?*

***J*** *Yes, some of the time yeah. The odd time you get a request and you get to say no so it doesn't leave the shelf.*

Joe described a typical shopping experience between him and his children. He initially joked that if he could avoid taking his children with him on a shopping expedition he would, because he understood what could occur if they accompanied him '*Am not unless I had to [laughs]. Ah no, they are not too bad'*. Despite his awareness and understanding of how a shopping trip may unfold he still viewed it as a game, it was 'no big deal' or natural behaviour and he was comfortable to have his children accompany him. He also understood that it is natural child behaviour to place items in the shopping trolley '*You walk down and when you have your back turned something else has gone in'*, after all children observed their parents do this from a very young age. But likewise requests will also be made '*the odd time you get a request and you get to say no so it doesn't leave the shelf*'. This reflects that children understood that some items require parental permission. But ultimately what he described is the game associated with parents and children shopping together.

Despite television advertising's reported prevalence as the main stimulus for children's purchase requests, respondents in this study disagreed and minimised its power as an influence in their children's purchase requests. The transfer of influence from advertiser to peer generated request behaviour, positioned children's purchase requests as a social phenomenon as opposed to a promotionally generated occurrence. This was not to suggest that television advertising did not in some instances act as a stimulus for some requests, but requests as a result of television advertising were also considered natural, but in the majority of experiences peer influence was dominant. Parents understood that children simply wanted what their friends had and this is natural. However, the main caveat raised in this finding was to consider how peers are exposed to these products in the first place.

Children too agreed with their parents and relegated television advertising behind peers as an influence for purchase requests. They understood advertisements to be annoying and boring;

***E*** *Them boring things*

***S*** *Ads and all them boring stuff*

***CS*** *They annoy me*
***S*** *Useless and boring*
***T*** *It only entertains sometimes and most of it was boring*
***P*** *..ads lie to you sometimes.*

As a result of these attitudes children avoided advertisements and understood that they were not to be trusted at times because '*ads lie to you sometimes'*. This was not to suggest that they disliked advertisements entirely, as Thomas states *'they entertain sometimes'*. Furthermore, the children, although age-dependent, understood that advertisements helped to sell products. This suggested that contemporary children are more 'media savvy' than previous generations. Again this was not to state that they did not make requests as a result of television advertising, they understood that on occasion they did, but they were limited occurrences and considered natural; another 'player' to consider in the game.

As with parents children understood peers to be their main influence. The main reason they considered this was simple; they trust them;

***A:*** *So if you saw a product that you think you might want, and you saw it on an ad or one of your friends told you about it, who would you believe the most?*
***R*** *Your friends.*
***K*** *Friends.*
***A:*** *Why your friends?*
***R*** *You trust them.*
***A*** *You trust them?*
***T*** *When your friend has recommended it. Well you'd know your friends better than you would the advertisers and you trust them, so you'd take their opinion.*

Children understood their friendships as more important and a more natural interaction than those with commercials. They also understood that their friends have no ulterior motive in recommending a product; therefore they are quicker to adopt their friends' recommendations than those of advertising. But as with television, peers too are another 'player' in the game.

In addition they also viewed their parents as a major influence in their requests;

***A*** *So what about if the ad said its terrific, its terrific, its terrific, and your Mum and Dad said, no its not, it's this and that and the other. Who would you listen to?*
***R*** *Mum and Dad.*
***All*** *Mum and Dad.*
***A*** *Mum and Dad. So you'd listen to your Mum and Dad before the advertisements?*
***R*** *Yeah*
***A*** *Why?*
***LL*** *They're nearly always right.*

In the lives of these children, people as opposed to advertisements are understood to be the major influences in their lives and purchase relationships. Both peers and parents predominated as influences in their lives and furthermore they understand them to be more honest and as such trust them. Considering parents role in the game, it seemed only natural that they would be included as a major influence.

Therefore, it was evident from both sets of respondents that television advertising was not the greatest influence on purchase requests. Instead it evidenced that supposed 'pester power' as a result of television advertising is indeed exaggerated. It was understood that television advertising in conjunction with other influences including peers and parents were responsible for the origin of some purchase requests in this study. Interestingly, parents did not understand themselves as an influence, and unlike children, positioned retail stores as a major influence in their children's requests. This was interesting considering the game parented engaged in with purchase requests.

The 'naturalness' and game-like quality of this relationship also emerged when parents vocalised their *awareness* of imminent purchase requests. It did not surprise them that their children made purchase requests; it was considered a routine occurrence for them; furthermore, it was viewed and understood as typical natural child behaviour and part of the game;

***J*** *But sure they're only kids they all ask, but they don't always get it. ……Well the first thing when they see it, 'I'm getting that' naturally enough they are only kids.*
***W*** *Yeah, basically sometimes it* [the request] *was a hint, hint, hint thing.*

Joe stated *'naturally enough, they are only kids'*; which suggested that requesting was a naturally occurring phenomenon within families. Joe expected his children to act as children and be impulsive in their requests. Furthermore, he found it entertaining;

***J*** *…… you just have to sit back and laugh at some of the things they come out with.. I would be one step ahead of them like… most of the time. You know when something was leading to a question, you have a fair idea there's something coming and 'No you're not getting it'. I've noticed it and I'm sure Catherine* [his wife] *has noticed it as well. They want what they want, if they can get it.*

His tone regarding these requests emphasised these occurrences were not arduous for him. He was aware and understood the request was coming but he also tried to intercept and deflect the request before it was even made which was indicative of the game. These requests did not annoy

him, he found them entertaining and even humorous *'you just have to sit back and laugh'*, hardly the language of a frustrated parent. None of this experiential description can lead one to conclude that a purchase request resulted in exasperated parents or was detrimental to family relationships. In addition the game-like aspect of the relationship was evidenced when he stated, '*I would be one step ahead of them like… most of the time. You know when something was leading to a question, you have a fair idea there's something coming'*. Furthermore he understood the process; it was familiar to him and therefore a natural occurrence.

In addition parents also understood that children may be disappointed as a result of a request refusal, but this too was considered a natural outcome;

**J:** '*I'd explain that to them, you'd have to like, the child would be disappointed'*.

However, an understanding of child-disappointment was best illustrated by Wilson's experience;

***A*** *Ok, so they'll be a bit disappointed ……. when you say no with an explanation, that normally applies. But your daughter might come back a couple of times and ask, and be upset perhaps about it. Have you any examples where that has happened and how she's behaved or..?*

***W*** *Am she doesn't really kind of ahh hold it against us, she doesn't stay angry for long as such…ahh …for a minute as such, and am, but she doesn't really hold it against us.*

***A*** *Her disappointment wouldn't last too long? What would that moment entail?*

***W*** *Am…… disappointment really for her. She would go away for instance…she would say it's not fair for instance, that would be one of the first things, and she would go away to her room, for that moment as such and come back later. Am but am…… no major consequences. They're quite good in that sense you know.*

Initially, it appeared his daughter conformed to typical refusal behaviour, repeating requests, withdrawing from the situation, engendering parental guilt, getting upset and so on, tactics often employed by children as part of the game. This could be interpreted as parent-child conflict. However, Wilson's description *'no major consequences'* was paramount to this description. Yes, his daughter can be disappointed, and directed her disappointment at him, but it did not concern him. He did not understand it as pestering or a major conflict situation between him and his child, his daughter did not hold it against him, it was simply inconsequential. More to the point, it was understood to be 'normal' or natural child behaviour. In fact, in his experience, he believed his children were quite understanding or *'good in that sense'* when it came to such situations.

Interestingly, children did not understand it as disappointment to any great extent. The majority of them were more accepting and understanding of the situation. When asked how they felt when denied a product request, they responded;

***E*** *I'd just walk off and play Playstation.*
***CS*** *I'd feel good. …Yeah, well I own lots of toys in my house.*
***T*** *Not too bad*
***LB*** *Ok, so it was.*
***S*** *Am yeah a bit. At least I could be happy that I could am…. Am that I…If I save up I could still get it.*

This was not to imply that children were happy with refusals, but it emerged that they were not overtly troubled or disappointed by such outcomes, they considered these refusals as a natural outcome of the game from time to time. Emmet recounted how he would *'just walk away and play Playstation'*. Sean described how he would feel *'a bit'* disappointed, but this was offset by the fact that he could purchase the item himself which was acceptable to him. Christopher S. was consoled by the fact that he already *'owns lots of toys'* so it was not a huge issue for him. Two older children, Thomas and Laura concurred and also considered refusals inconsequential to them when they described such refusals as *'not too bad'* and *'ok'*. This highlighted that children understand refusals as natural and they cannot have everything they want. This was not to suggest that they would not attempt the request again, but, initial refusals were also accepted, it was part of the game.

It also emerged that children were accepting and have an understanding regarding request refusals. This understanding was evident in their reluctance to engage in disputes and upset the game with their parents. Thomas' description best summed up the interaction between parent and child and request refusals;

***A*** *Who did you ask?*
***T*** *My mum.*
***A*** *Your mum…. and she would say 'no' mostly?*
***T*** *Yeah.*
***A*** *How does that make you feel?*
***T*** *Not too bad, sometimes I really want it and it makes me a bit angry.*
***A*** *A bit angry and would you keep asking her if she said no or would you just leave it?*
***T*** *Am I'd leave it.*
***A*** *You would leave it, you wouldn't go 'Ah Mam please, please,' or would you just leave it?*
***T*** *Just leave it…If they were on the way to work yeah.*

Thomas' use of the phrase *'a bit angry'* signified some conflict, but he preceded this with the word *'sometimes'* which suggested that any ill feeling as a result of a request refusal was at best spasmodic. This excerpt also suggested that he did not in fact pester his mother and understood the boundaries of the game when it came to getting what he wanted; moreover he accepted them. He simply described a direct purchase request and stated that he will not repeat the request. He further stated that he would not ask his mother for an item when she was *'on the way to work'*, reflecting his understanding of his mother's busy life and time pressures and when it was inappropriate to make requests. Philip also described his experience, and commented *'not bothered'* regarding a refusal. Both descriptions revealed that refusals were inconsequential to children and they accepted that they naturally occur from time to time.

This was further evidenced in the following description when the older girls recalled their experiences. While there were mixed reactions to purchase request refusals the overall consensus was it was not a big issue;

***A*** *So say if you asked your Mums for stuff and they said 'No', how would that make you feel?*
***LL*** *Angry.*
***A*** *What about you Kate.*
***K*** *Not angry….*
***LB*** *Not really.*

In relation to this study it was repeatedly evident that request refusals were of no major consequence and do not have any enduring effects on children, their behaviour and feelings, negative or otherwise, towards their parents. Both parties understood it was a game thus negating the damaging parent-child relationship criticism levied against pester power and children's purchase requests, it simply did not manifest itself in this study. The children reported little anger or disappointment as a result of a request refusal, instead they simply accepted it as natural familial interaction. These findings also suggested that children were sensitive to parents' limitations and thus ceased or were selective in their requests, possibly as part of their game tactics.

This was not to suggest that disagreements between parents and children did not occur, they did, occasionally, but more importantly it was evident that both parties understood why they occurred and furthermore considered them natural. Parents in this study did, on occasion, experience some

behavioural decline in their children as a result of a purchase request refusal. This behavioural decline led to disputes between themselves and their children, but it was understood as natural and a short lived episode. It further emerged that resultant behavioural changes too were understood and ranged from verbal displeasure to a behavioural decline encompassing physical displays of anger;

***A*** *How would she behave if you said no to her?*
***AM*** *Depends on what it was. Sometimes she's fair enough about it. Other times she can be a bit…..tantrumy…….well, tantrumy was not a fair thing. She can moan a bit about it but, am…..generally she's not bad. …..*
***A*** *So her behaviour might change?*
***AM*** *A little bit but, she might sulk, she might sulk for a few minutes but..Sulking, just … Giving me a dirty look (laughs) and telling me I'm not a nice Mammy and that's it.*

This description highlighted a number of points concerning parental attitudes towards such behaviour. Firstly, any behavioural decline that *might* have occurred was inconsequential, and furthermore, it was far from prevalent, recurring or persistent. In addition, Ann Marie's experience revealed various behaviours as a result of purchase request refusals. It was not always the same and the extent of the behavioural decline was dependent on the actual product the child requested as reflected in her comment *'it depends what it was'*. This suggested that children's game tactics were also product dependent. The resultant behaviour included being acceptable to the child, to what she described as *'tantrumy'*, although she later rejected this word as she felt it was too strong to describe what occurred. Ann Marie simply described that some behavioural change may occur *'and that's it'*. In effect no overt conflict was taking place, and the parent, in this instance, felt in control of the game

Similarly, Helena made reference to her experiences of a behavioural decline as a result of a request refusal;

***A*** *So whenever you say 'no' to them, they are all right, they don't mind?*
***H*** *They might throw a bit of a wobbler but after a while they know they are not going to get it so…*
***A*** *What does a bit of a wobbler entail?*
***H*** *A bit of a wobbler with them 'Ahh are you not getting me something nice' or 'You got Sean something nice', or ....Am, she'd be starting, she might start to whinge a little bit or whatever ….Well whinging, whinging more so than crying…the 'Poor me' card.*
***A*** *So it's more verbal oh you didn't get me or whatever?*
***H*** *Yeah.*

Again some behavioural change *might* occur, in what she described as a '*bit of a wobbler'*. This 'wobbler' manifested itself in typical game tactics including sulking, guilt tripping, and some *'whinging'* or moaning, all of which was primarily verbal. Both Helena and Ann Marie used the word '*might'* on a number of occasions which suggested that request refusals did not always result in a behavioural decline or any resulting parent-child conflict. Also Ann Marie commented that her daughter's behaviour might change *'a little bit'* indicating some behavioural change. This was not indicative of an all out tantrum resulting in conflict, as regularly reported in studies, therefore, major parent-child conflict does not exist in the lives of these respondents. Again any minor disagreements reported were considered natural as a result of the game.

Furthermore, parents described the duration of these occurrences as temporary with no negative consequences. Catherine's experience highlighted this occurrence;

***A*** *Have you ever had any times when you said 'no' to them and it wasn't the most pleasant experience you ever had?*

***C*** *Where you mean that you turn around and get thick and 'I don't love ya!' .Let me see……..Am I'd say no, ….yeah am, there would have been yeah, where he'd make a face, but then again it would be forgotten about, you know, ah, both Louise and Alan wouldn't harp on about something.*

She experienced some behavioural decline in her children's behaviour as a result of a request refusal similar to those already described. But she continued to describe that it was as a short-lived occurrence. Her children did not persist in their requesting, she stated they *'wouldn't harp on about something'*. Her husband Joe concurred;

**J** *'it would be over in a couple of minutes'.*

Italo also commented on the longevity of disagreements that occurred between himself and his children. He described how their relationship may deteriorate, temporarily, complementing experiences of other parents and but he similarly understood it to be part of the game, an insignificant issue or not a 'big deal';

***I*** *Well if I say 'No' he* [his son] *gets a bit pissed off, but then afterwards I just play with him and that's you know, we get along well*

***A*** *What would he do if he got pissed off?*

***I*** *Oh well he'd get cross, but he'd get cross I don't think I remember, Sean asking me something, but he rarely asks me for something , he never really. But he likes asking me for things in magazines, when he wants to learn, things that are put together, you know.*

***A*** *But if he got pissed off, how would he get pissed off, what would he do. How would you know he's pissed off?*

***I*** *Ohhh, he got a face…he got a face that's deadly, he got a face and then he shows his cross face*

***A*** *That's it?*

***I*** *Then that's it then, he doesn't go any further than that.*

***A*** *And what about the girls?*

***I*** *Ohhhh the girls* [twin daughters] *Oh they start whinging…yeah they start whinging, I don't care if they whinge, because I start counting…..*

His experiences ranged from his son being angry or '*pissed off*', or giving him dirty looks *'his face'* to his younger daughters *'whinging'*. He commented that disputes with his son did not escalate past dirty looks, effectively that it was forgotten about in a short period of time. His tone in relation to his daughter's behaviour was markedly different, almost indignant, as he discussed how his daughters *'whinge'* but as a disciplinarian he exercised his authority to resolve the situation as quickly as possible. These experiences highlighted the differences between children's ages and their request behaviour including frequency of requests and resultant behaviour, younger children requested more frequently. In contrast when tension existed between him and his son, he resolved the situation through play and detailed how *'they get along well'* which meant that refusals do not adversely affect their relationship. With regards to the persistence of these disputes he stated '*then that's it then, he doesn't go any further than that'*. The limited duration of disputes, their inconsequential nature and the naturalness of these occurrences between parents and children was a recurring theme throughout this discussion.

Furthermore, the tone and language used to describe these occurrences did not reflect the experiences of exasperated parents. Repeatedly these parents recalled instances of minor disputes between them and their children, which involved emotion-laden tactics previously described. While these disputes did occur occasionally, it did not have a detrimental effect on the parent-child relationship, it did not result in parents feeling frustrated and it was far from an enduring situation. They understood it to be a 'run of the mill' game between them, a natural occurrence, viewed as an unavoidable event in their interpersonal relationships. Ann Marie laughed at the notion of her child sulking; Helena described how it might result in a bit of a *'wobbler'* while Catherine recalled how it would be forgotten quite quickly, similar to Italo who stated it did not go any further than a short lived disagreement. If children do not persist with purchase requests

and behavioural declines are considered insignificant by parents it cannot be considered damaging to their relationships, after all it is only a game.

It further emerged children too did not experience request refusals as damaging to their relationships with parents. When questioned regarding request refusals they eventually described their ensuing behaviour, which at times resulted in a behavioural decline. This behavioural decline, as with parents, varied from verbalised feelings of anger to displays of physical anger such as door slamming. Alan and Philip described how they reacted to repetitive refusals;

***AL*** *I asked her and she said no and I asked her again and she said No.*
***A*** *You asked her twice?*
***AL*** *Yeah.*
***A*** *And she said no?*
***AL*** *Yeah.*
***A*** *So how does that make you feel?*
***AL*** *Am thick.*
***A*** *Thick? What happens when you get thick?*
***AL*** *Get mad, go away.*
***P*** *Slam the door* [Philip interjects]
***A*** *Slam the door Philip? If you didn't get what you wanted?*
***P*** *Hmmmmm* [Nods his head]

These excerpts highlighted a behavioural decline, on occasion, as a result of purchase request refusals; the worst reported behaviour was door slamming. However, at this point it was noted that some of what these boys described appeared to be more bravado than what may actually occur.

In addition, children also understood the effects these requests had on their parents, yes; they can and did sometimes make their parents angry. As mentioned, the children understood that not all requests are facilitated. They also understood the potential for these confrontations to escalate and knew when to desist or stop the game playing. This was best evidenced with the older boy group;

***A*** *So, would your Mam and Dad ever get annoyed with you for asking for stuff?*
***All*** *Yeah*
***T*** *When they start to get annoyed I stop*
***A*** *You stop!*
***T*** *Yeah*
***A*** *And how, what kind of stuff would they get annoyed with, would they ever say to you would you stop asking for stuff or?*
***AL*** *If you didn't want to get them into a fury*

Alan the youngest boy in the group used the word *'fury'* to describe knowing when to stop requesting, which suggested an escalation in disputes between parents and children. Consequently he recognised potential problems and stopped his game tactics so as not to exacerbate the situation or upset the game. Interestingly, neither of Alan's parents made reference to this *'fury'* or any anger for that matter.

Their female counterparts also described similar patterns of disputes and an awareness of when to cease request attempts;

***A*** *And when do you know to stop?*
***LB*** *When she shouts.*
***R*** *When they get angry.*
***LL*** *When they shout.*
***LB*** *And when they say, 'Don't ask me again'.*
***A*** *Don't ask me again. What about you Kate? When do you know when you say, 'Oh I'm not going to get it now'.*
***K*** *When she says 'No was the final answer'.*
***P*** *'Look at my lips, I said No'*

It emerged parents did not always shout or get angry, they also respond *'No was the final answer'* which illustrated parental exertion of authority. Children mimicked their parents when they used the phrase *'No was the final answer'* or *'Read my lips'* it was delivered in a very authoritative tone. They appeared to be ridiculing such responses, which suggestd they did not take it too seriously and that it too was part of the game. Nevertheless, children acknowledged and understood their parents' authority regarding their requests.

These examples of disagreements mirror those described by parents to a certain extent. However, unlike parents children acknowledged their parents can and do sometimes get angry and lose their temper resulting in anger and shouting. Yet, no parent used the word anger, angry or annoyed when recalling their experiences. This suggested that parents simply paid no attention to an escalation in their own responses and viewed them as 'no big deal'. In any case the children did not take it too seriously and understood it to be a game between themselves and their parents, which were not damaging to their relationships. In this study parents did not get involved in arguments with their children and children accepted refusals as part of the request process and did not engage in persistent conflict episodes.

### 5.4 Key Theme 2: The Balancing Act

A further theme to emerge in this study was that of a balancing act. From the parental perspective this concerned an understanding of the need to balance their authoritarian and indulgent parenting skills, purchases and refusals, along with strategies employed and justification thereof. The children's perspective involved an understanding of the need to balance the types and timings of requests made, along with strategies employed and justification thereof.

Parental strategies utilised in request refusals included: direct refusals, engaging in a discussion with their child, stalling, distracting and bargaining, all game-like tactics. Parents provided justification for refusals in numerous ways but they mainly related to benefits for the child. Refusing undesirable purchase requests, for whatever reason, involved their understanding of responsible parenting. This was further evidenced through an adaptation of their childhood history in relation to how they interacted with their own children. However, in order to provide a balanced approach to the game and purchase requests and denials they also initiated some purchases for their children in the form of indulgences justified by means of rewards, special occasions and price.

Children too understood the need to implement a balanced approach concerning, what, when, who and how to ask for the desired item, effectively evidencing their approach to the game. In order to maximise success for these requests and reduce any potential disputes they kept their requests relatively simple; were aware of when to ask for products, normally close to a special occasion; requested inexpensive products and promoted the benefits of such products in order to influence the game and achieve a purchase. These experiences will now be described.

In relation to the authoritarian parent, throughout the data set parents regularly vocalised their authoritative position saying no to their children for certain purchase requests, understanding that they cannot or should not concede to all purchase requests; thereby reinforcing their power and authority in these situations. A direct refusal was the first action by parents to ward off superfluous requests and most succinctly portrayed their authoritative approach to the game;

***C*** *Well no means no to my kids…. I'll say 'Alan no', I said no and that's it.*
**I** *I don't care, I just say 'no' and that's it. It's 'no'.*

Furthermore, parents were not averse to refusing some requests if they felt the product was undesirable. Ann Marie described her refusal for *Dairy Lea Lunchables*;

**AM** *They won't get it. Because its absolute rubbish..You see they think it's nice and its cool, because it's on an ad on the telly, they're not aware of how processed it was, and it was so obviously processed, you can see it…. Appearances can be deceiving on television, it looks great and everything, but then you actually see it in real life, and its small, little crackers and the small little pieces of meat and whatever, but its so processed looking, its not something I would buy. It's too processed anyway for me…They believe what was advertised, but Mammy doesn't.*

Ann Marie refused to buy this product for her children and exercised responsibility along with the protection of her children from what she understood as misleading advertisements and non-nutritional food,as she stated '*Appearances can be deceiving on television… They believe what was advertised, but Mammy doesn't'.* She understood that exposure to commercial messages led to some requests naturally but believed children may be deceived by such advertisements; but not her. As a result she mediated, protected and educated them from such influences and products, which reflected her understanding of good parenting. This experience highlighted that the game also raised some serious concerns for parents but it was effectively dealt with.

This was further evidenced by Joe who articulated his reasons for purchase request refusals;

**J** *… then again you don't give in to everything. But like if I say 'No' and I mean no. It's a good stern 'No' stick with it yeah. Not everything was got there and then like.*

Joe revealed *'then again you don't give in to everything',* which suggested that it was acceptable to *'give in'* at times, but not always, thus providing a balanced approach to such requests. In addition he understood that there are occasions when the balance between purchases and refusals must be addressed; his children simply cannot have everything they want. These fathers echo Ann Marie's position, whereby they understood that refusing requests and exercising authority ultimately benefited their children and reinforced their understanding of good and responsible parenting as part of the game. These strategies did not involve making deals but consisted of unilateral, authoritative declarations by parents. This study revealed purchase refusals, while appearing harsh, are understood, either consciously or subconsciously, by parents to be beneficial to their children, and as such addressed their need to be protecting and nurturing parents.

Likewise it also emerged that children of all ages understood and acknowledged their parents authority. They understand their parents may refuse purchase requests yet despite this they

continued to state that ultimately it was their parents' opinions and decisions they trusted and respected regarding requests. Regardless of influences, circumstances, or feeling towards the game and attainment of the product, parental decisions were understood as the main determining factor in the lives of these children;

***T*** *Well you're not going to get it without your Mums and Dads.*
***A*** *So you listen to you Mum and Dad more than anyone Thomas. But they might not let you have it?*
***T*** *Yeah, but you're not going to be able to buy it if your Mum and Dad say no.*
***A*** *What about you Alan?*
***AL*** *They are most important.*
***A*** *Most important was your mum and dad what they say?*
***AL*** *Yeah.*
***A*** *Philip?*
***P*** *Mum and Dad.*
***A*** *Your mum and dad, why?*
***T*** *Because you trust them*

Parents appeared unaware of the influence they exerted over their children and their purchase requests, or possibly they take it for granted and did not need to vocalise this fact.

Parents also engaged in lengthy explanations as a tactic for refusals. They engaged in this type of communication because of the disappointment they believed their children may experience;

***W*** *We have to try and explain first of all, why we say 'No', what the effect of it as such, and ah, whether it will be a good thing for them or not as such and they accept, they normally accept what we say as such.*
***J*** *No, but I'd explain that to them, you'd have to like, the child would be disappointed.*
***H*** *I plámásed them that day too telling them they weren't nice because I know they are not nice.*

Their experiences were reflective of a 'cruel to be kind' mindset. Parents believed request refusals were made for good reasons, predominantly that it was beneficial to their children, but they also wanted their children to understand the reason for the refusal. However, one has to wonder if such a discussion was only instigated to relieve disappointment for children, or address some guilt issues parents may experience as a result of refusals and not playing along with the game. It is also related to parental attempts to teach children to become responsible consumers, again, addressing another of their parental roles as educators and socialisation influencers for their children.

Interestingly, it was predominantly fathers who reported the use of discussion. They did not differentiate between their children regarding request refusal strategies, therefore, it was concluded that it concerned all of their children regardless of age, as they discussed their children in general, only on occasion mentioning children by name. Despite parents referring to discussion on a number of occasions, none of the children reported this occurrence.

Stalling or distracting game strategies were also used to balance request refusals and are best evidenced by Helena;

***H*** *When we go down town to Supervalu when they* [her children] *do come in, because they are too lazy sometimes to come in, so when they do come in they have sweets at the Supervalu counter and because they don't come to Tesco so Supervalu would only be a trip that I… you know… need something or whatever and they … they'd be standing there looking at the bars and ask 'Can we have one of these?' and I'd say 'No, sure we already have some at home', because I get the mini, mini size.*

Implementation of such a strategy may again absolve parental feelings of guilt, being too authoritative with their children, thus they sought a balance between purchases and refusals. This strategy also helped to alleviate any potential disputes which may have arisen. What parents did not report was, if following these tactics the game continued and they received more requests and if so did they succumb to the repeated requests, although it was concluded they did not.

A previously unreported finding which related to refusals was parents own childhood, although this was not necessarily part of the game. Here parents described and compared their own upbringing to their children's and society's view of child rearing in general. The general thrust of their narratives was 'if it was good enough for me, then it is good enough for them'. Recalling their own child rearing history, parents addressed the issue of their parenting skills and their personal history (their rearing) with current standards and a socially shared understanding of what it is to be a good parent today including communicating with your children, involving them in decisions and so on. As a result of their upbringing they understood themselves to be sensible, responsible and nurturing people and wished the same for their children. However, they also understood that contemporary society is different in relation to products and services children requested, wanted and expected. Joe best highlighted this issue;

***J*** *They expect more they do... and, there was like everything like mobile phones now and this that and the other, we never had, I know my parents ……certainly, we had a car, but we cycled and walked; now they expect to be driven. Yeah, how would you put it, they*

*[children] want more and more and more but give less and less back if you know what I mean….. they love you and love you for this that and the other but yet when you ask them to do something there was a tantrum or there was a 'no' straight away ..Think they shouldn't have to do it, Mammy and Daddy are there to provide, wash, clean, dry.*

***A*** *Everything I want without having to give Mammy and Daddy anything back in return for it?*

***J*** *Yeah, to a certain degree.*

***A*** *Ok, so it's all about self gratification I want it, get it for me and get it for me now and don't…..*

***J*** *To a certain point yes.*

***A*** *You don't like that obviously*

***J*** *No, I don't I wasn't reared up that way and I don't think me own kids should be..Yeah, no matter how much money, they should be able to do something for themselves.*

Other parents, particularly Catherine and Italo, also had similar, but not so staunch an opinion regarding this issue, nonetheless, the sentiments are similar;

***C*** *Well I think they respect it a bit more than me just handing it out to them anyway*

***A*** *So was that how you think you….*

***C*** *Well that was the way I was brought up*

***I*** *I was raised like this and I don't think I'm bad so, go on with it.*

Joe highlighted that it was not just more products that children desired; he also made reference to the fact that they expected more in general. For example he made reference to the fact that his children expected to be '*driven*' everywhere. This antagonised Joe and did not fit in with his understanding of the game. He did not believe that his children should behave in this manner but he viewed it as a reflection on society absolving himself of any blame. Joe made a previous reference to his children being influenced by peers however, he did not state if he feels that this was the main reason for his children's requests or if it was a more general pattern of requesting occurring. Overall parents' understanding of their own childhood and how they view themselves as parents impacts on their relationship with their own children today.

In an attempt to implement balanced approaches to the game parents were not always authoritarian; they occasionally indulged or rewarded their children with either requested or unrequested items. Interestingly these purchases were initiated by parents themselves not their children. However, when the discussion turned to such matters parents again appeared somewhat reticent to discuss this fact. This not only provided a balance between purchases granted and denied but also balanced the authoritarian and indulgent parent. Parents sought to justify this indulgent aspect of the game by means of rewards, special occasions, price and benefits, to

reconcile their understanding of responsible parenting; understanding when to say 'no' and when to say 'yes' in the game.

It was not a matter of just allowing their children to have these products, there were legitimate reasons behind such purchases and furthermore it was acceptable to them to do so;

***C*** *Am, my budget got bigger that's because it was only lately that I went back to work that we have the money to buy luxuries. Up to that it was a struggle and that we were watching the pennies. Before you would buy the cheaper brands like say the yogurts, now I am buying Yoplait yogurts …the kids would like….. the dearer yogurt and now that we have the money, that was what we are doing.*

***A*** *But it's not the kids going 'Mammy get me the dear yogurt was it?*

***C*** *No*

Catherine initiated the purchase of branded products because she believed her *'kids would like the dearer yogurt'*. She could afford more expensive products and was determined that her children would have the best, she indulged her children and this seemed to please her.

Furthermore, these indulgences were also categorised as rewards by parents; but again parents initiated these purchases. Some of these experiences were evident in the following narrative;

***W*** *Because sometimes we want to kind of reward the child with something, you know. Take home something as such. You know they're good kids as such and we are pretty much aware of that and we feel that we are quite lucky with them and don't have any trouble, they don't give any hassle of any kind at all, and you know we are happy with that and ah, as I said, from time to time, a nice little something won't do any harm.*

Wilson described his occasional purchases as rewarding his children; '*Because sometimes we want to kind of reward the child with something'*. More interestingly, rewarding or indulging his children was acceptable to him. Furthermore, it was not considered detrimental to his children; *'a nice little something won't do any harm'*. So it was 'ok' to reward them, occasionally; it did not make him a 'bad' parent or a weak game player. Furthermore, Wilson viewed this situation as a result of both his and his wife's parenting skills. His children are well behaved '*they don't give any hassle of any kind at all'* therefore rewards are justified. Interestingly, children in this study did not make reference to these rewards and it seemed they did not understand such purchases as rewards but a normal purchase or a normal outcome of the game.

Special occasions, such as birthdays and Christmas, were also considered acceptable to parents to indulge or reward their children, although unreported in the majority of other research it was

quite prevalent in this study. Parents frequently made reference to this aspect throughout their interviews;

***AM*** *Maybe on a special occasion…..they're too dear, his birthday or something….or World Cup. He supports Brazil, so he will probably get a new jersey, or he'll get a present probably of the Barcelona or Real Madrid jersey when Wil* [her husband] *goes to Spain. But it's only because he has no interest in clothes otherwise, therefore, they're the only things we really do indulge.*

***A*** *So, if, like you said you'd buy the T90s* [a brand of Nike runners] *for him quite regularly and not so much the jerseys, unless it's a special occasion, so how does he feel if you are saying 'no' to a jersey or something?*

***AM*** *Well, he understands that they're fairly expensive and he knows he can't have it just off .just because he wants it there and then, he knows that he usually has to wait for some occasion to get it, or else what we do was we tell him to save his money himself and he'll buy it, and he appreciates it.*

Ann Marie revealed at times she too indulged her son, but on a limited scale, in this case his football jerseys, which she clarified when she stated *'these are the only things we really do indulge'*. Ann Marie viewed her son as non-demanding *'he understands'* (possibly due to his age, twelve years old) therefore she deemed it acceptable to indulge his limited requests which was acceptable to her and again did not make her a weak player in the game.

Furthermore, Helena described how her son actively sought products as Christmas approached as he understood his chances of winning the game and acquiring the items were greater. Therefore, parents were able to justify indulging their children when a special occasion was close. Parents made exceptions in such instances rather than just for the sake of indulgence;

***H*** *…… only say like if, like if you were sitting down watching television say before Christmas time that they are planning their Christmas list as to what they were going to get for Christmas, he would have, he might have made some reference to 'remember it was advertised on the telly' or 'remember I saw it on the telly' or something like that but that but that's all he'd say…yeah and at Christmas time too you are bombarded with the ads as well.*

***A*** *So it's more noticeable at Christmas was it?*

***H*** *Yeah and because he has already kind of got it into he's head that Christmas was coming up so he'd probably be, I don't know if he would, but I would think that he would be more aware that he has to look out for something that catches his eye.*

It also emerged children too understood this game tactic and that making requests close to a special occasion increased their success rate;

***S*** *I would just ask them for Christmas or something.*

***CB*** *Yeah, for my next birthday.*
***A*** *But you've got a birthday coming up next week so, do you think you'll get it for you birthday?*
***LB*** *Probably.*

Children understood the timing of the request was critical to attaining the item. As such, they employed game tactics such as delaying their requests and waiting until a more appropriate opportunity arose. They understood the special occasion tactic provided them with a special dispensation for perhaps more indulgent requests. Therefore, they understood the game and when to schedule their requests to ideal requesting opportunities and balanced them appropriately.

However, despite indulging or rewarding price was still an issue; the indulgences too had to be balanced with price;

***J*** *It depends if there was a birthday or Christmas or whatever occasion they might have a good chance of getting it. Yeah, they might have a good chance of getting whatever they were looking for. It depends, the price too as well.*

Joe acknowledged special occasions for indulging his children although he was quick to point out that there were limitations, predominantly price, which emerged as a general pattern throughout the interviews. Indicating parents wished to give their children as much as they could afford while still maintaining control of the game;

***AM*** *If it's something that was reasonably priced, like a bracelet or something like that then yeah no problem. I'd probably buy more for her of less value, than I would buy for him of a higher value…Well the reason why I normally give in to her purchase requests was usually, like I said already, was that they are a lesser value. But usually it was things that are very cheap…*
***W*** *And mainly also if it's pricey and we have to weigh the benefits against the cons as such. What it does or doesn't do for the child… Again the things that we would discuss, am… lets say quite lengthy as such, would be more important things, bigger things, more pricey things, these are the real things that we would bring to the discussion, but small things, wouldn't really need that.*
***H*** *Yeah, if it was a good price then, and I maybe have a few bob extra that week, then I might get it.*
***I*** *Oh yeah, but you have to keep it to budget…..If I can afford it- no problem*
***J*** *Yeah, they might have a good chance of getting whatever they were looking for. It depends… the price too as well….. If it's outrageous yeah, you have to say 'No'.*
***C*** *'Ah yeah go on' as they are only 3 or 4 Euro.*

On numerous occasions parents referred to affordability as a key determinant in their purchases, *'If I can afford it- no problem'; 'Ah yeah go on' as they are only 3 or 4 euro'*. It also emerged

that extended discussions became more necessary between parents and children as their purchase requests moved from inexpensive to expensive items '*more pricey things, these are the real things that we would bring to the discussion, but small things, wouldn't really need that'*.. The immediacy of the purchase, or the end game, was also balanced against price; less expensive items tended to be purchased instantaneously. Parents in this study believed their children understood that expensive items cannot always be purchased immediately which inferred children understand the value of money, and its relevance to the game, or at the very least were being taught it by parents. All parents were happier acceding to requests and the game and felt more justified in purchasing when items were less expensive.

Children also understood that price was a main determinant in purchase success and balanced their requests between expensive and inexpensive items. When asked about requests made children referred to price on a number of occasions;

***CS*** *Cos it's not that much money…Ammm yeah….yeah, because doughnuts are cheap.*
***S*** *They'll get ahh something for 2 euro on some special occasion.*
***K*** *Cos they're cheap.*
***R*** *You know they'll say yeah.*
***Q*** *….so do you ask for expensive things?*
***R*** *Not really, because you know the answer was going to be 'No'. If it's really expensive.*

This suggested that children were not excessively demanding, at least not in financial terms. They understood requesting inexpensive products did not pressurise parents and as such was a winning game tactic which increased their chances of acquiring the item. This suggested that they are highly astute requesters and game players reflecting their intelligence and developing abilities to balance requests made and play the game.

It also emerged, along with price; if a parent believed the purchase was beneficial to their child and enhanced their lives in some manner they were more willing to indulge the request. Therefore price and benefits were also balanced;

***AM*** *If it's a magazine I don't mind him buying it, they have an interest in the magazine and they read it. But toys, or something like that, when they have a load of toys already, I think was a waste.*

The benefit Ann Marie identified was reading, possibly as opposed to watching television. A myriad more toys or non-beneficial products she viewed as a *'waste'*. Other parents recounted a similar pattern for beneficial purchases;

***W*** *Basically, firstly they would come to us, with the features and the benefits, and then of course we put that into perspective you know, within reason, and then we see what we can do and we kind of take into consideration, and then I would say perhaps, am, talk to them about it at a later date, after some consideration as such, a chat with Ann Marie[his wife] for instance, and take it from there really. …..Yeah, and ah, she [his daughter] would say of course, she would say what she, what it does of course, how it will benefit her.*

***I*** *Yea, Sean* [his son], *Sean hardly ever asks me to buy something, anything for him …. Never, only when it's a magazine, he sometimes asks me to buy a magazine and I do buy a magazine for him because, I think it's nice, well then he's learning… and he can learn with that, then no problem, I will spend money on that. I see it that, if he sees it on the telly, something like one of those… those magazines that brings out a DVD or a CD, you know what I mean, that you can learn with that, even if it was a lot of money a fiver or tenner, alright, I would buy it, no problem.*

***H*** *It was one more thing that they have but it was something that was a bit more educational as well for them.*

Parents again justified, to themselves and possibly to their children, that it was 'ok' to purchase certain items, or give in to the game, as long as it was beneficial. In this study educational benefits were at the heart of the purchases as many of the respondents referred to *'learning'* and '*more educational'*.

Children also understood that incorporating a benefit tactic in the game increased their chances of attaining the desired item;

***T*** *Am, well it depends on if you're sensible about what you ask for.*
***P*** *A football yeah cos its exercise*
***K*** *There was this ad for the Harvard Science Magazine that I asked my Mum could I get it.*
***Q*** *And what did she say?*
***K*** *Yeah because she thought it might be interesting.*

Children understood that certain types of products were acceptable to their parents and as such balanced their requests and game tactics accordingly; in this case they cited exercise and educational reasons. It was the older children who predominantly reported utilising benefits to attain the item.

### 5.5 Key Theme 3 The Soft Target

A further theme to emerge was 'the soft target' in the game which also illustrated the understanding both parents and children in this study had in relation to their purchase interactions. Interestingly, this was the one area throughout the research that any kind of disagreement arose between respondents, spouses in particular, although children were very clear regarding the soft target. Despite these disagreements all respondents understand their roles in the purchase relationship game.

Without fail, and without hesitation, throughout the interviews both spouses viewed themselves as more in control, sensible and responsible in the request process, in effect referring to their spouses as the 'soft target' which suggested that they considered themselves the better game player. This was directly related to their understanding of good parenting as both parties looked to portray themselves as the responsible parent;

***AM*** *Well, if they're out with him* [their Father], *they'll ask him and they're more likely to get something off him than they are me….because he gives into them, easier than I do.. Because he's out less frequently with them than I am… I think he'd wise up.. Not that they'd get more bought for them, but they'd chance their arm about getting something bought for them.*

***A*** *And would he say yes or no to them?*

***AM*** *Well it depends on what it was…Well he gives in to them, he gives in to them more easily than I do.. They chance their arm and they probably see more results by chancing their arm, than they would with me.*

***A*** *So you think he's a softer touch?*

***AM*** *……probably …yeah I'd tell him he's a soft touch…. It depends on what it was, if its something that's useless and they'll have no interest in five minutes later* [phone starts to ring].. *If he bought them their magazines or something to eat because they needed something to eat, or something like that, fair enough, they're something they need, not that they need, something to eat , yeah they need, something, their magazines are something they get every week. If it's a magazine I don't mind him buying it, they have an interest in the magazine and they read it. But toys, or something like that, when they have a load of toys already, I think was a waste. So for that reason, I would tell him he's a soft touch if he bought them something that was useless.*

***A*** *So you think he gives in to their purchase request more than you do?*

***AM*** *Yeeaah!*

Firstly, she firmly believed and understood herself to be the more responsible parent, balancing purchases and refusals and her authoritarian and indulgent side. She made numerous references to her husband *'giving in easier'* suggesting that she would not and that she knew where to draw the line in the game. Furthermore, she had no issues if her husband purchased goods her children

needed or benefited from, but products she viewed as a *'waste'* antagonised her. She was also amused because her children knew success greatly increased if they asked their father for such items. She believed she would never consent to such unimportant requests and therefore was not the soft target or the weak link in the game.

Conversely, her husband disagreed and was of the understanding that she was indeed the soft target and viewed himself as superior to his wife;

***A*** *Which of the two of you, you or your wife, would give in to the requests more? Or would it be equal, because you said earlier on that you both make the decisions together. Would you both be of the same opinion when you are discussing whether the item should be bought for them or not?*

***W*** *I think Ann Marie would give in easier than me. Am…Ah she was softer than me with the kids, and ah…….. but am…… I would say…… yeah more often than not, especially on smaller things she tends to …. to overwrite and skip past a decision with her as such, am because I find, when I think about something and I think that it doesn't really matter, or its not going to make an impact on the child, either good or bad as such, I practically, and its not something that's pricey either, I practically leave it to her, Because at the end of the day she was probably the person more likely to make the purchase anyway, and I'm sure she gets a thrill from that.*

Wilson's used the word *'softer'* here portraying himself as the authoritarian, interesting, considering he was involved in some decisions but not all of them. However, if mothers are the main target for requests as was frequently reported then it was only logical that they acceded to requests more frequently. He too acknowledged that his wife facilitated most of the purchases '*Because at the end of the day she was probably the person more likely to make the purchase anyway*'. Wilson appeared happy to concede such decisions to his wife, '*I practically leave it to her'*, giving her the authority as he felt she was in a better position and preferred to facilitate requests *'I'm sure she gets a thrill from that'*. This was said in a somewhat sarcastic tone, as earlier he described how his wife *'loves to shop*'.

Helena and Italo's experience concurred with those of Ann-Marie and Wilson. Helena further evidenced this role of 'the one who keeps it all together' or the main game player in the household, when she referred to *'rules'*, not just for purchases but general house rules, possibly game rules, and how they must be enforced if not by her husband, then she must take control;

***H*** *Am, I think Italo would relent a lot easier. ..Because I spend most of the time with them. If I don't have some sort of a rules laid down, they know the rules with me whereas they know he might not necessarily know the rules like for example getting undressed for bed*

*at night you have to...you don't drop your clothes where you get them you put them there for the wash and that's it. Whereas if he puts them to bed I know I will come up and there will be no pile for to be taken down for the wash and they would be under her bed or under his bed or whatever.*

These occurrences did not relate solely to purchase requests but other household practicalities also which suggested that the game not only related to parent-child purchase interactions. Her husband Italo disagreed, on the request front at least, and believed that he was the more 'sensible' parent, or better game player, as he would not accede to his children's requests, or effectively waste money on some of the items his wife purchased;

***A*** *And what about their mother? How does…*
***I*** *She buys it*
***A*** *She buys it for them* [Italo nods] *so they know they can ask…*
***I*** *She buys the toys for Christmas, I would never spend so much money, all the junk You know, there are more important things.*
***A*** *So your wife would end up buying most of the requests?*
***I*** *I think so, because I don't.*

As with Wilson, he was of the understanding that his wife facilitated most of the purchases '*She buys the toys for Christmas'* but again this reflected the fact that his wife was approached more often as household purchases were her responsibility.

Children without hesitation stated their mother would be the initial or main target. When questioned a high proportion of them reported that they would ask their father for an item they desired, however, he was often viewed as the secondary target. When asked who they made purchase requests to they commented;

***S*** *It depends who I'm with*
***AN*** *Well my Daddy would buy me anything*
***A*** *Sometimes, mainly I'd just ask Mum***. ….***because they* [mums] *wouldn't be as bad tempered.*
***R*** *Mums, because they're usually there more. Yeah. I wouldn't ask him much.*

At times the target can be situational which suggested that children were not fussy regarding their targets. A number of children cited other potential targets, or other players in the game, which included extended family members such as Grandmothers and Uncles. However, mothers were predominantly the main target as they would not be, according to Alan, as *'bad tempered'* as fathers or the softer touch. Although April clearly stated that; '*Well my Daddy would buy me anything'*. This certainly suggested that her father was indeed the soft touch, or the weak link in

the game, at least for her. The children were very astute in this part of the game and understood which parent to ask. This suggested that the soft target varied from request to request. This part of the game was termed ‘playing the parents off against each other’ in this study and children appeared very good at it. Predominantly mothers were targeted and children understood who, in their lives was the soft target. It was also understood by all respondents that mothers were the main request target because mothers spend more time with their children, go shopping more often and are therefore more likely to facilitate requests or be more involved in the game.

Yet despite all of this, mothers themselves claimed to be the more ‘sensible’ parent when it came to purchases and denials. Is this really the situation if children are more likely to make the majority of requests to their mothers? It seems not. Interestingly, children still regarded their fathers as the main authoritarian, a very traditional view, despite changes to families in recent decades. It could also be interpreted that they alternate their requests between parents so as not to appear demanding by targeting the same parent repeatedly or more simply they understand who and when to ask in the game.

### 5.6 Summary of Findings

A rich array of findings emerged from the data set, some of which both concur and conflict with similar research studies, while others were previously unreported.

Understanding the game, the purchase request game, prevailed in the parent-child purchase relationship. Both parties understand each others role in the game along with each element and tactic of the request process game itself. Furthermore, the parent-child purchase relationship and associated game was considered a natural occurrence understood and accepted by all concerned. In addition, no pestering occurred in the lives of these respondents, children simply requested products. Repeatedly respondents’ narratives negated its existence in their lives; they understand what occurs in purchase request relationship game and viewed it as natural parent-child interaction. This became evident as the interpretive process progressed and the findings emerged.

Children understood who, when, where and how to ask for items in order to play the game and balance purchase requests granted and refused. Their game tactics involved approaches to mothers predominantly for purchases, as she was most accessible to them; they chose the timing

of their requests carefully, special occasions being the most cited time; financial constraints also factored in their purchase requests, thus they kept their requests to inexpensive items; and were aware that parents will purchase products of benefit to them thus they provided beneficial reasons acceptable to parents. These purchase request or game tactics appeared to be well rehearsed patterns for both parties, tactics that they both understood in these interactions.

Pestering in this study this did not emerge. Children do make purchase requests, this was not disputed. However, initially the majority of respondents had difficulty remembering any purchase or repeat requests issued. All respondents were of the opinion that purchase requests were at best spasmodic rather than persistent. When purchase requests were made both children and parents engaged in a number of game strategies to acquire and refuse requests respectively. Game strategies used by children included asking, bargaining, pleading, sulking and evoking guilt. However, it emerged that simply asking for the product was predominantly employed. Furthermore, these strategies concurred with previously reported research, but are viewed in this study as methods of requesting *not* pestering. In addition, a previously unreported strategy emerged and was termed the 'sibling co-operation strategy'. This tactic emerged due to the nature of the data generated from the consumer perspective, in particular the inclusion of fathers in this study. It appeared to be quite successful as parents considered the merit of the request if both children strived for it. But it was not stated if it led to a successful purchase. However, again as with other strategies it involved requesting, even if they are in stereo, rather than pestering.

Parents too had a repertoire of request refusal game strategies to deny purchases. For every game tactic children possessed, parents had a counter tactic and vice versa. But neither side took the game seriously and both understood and were aware of the strategies involved in the game. Parental strategies included direct refusals, discussion, stalling or distracting and bargaining, all concurred with previous research. Furthermore, parents in this study believed that engagement in these strategies 'softened' the refusal, eased the game and eliminated any possible disappointment children experienced. Overall these strategies helped to ease the purchase process for both parties and all concerned understood this.

Previous literature conjured up images of children throwing tantrums following the refusals of purchase requests, again this did not emerge. Both children and parents described some behavioural decline, however, the majority of requests refusals were accepted without incident.

When a behavioural decline was reported it was predominantly verbal in nature and both parents and children viewed them as trivial thus not damaging to their relationship or the game.

Furthermore, dysfunctional parent-child conflict was also widely reported in other studies as a result of purchase requests. Respondents in this research disagreed, these experiences did not appear in their narratives and the suggestion that it was harmful to their relationships was not evident, again because they understood it to be a game and a natural interaction between them. What occurred were spasmodic episodes of tension between parents and children, and even then it seldom occurred and rarely persisted. Request refusals were acceptable and understood by both parties resulting in no major consequences. But how does this alleged conflict differ from any of the other numerous refusals parents make to their children on a daily basis? It appeared these minor disputes patterns related to refusals *in general,* not just purchase refusals. Therefore, to position them as a consequence of supposed pester power seems nonsensical.

On a related issue it was frequently reported that request refusals resulted in disappointed children. None of the children reported feelings of disappointment to any great extent. On the contrary children understood purchase request refusals, viewed it as 'no big deal' and part of the game and thus handled it accordingly. Effectively, they adopted a 'win some and lose some' mentality to the game. Instead they reported to sometimes feeling anger as a result of request refusals as opposed to disappointment**.** This anger directly correlated to how much they desired the item rather than every single purchase request refused, but again this was temporary and insignificant to them. Interestingly, it was parents who reported disappointed children, although they were prepared to accept this outcome if it resulted in the protection of their children from non-beneficial items, again any disappointment was temporary. Furthermore, parents viewed it as a learning situation for their children and instilled in them the knowledge that they cannot always win and have everything they want when they want it.

Television advertising cited as the main influence for children's purchase requests was not evident in this study. Both parents and children relegated its impact behind other influences mainly peers followed by parents and shops along with co-shopping. This was not to suggest that no requests emanated from television advertising, on the contrary it was mentioned on a number of occasions as an influence, but it was not considered *the* main influence and was considered as just another aspect of the game. Furthermore, both sets of respondents treated television

advertising with a certain degree of suspicion and distrust and were therefore unlikely to view it as an objective source of product information. This suggested that contemporary society has changed, that it is more ‘media savvy’ and no longer relies on mass media influences to initiate or make purchases.

Purchase requests also resulted in both parties seeking a balance between purchases and refusals acceptable to all concerned. In doing so a status quo was maintained in the game which allowed both sets of respondents an opportunity to exert their influence. For parents this resulted in a time to say ‘no’ and a time to say ‘yes’. For children it related to purchases and refusals, or winning and losing the game from time to time. Parents said yes to purchase requests if it satisfied a number of criteria including primarily price and benefits to children. Likewise parents knew when to say no. They were reluctant to be perceived as spoiling their children, so not all requests were facilitated. They did not always refuse and balanced any refusals with justified purchases and rewards for their children with purchases they themselves initiated. Some of these beliefs stemmed from their own upbringing, and parents were of the opinion that their children benefited from the same rules they had. The need for parents to explain request refusals was also of interest. It was viewed as an emerging pattern in family communications where parents and children engaged in more discussion regarding decisions in general.

Previous research also reported mothers as the primary target for purchase requests, this study concurred. However, it is important to note the majority of previous studies *only* investigated mothers’ experiences. This study introduced fathers and children to gain a complete understanding of *all* parties’ involvement in these interactions. Despite these changes it emerged that mothers remained the primary target, or the soft target in the game, for purchase requests with fathers a close second. The main reason cited; mothers were more accessible to children than fathers.

Interestingly, the issue of request targets led to disagreements between spouses concerning the ‘soft touch’ target, although both parties understand these positions also. While all parties acknowledged mothers as the primary target for purchase requests, fathers were also of the opinion that this occurred because their spouses are the ‘soft target’. Their wives were of a similar opinion, but labelled their husbands the ‘soft target’. This was one of the few areas of disagreement between spouses concerning the entire purchase interaction, but was also

considered part of the game. Interestingly, children agreed with their fathers that mothers will grant purchases more often. But was this occurred because of the high proportion of requests made to mothers and not fathers. Furthermore, the traditional role of fathers as the authoritarian figure prevailed. Excluding fathers and children from this study would have resulted in this finding going unreported.

The next chapter will present final conclusions and evaluate these findings in relation to previous literature.

# 6.0 Chapter Six: Conclusions, Reflections on the Research Approach and Recommendations for Future Research

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the conclusions reached in this study along with an integration of the thematic findings in the context of the current literature. Comments on the challenges of the research approach adopted will also acknowledged and finally recommendations for future research will be outlined.

## 6.2 Conclusions

The main conclusion in this study is that the parent-child purchase relationship is viewed as a 'game' by both parents and children. Furthermore, it is a well rehearsed game with both parents and children clear in their understanding of each others roles in the game of the parent-child purchase relationship. As a result of this understanding all respondents view this relationship and its process as natural familial interaction prevalent in their lives. The 'natural' component of this finding concurred with Furnham (2000) who suggested that requesting is a naturally occurring phenomenon within families, although the 'game-like' qualities of this process have not been reported until now. Instead the previously documented negative connotations associated with pester power prevail. This study repudiates such findings and considers them inappropriate, misleading and unreflective of what occurs in the parent-child purchase relationship at least in the lives of these respondents.

As a result of this understanding and the game-like naturalness of these interactions, pestering did not occur in the lives of these respondents. Instead children simply request purchases of their parents, not pester for them. This suggests that purchase requests are considered no different from any other type of request issued to parents due their inherent nature. Furthermore, in the lives of these respondents purchase requests are not as abundant or successful as previous research reported (Martino, (2004); Quinn, (2002); Nicholls and Cullen, (2004); McDermott et al., 2006). Acceptance of such requests and refusal was also prevalent among respondents in this study. Parents understand and accept that children will make requests; they are considered 'typical'

natural child behaviour. Children too understand and accepted refusals as a possible outcome of purchase requests, furthermore it caused them no undue distress.

Extant research provides a number of definitions of pester power and pestering in child purchase requests, yet they are inconsistent and unreflective of the natural parent-child purchase request relationship in this study. Pester power and its constituent parts are not evident in this study and furthermore are generally discredited in much of the literature. Moreover, the experiences of respondents repudiates most elements of the construct itself, except for strategies employed by children and parents to obtain and deflect the request respectively, concurring with strategies identified by Falbo and Peplau, (1980); Middleton, et al. (1994); Scanzoni and Szinovacz (1980); Spiro (1983) and Palan and Wilkes (1997). In addition, when requests are actually made, albeit spasmodically, the outcome of these requests, particularly purchases, are consistent with previous research. Refusals on the other hand and the resultant negative behaviour reported to occur did not manifest in this study.

In this study it was repeatedly evident that purchase request interactions are considered inconsequential to the respondents due to the game-like natural qualities of the purchase request process itself. They are not damaging in these families' lives contrary to Adler et al. (1980); Martin's (1997) and McDermott et al.'s (2006) findings. Furthermore, there are no enduring effects on either party's behaviour or feelings, negative or otherwise, towards each other, they are simply accepted consistent with Isler et al. (1987).

Parent-child discussion aided the limitation of any damage to their relationship. In this study parental discussion, rather than direct dictatorial refusals, with children regarding request refusals was prevalent and aided an understanding for these decisions which limited any potential 'damage' in the relationship itself consistent with (Dahlberg, 1996; Torrance, 1998; Roedder-John, 1999; Valkenburg and Cantor, 2001; Neeley and Coffey, 2004). In addition, extended discussions became more necessary between parents and children as their purchase requests moved from inexpensive to expensive items concurring with McNeal (1992). These communications trends were prevalent among contemporary parenting and families in this study, but again it did not just relate to purchase requests but requests in general. Engagement in these discussions are viewed by parents as playing a pivotal role in the education and socialisation of their children as consumers consistent with Neeley and Coffey (2004) and Geuens et al. (2003).

Previous research, such as Adler et al. (1977), claimed that conflict occurred between parents and children as a result of request refusals, while this is evident to a very limited extent in this study, respondents understood it is as 'normal' similar to Kilme-Dougan and Kopp (1999) who claimed that it is inevitable that conflict may occur from time to time due to the proximity of these relationships. In this study parents did not get involved in arguments with their children and children accepted refusals as part of the request process and did not engage in persistent conflict episodes, after all it is only a game. These findings negated other studies including Valkenburg and Cantor (2001); Nicholls and Cullen (2004) and Fletcher (2004) who claimed mass conflict occurred between parents and children as a result of purchase request refusals. There was minimal evidence of conflict of a temporary nature reported in this study, consistent with Isler et al. (1987), but again it was understood by all respondents as a natural insignificant occurrence. The short-term duration of these disputes was a recurring theme throughout this discussion and concurs with Atkin (1975).

Furthermore, the focus on television advertising as the main antecedent to children's purchase requests in previous literature appears inappropriate. This study acknowledges its role as a minor player in the purchase request game, but relegates its influence behind other sources predominantly peers, parents and in-store influences. Instead television advertising in conjunction with other influences including peers and family, are responsible for the origin of some purchase requests in accordance with Furnham (2000) and Hetherington (2003). The transfer of influence, from advertiser to peer generated request behaviour positions the parent-child purchase relationship as a natural family interaction, not something propagated by commercial influence, concurring with Pilgrim and Lawrence (2001) and Proctor and Richards (2002). In this study it is understood by all that peers are the foremost source of purchase request influence consistent with Frideres (1973); Moschis and Moore (1979); Goldstein (1994); Bas (1998) and Proctor and Richards (2002). Furthermore, children considered their family, parents in particular, along with peers as their most important influence consistent with McNeal (1992); Goldstein (1998); Gunther and Furnham (1998) and Nicholls and Cullen (2004). Parents did not necessarily view themselves as an influence, and unlike children, position stores as a major influence on their children's requests, similar to Isler et al. (1987) where shops were identified as the main influence. Therefore it is evident from both sets of respondents that television advertising is not the greatest influence of children's purchase requests contrary to other studies including

Goldberg and Gorn (1990); Valkenburg and Cantor (2001); Singh and Ingham (2003) and Mayo (2005). Instead these findings concurred with Earnshaw (2001), Jarlbro (2001) and Quinn (2002) that children's purchase requests as a result of television advertising is indeed exaggerated. Furthermore, the children, although age-dependent, predominantly understood that advertisements help to sell products, consistent with Duff (2004) which suggested that children today are more 'media savvy' than previous generations. Criticisms of advertising exploiting children's vulnerability (Adler et al., 1980 and Bandyopadhyay et al. 2001) are negated. These findings support the work of Bartholomew and O' Donohoe (2003) who claimed that children actively engaged in advertising and were primarily cynical of them. The focus on television advertising as an influence in previous research is therefore inappropriate and appears misguided.

Balance was also a dominant theme throughout this study and again was unreported in much of the previous literature. The prevalence of an understanding parent-child relationship in the purchase request game revealed that parents balanced purchases and refusals for items based on a set of principles and responsibilities important to them including benefits and price, which they enforce for the protection and nurturing of their children. Furthermore, refusals are balanced by rewards and these indulgent purchases are often initiated by parents themselves. Children too balance their requests based on product choice, past experience, price, likelihood of success and tailor their requests to items acceptable to parents' standards and financial position. These findings concurred with Corfman and Lehmann (1987) and Flurry and Burns (2005) who claimed that historical decisions influenced children's behaviour and suggested that children were sensitive to parents' limitations as with Hill and Tisdall (1997). This balancing act between purchases and refusals for parents and types and timings of requests by children is highly indicative of the game played out in the guise of the parent-child purchase relationship.

In relation to balance, it was never an objective in this study to uncover who has the power in relation to the parent-child purchase relationship, however it emerged naturally. In this study the balance of power moves between parents and children in each purchase. At times parents exercise their power in relation to what they consider harmful purchase requests for their children, but they also relinquish power to their children in order to balance such refusals with beneficial purchases. Likewise children understand that as part of the game they would sometimes succeed in attaining the desired item, giving them the power, while on other occasions they would be

unsuccessful in their attempts, thus parents had the power. But again both parties understand these instances to be part of the game.

The ‘soft target’ theme was the only area in this study that resulted in any major disagreement, primarily between spouses. They disagreed about who was the soft target, typically in relation to who granted more purchases than refusals, who made inappropriate purchases and so on, although they fully understood their own position vis à vis their spouse, predictably each spouse viewed themselves as the more responsible and authoritarian parent. All respondents however, are in complete agreement regarding the main request target in the game. Despite changes in parent-child interactions, the majority of requests are still directed towards mothers. Mothers are frequently reported as the main target for requests (Carlson and Grossbart, 1988; Valkenburg and Cantor, 2001) as in this study therefore it is only logical that they accede to requests more frequently. Mothers as the main request target is determined by the fact that mothers spend more time with children, go shopping more often and are therefore are in a position to facilitate their requests, consistent with other reported findings including Neeley and Coffey (2004). Fathers too are approached with purchase requests but often as second choice which concurred with Palan and Wilkes (1997). Furthermore, it emerged that children are astute and understand which parent is most likely to accede to their requests consistent with Thompson (2003). This suggests that the ‘soft target’ varies from request to request and in this study is termed as ‘playing the parents off against each other’ but again this is all part of the game.

In summation this study reveals that the parent-child purchase relationship is a typical natural interaction between parents and children, played out like a game, and as such has no long-term detrimental effects on their relationship. Furthermore, these findings appear to support the position long argued and defended by industry practitioners. Therefore to associate the intricacies of the parent-child purchase relationship with pester power has no basis in the lives of parents and children, at least not those involved in this study.

### 6.3 Reflections of the Benefits and Challenges of the Research Approach

The use of an interpretive approach, particularly the phenomenological paradigm was chosen to position consumers at the centre of this inquiry to uncover an understanding of their experiences in the parent-child purchase relationship. This approach resulted in both benefits and challenges.

In relation to benefits, the understanding, naturalistic family behaviour associated with respondents would not have emerged had an interpretive approach not been adopted in this study. It further suggests that previous research may not have provided a full understanding of the parent-child purchase relationship because of the positivistic vested interest perspective adopted by many researchers. This is not to suggest that they are not rigorous nor valuable in providing a contribution to the area, but focusing on the more pertinent consumer perspective seemed a more appropriate place to start in relation to an understanding of this phenomenon. An understanding of the consumer perspective, the focus of this study, allowed the full story and experiences of those involved, namely, mothers, fathers and children, to be captured. Consumers are at the centre of this process, yet their voice and experiences have been completely neglected in some research and only partially examined in others. Historical research predominantly sought mothers' experiences only. In an attempt to allow the full story to emerge, this study concentrated on all participants involved in the *parent-child* purchase relationship; the total consumer experience, thus providing a more complete and reflective overview of the contemporary purchase relationship. It was therefore imperative that data generated from the phenomenological interviews and focus groups reflected their experiences and descriptions of what occurred, and they did in an enriching manner. A no *a priori* position adopted by the researcher also allowed an even greater range of meanings to emerge and led to the emergence of a number of themes not previously reported. In addition, fathers and children's inclusion in the study proved extremely beneficial as they provided this study with a complete perspective of what occurs in the parent-child purchase relationship facilitating a greater scope of understanding regarding this relationship.

The challenges associated with this approach related to the data generation process and the process of interpretation itself. Challenges faced in the data generation process related primarily to the phenomenological interviews, mainly generating thick description and allowing respondents to lead the discussion, however these challenges were overcome. The challenges faced with researching children were outlined earlier. Upon the completion of the data generation process the prospect of facing over 125 pages of transcripts of varying nature to be interpreted using this metholodogy for the first time proved daunting, especially when constantly trying to bracket away any preconceptions or notions associated with current literature and no definitive

process to follow. However, the use of interpretive groups proved very beneficial in addressing these issues and hugely aided the development of meaningful interpretation.

Despite these challenges, adopting an interpretive approach and using phenomenology as methodology proved very beneficial in developing a fresh understanding of the parent-child purchase relationship. Much of this understanding would not have emerged if the consumer perspective in conjunction with this paradigm had not been adopted and as such it should be viewed as an alternative complementary way of gaining an understanding and knowledge rather than conflicting with other paradigms.

## 6.2 Recommendations for Future Research

The positivistic industry perspective adopted in previous research studies in relation to this area have proved limiting in furthering an understanding of the parent-child purchase relationship. This study calls for a return to consumer research, focusing on a consumer perspective in relation to this much fragmented areas. It is only through consumers' experiences that many of these areas can be fully understood.

In addition, the persistent focus on television advertising and its effects on the parent-child purchase relationship need to be re-addressed. This study calls for research to investigate a broader scope of study involving all forms of influence, commercial and non-commercial, and their role in the parent-child purchase relationship in order to expand an understanding of the effects of these influences on children and their requests.

Furthermore, the issue of advertising itself also proved significant. The majority of research concentrates on *child-targeted* advertising. This exploration uncovered that advertising per se and its effects on family purchases and decision making was a more appropriate research area requiring additional investigation.

Shops, presumably in-store displays and merchandising, were cited in this study as a major influence in the lives of these families. Previous studies also report it as an influence in children's purchase requests although they have received little attention regarding the extent of this influence. Thus shops and co-shopping as an influence warrants further investigation.

In relation to influence, peers, along with in-store requests, have also been cited as a major influence in purchase requests initiated by children. A caveat was raised in relation to this issue concerning the origin of the information these influences use to recommend such products. The question concerning the origin of peer information remains unanswered. Further research into an understanding of the antecedents of these requests therefore seems appropriate.

Finally, as previously mentioned, much of the research pertaining to this area was dated and originated in various other countries outside of Ireland. It is therefore recommended that further research, from an Irish perspective, be carried out in relation to this rich, complex and divergent field of study.

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## Appendix 1

Issues Concerning Researching Children

**1. Involvement of Children in Research *(Glasgow Centre for Child and Society 2007)***

Researchers must consider how their proposed research will advance knowledge and understanding about children's lives as influenced by socio-economic and social policy contexts.

2. Consent and Choice (*Market Research Society Code of Research March 2006)*

**Where Consent is required**

B.26 **Consent of a parent or responsible adult (acting in loco parentis) must be obtained before interviewing a child under the age of 16 in the following circumstances:**

**In home/at home (face-to-face and telephone interviewing);**

**Postal questionnaires;**

**Internet questionnaires;**

**E-mail;**

**Where interviewer and child are alone together;**

**In public places such as in-street/in-store central locations;**

B. 28 **Where the consent of a parent or responsible adult is required, members must ensure that the adult is given sufficient information about the nature of the research to enable them to provide informed consent.**

B.29 **Members must ensure that the parent or responsible adult giving consent is recorded (by name, relationship or role).**

B.32 **In all cases members must ensure that a child has an opportunity to decline to take part, even though a parent or a responsible adult has given consent on their behalf. This remains the case if the research takes place in school.**

B.33 **Personal information relating to other people must not be collected from children unless for the purpose of gaining consent from a parent or a responsible adult.**

Guidance

**1. Consent should be provided in writing but where it can only be provided verbally- e.g. in telephone interviewing- the responsible adult should be sent written confirmation if requested.**

**3. Possible Harm or Distress *(Glasgow Centre for Child and Society, 2007)***

Researchers have a duty to protect all individuals from possible harm or distress due to the research process regardless of whether individuals are directly or indirectly involved. It is essential for participants to feel and be safe throughout the research process.

**The Rules (*Market Research Society Code of Research March 2006)***

**A.10** Members must take all reasonable precaution to ensure that Respondents are not harmed or adversely affected as a result of participating in a research project.

**B.18** A Respondent's right to withdraw from a research project at any stage must be respected.

**4. Privacy and Confidentiality *(Glasgow Centre for Child and Society, 2007)***

Researchers must avoid unnecessary intrusion into the private lives of prospective research participants.

All children and adults participating in and affected by research have the right to confidentiality and privacy.

Researchers must ensure participant and research data confidentiality unless the protection of health, life and safety and/or legal considerations arise.

**Special Cases**

**A: Qualitative Research (*Market Research Society Code of Research March 2006)***

**A.10** As Above

**B.15** If there is any recording, monitoring or observation during an interview, Respondents must be informed about this both at recruitment and at the beginning of the interview.

**B.21** Make sure the following is communicated to the Respondent:

- The name of the interviewer;
- Assurance that the interview will be carried out according to MRS Code of Conduct;
- The general subject of the interview;
- The purpose of the interview;
- If asked, the likely length of the interview;

**B. 34** At the time of recruitment (or before the research takes place if details change after recruitment), ensure that Respondents are told all relevant information as per rule B.21 and:

- The location of the discussion and if it is to take place in a viewing facility; whether observers will be present and;
- When and how the discussion is to be recorded; and
- The likely length of the discussion including the start and finish time; and
- The moderator and/or research agency that will be conducting the research.

# Appendix 2

**Theme Sheets-Parental Phenomenological Interviews**

**Areas to be explored in the parental interviews (subject to flexibility)**

To explore the experience of children making purchase requests

Explore typical products requested

Explore the origin of purchase requests

Explore the location of the purchase requests

Explore the request target

Explore the purchase request delivery

Explore the experience of how requests granted/refused are handled

Explore what occurs following purchase requests delivery

Explore the outcomes of requests facilitated/refused

# Appendix 4 Thematic Development

| | Themes | Sub Themes |
|---|---|---|
| **June 06**<br>Researcher Interpretation | **Theme 1 Pestering Occurs**<br>**Theme 2 Numerous pestering strategies used**<br>**Theme 3 Numerous Refusal Strategies used**<br>**Theme 4 T V Main Influence**<br>**Theme 5 Conflict Occurs**<br>**Theme 6 Disappointed Children**<br>**Theme 7 Behavioural decline** | Children<br>Parents<br>Other influences but not as powerful as TV |
| **July 06**<br>Readings & interpretive groups | **Theme 1 Pestering Occurs**<br>**Theme 2 Pester Request strategies**<br><br>**Theme 3 Parental capitulation**<br><br>**Theme 4 Pestering Target**<br>**Theme 5 Television as an Influence**<br><br>**Theme 6 Other influences**<br>**Theme 7 Parent Child Purchase Relationship**<br><br>**Theme 8 Denial** | <br>*Requests;* Repeat Requests; Pleading Requests; Special; Occasion Strategy; Benefit Strategy; Guilt Trip Strategy; Peers/Friends/School Strategy; Parental Manipulation Strategy; Just Throw it in the Trolley Strategy; Sibling Co-operation Strategy Verbal<br>Products Requested; Needs versus wants; Special Occasion; Price Issue; Benefits; Savings; Parental Purchases & Rewards.<br>Other Targets<br>Television as an Influence; Television Consumption; Television Programs Consumed; Television Advertising Influence; Shops; Sibling influence; Peers/Friends/School.<br>Other media.<br>Request Refusal behaviour and the Parent Child Purchase Relationship; Parents Refusal Strategies; Direct Refusal; Discussion/Explanation; Stalling/Bargaining;<br>Parental Awareness of Strategies. |
| **Sept 06**<br>Readings and Interpretive groups | **Theme 1 Pestering**<br>**Theme 2 Pester Request strategies**<br><br>**Theme 3 Requests Granted**<br><br>**Theme 4 Pestering Target**<br><br>**Theme 5 Television Influence**<br><br>**Theme 6 Other Influences**<br>**Theme 7 Refusal Effects on the Parent child purchase relationship**<br><br>**Theme 8 Children and Advertising** | <br>*Strategies:* 'Just Ask' Requests; Repeat Requests (Persuasion Strategy); Pleading/Begging Requests (Persuasion Strategy); Special Occasion Strategy (Emotional Strategy); Benefit Strategy (Bargaining Strategy); Playing the Parent's Off Against Each Other' strategy; Guilt Trip Strategy (Emotional Strategy); Peers/Friends/School Strategy (Persuasion Strategy); Just Throw it in the Trolley Strategy (Request strategy); Sibling Co-operation Strategy (Persuasion strategy); Price (Bargaining strategy); Bargaining (Bargaining Strategy); Parental Awareness of Strategies.<br><br>Products Requested; Parental Capitulation to Requests Granted; Needs versus wants; Special Occasions, Price Issue; Benefits<br>Parental Target; Maternal Dominance; The Soft Target; Other Targets.<br>Television and Products Requested; Television Consumption-Hours consumed; Television Programs Consumed; Television Influence.<br>Shops; Peers/Friends/School; Sibling influence; Other media.<br>Request Refusal behaviour; Parents Refusal Strategies; Direct refusal; Discussion/Explanation; Stalling/Bargaining.<br><br>Attitude towards Television Advertisements; Understanding and Intent of Advertisements; Recall; Recall of Non-Child Centred Advertisements. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Theme 9 Children as consumers**<br><br>**Theme 10 Initial Denial (Reticence)** | <br><br>Parental Denial; Parental Purchases/Rewards. |
| **April 07**<br>Readings and interpretive groups | **Theme 1The Balanced Family**<br><br>**Theme 2 Pestering not a 'big deal'**<br>**Theme 3: Pestering Request Strategies**<br>**Theme 4: Request Granted**<br>**Theme 5: Pestering Target**<br>**Theme 6 Television Influence**<br><br>**Theme 7: Other Influences**<br><br>**Theme 8: Request Refusal Conflict**<br>**Theme 9 Children and Advertisements**<br><br>**Theme 10 Children as Consumers**<br>**Theme 11: Initial Denial (Reticence)** | The disciplinarian versus the indulgent parent/ Good cop Bad Cop; The Balanced Spouse/Parent; Good kid, bad kid.<br><br><br><br>Parents Products Requested.<br>Parental Target; Maternal dominance; Other targets<br>Television and Products Requested; Television Consumption-Hours consumed; Television Programs Consumed; Television Influence.<br>Shops; Peers-Friends &school; Sibling Influence; Other media; Parents<br><br>Television and Products Requested; Television Consumption-Hours consumed; Television Programs Consumed; Television Influence; Request Refusal behaviour; Attitude towards Television Advertisements; Understanding and Intent of Advertisements; Recall; Recall of Non-Child Centred Advertisements.<br><br>Parental Denial; Child Reticence |
| **June 2007**<br>Readings and Interpretive groups | **Core Theme1 Requesting not Pestering (Pestering is not a 'Big deal')**<br><br>**Core Theme 2 The Self Perception Perspective** | **Parental Perspective:** Requests-Repeated and Persistent; Conflict –The Exasperated Parent, the Behavioural Decline and Disappointed Child.<br>**Child Perspective:** Requests-Repeat and Persistent; Conflict: The Exasperated Parent, The Behavioural Decline, The Disappointed Child; Parents Know Best.<br><br>The Authoritarian versus the Indulgent Parent The 'Good Cop Bad Cop' Struggle: Parental Purchases/Rewards; Spousal Differences<br>The Child Perspective: Knowledge Power (Good kid, bad kid) |
| **January 08**<br>Researcher Interpretation | **Core Theme1 Requesting not Pestering (Pestering is not a 'Big deal')**<br><br>**Core Theme 2: The Self Perception Perspective** | **Parental Perspective:** Unwanted Products; Requests-Repeated and Persistent; Conflict –The Exasperated Parent, the Behavioural Decline and Disappointed Child<br>**Child Perspective** Unwanted Products; Requests-Repeat and Persistent; Conflict: The Exasperated Parent, The Behavioural Decline, The Disappointed Child; Parents Know Best<br><br>The Authoritarian versus the Indulgent Parent The 'Good Cop Bad Cop' Struggle; Authoritarian Parent; Indulgent Parent; Parental Purchases/Rewards; Spousal Differences<br>The Ideal Child (Good kid, bad kid) |
| **February 08**<br>Researcher Interpretation | **Core Theme 1: Requesting Not Pestering (Pestering is not 'a big deal')** | **Parental Perspective;** Few Requests; Requests-Repeated and Persistent; Conflict –The Exasperated Parent, the Behavioural Decline and Disappointed Child.<br>**Child Perspective:** Unwanted Products; Requests-Repeat and Persistent; Conflict: The Exasperated Parent, The Behavioural Decline, The Disappointed Child; Parents Know Best.<br><br>The Authoritarian versus the Indulgent Parent The 'Good Cop Bad Cop' Struggle; Authoritarian Parent; Indulgent Parent; |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Core Theme 2: Balance not Power** | Parental Purchases/Rewards; Spousal Differences<br>The Ideal Child (Good kid, bad kid). |
| **March 08**<br>Researcher Interpretation | **Core Theme 1: Requesting Not Pestering**<br><br><br><br>**Core Theme 2: The Balance Redress** | Limited and Infrequent Requests; Repeat Requests and Non-persistent Requests; Request Origin; Parental Awareness of Impending Purchase Requests; Familial Disputes- A Natural Occurrence of Limited Duration; An Understanding Relationship.<br>The Authoritarian Parent -A Time to Say No; Discussion/Communication; Strategies.<br>The Indulgent Parent- A Time to Say Yes; Rewards; Special Occasions; Price; Benefits; The Soft Target.<br>Childhood History |
| **April 08**<br>Researcher Interpretation | **Meta Theme**<br>**Understanding** | **Key Themes**<br>Requesting, Not Pestering<br>Request Origin and Influence<br>The Request Relationship: A Natural Familial Interaction<br>The Balance Redress |
| **September 08** | **Meta Theme**<br>**Understanding** | **Key Themes**<br>The Request Relationship: A Natural Familial Interaction<br>The Balancing Act<br>The 'Soft Target'' |
| **September 08** | **Meta Theme**<br>**Understanding 'The Game'** | |

## Appendix 3

**Moderator Discussion Guide-Children's Focus Groups**

| | |
|---|---|
| Establish rapport | Introductions, explain what we will be discussed. |
| Establish rules | Try not to talk over each other, you can say what you want, ask questions if you don't understand, its not a test etc. |

Areas to be explored (To be used flexibly, any additional relevant areas to be explored with additional questions)

| | |
|---|---|
| The request experience | Have you ever asked you Mum or Dad to buy you anything? |
| Request target | Who do you ask to buy you things? |
| Products requested | What products have you requested? |
| Request Origin | How did you know to ask for that product? |
| Timing of requests | When did you ask for that product? |
| Request delivery | How did you ask for the product?<br>Did you ask them again?<br>Would you ask them again? |
| Outcome of request- | How did it make you feel when you got/did not get what you asked for? |
| Summarise | All proceedings for agreement of what has transpired<br>Provide an opportunity for adding further discussion |

Thank the respondents for their time