

Children's materialistic and appearance related motives: A qualitative study



The Leverhulme Trust

Overview

- Background and aims
- Methods
- Categories of consumer culture motives
- **Children's actual responses**
- Basic statistics
- Conclusions

Background

- Intrinsic vs. extrinsic goals for materialism and appearance aspirations
- Peer culture provides key motivational drivers for school aged children
- Peer group pressure > social motives > materialistic ideals (Banerjee & Dittmar, 2008)
- Specific aspects of peer culture (e.g., peer conversations and criticism regarding appearance) have also been shown to influence appearance internalisation (Jones, Vigfusdottir & Lee, 2004)

Main aims

- To understand children's motives for wanting money and material things and for desiring to 'look good' through semi-structured interviews
- To develop a new measure of appearance and materialistic motives based on thematic analysis of children's actual responses

Study 1: interviews

- 60 in-depth interviews with children in years 4 (8-9-years), 7 (11-12-years), and 10 (14-15-years), from relatively high and low SES areas, asked about materialistic and appearance related motives
- Setting up the questions

‘When children see famous people like footballers or pop stars who look good and have lots of money and expensive things (e.g., the latest mobile phone or cool clothes), they often think that they would like to look good like them and have the money and things they have. There are lots of reasons why children might want to look good or have lots of money and expensive things...’

- Key questions
 - Do you want money, and trendy and expensive things, Why or why not?
 - Do you want to look good like that? Why and why not?
 - When you grow up, would you like to be famous? Why or why not?
 - More implicit questions
 - Do you think things might be better for you if you had lots of money and expensive things? How?
 - How do you think other children would be towards you?
- Examine the nature of these motives (e.g., intrinsic vs. extrinsic, social, personal etc.)

Interview findings

- Several higher order categories identified through thematic analysis
 - Materialism:
 - To be popular/liked
 - To fit in
 - To 'look good'
 - For altruistic/intrinsic reasons
 - Appearance:
 - To be popular/liked
 - To fit in
 - Look attractive/get attention
 - To impress others/be looked up to
- Motivations were overwhelmingly of an extrinsic nature
- Of these extrinsic motivations the majority were social or peer related

Motivation for popularity

Materialism

- *“Cause you could show them to your friends and they’d be like ‘wow’, that’s good”*
- *“Um, probably ‘cause everyone would like want to hang out with you and stuff”*
- *“They’d probably like all surround me and think I’m all that ‘cause I have money”*

Appearance

- *“Because I’d be popular and people would wanna be your friend”*
- *“Yeah, I think it would be better if I looked like that ‘cause um, er, on the boys side of things it [I] would be more attractive, and girls here, if you’re more pretty and you’re more like the celebrities and models you get more accepted and you’re more popular and everyone kind of likes you”*

Motivation to fit in

Materialism

- *“I think it’s because then you’re up-to-date with everything, everyone else. It’s always about who’s in line with who, you can’t be the odd one out”.*
- *“I dunno, everyone...just trying to fit in I guess, everyone wants to be the same as everyone else, have the same stuff, be in the know, like if someone’s talking about a new phone or whatever saying ‘Ohh, it’s so good, it has all these apps and stuff’ they wanna say ‘oh yeah, I’ve got that too’ you know, they don’t wanna be sitting there with a phone that does nothing”.*

Appearance

- *“Um, maybe they’re different, maybe for the boy to look good it’s so then he looks like every other boy, and for the girl it just, actually I think it’s the same ‘cause then she looks like everyone, every other girl”.*
- *“they’re trying to impress other people and they’re trying not to, so they’re trying not to be that low down that they wouldn’t get picked on”*
- *“Um, so people can notice me more ‘cause I’m normally just sitting round in the playground ‘cause no-one normally plays with me and that”*

To 'look good'/look attractive & get attention

Materialism

- *“Everyone wants them [expensive things] - it’s just maybe to look appealing to other people”*
- *“Well they’d sort of make me look good in a way and like really rich and posh”.*
- *“Everyone wants them - it’s just maybe to look appealing to other people”*

Appearance

- *“Yeah, I’ve, like I know a few people that are like that and really want all of the, all attention, but aren’t getting it, so if they did look nice then maybe they would get more attention, I, yeah”*
- *“Maybe it’s, like think that look more attractive or something ‘cause, I mean, loads of girls wear loads of make-up, they spend hours straightening their hair”*

Motivation for altruistic/intrinsic reasons

Materialism

- *“Well if you like get um, like you know, gadgets and stuff like that, it’s good, like it’s um, like good fun to have, um, and good entertainment in a way and um, yeah but um...yeah that’s the reason why”*
- *“To get their own way with stuff and then go out away from their parents”*
- *“Because um, like um [laughs], ‘cause er, [they’re] really good to play with and have fun with and other people would be really jealous and...”*

Motivation to impress others

Appearance

- *“um, well they’d probably respect you, I dunno if they’d actually like you more though”*
- *“they may look up to you and see that you look like other people who they see around on TV and stuff, and think that you’re amazing maybe”*

Percentage of children in the study citing these motives

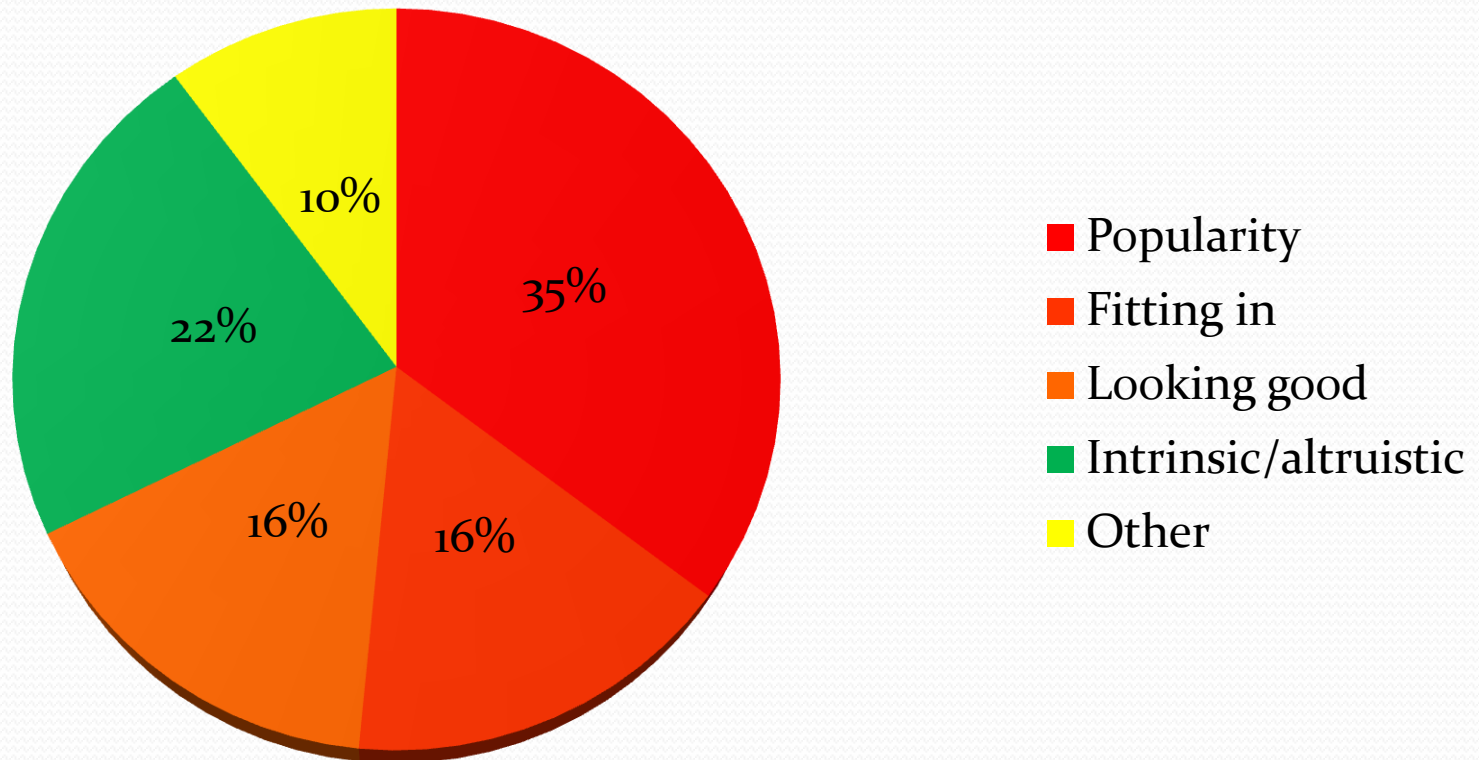
| Materialistic Motives | Cited (%)* |
|----------------------------------|------------|
| Popularity | 84% |
| To fit in | 39% |
| To look good | 39% |
| For altruistic/intrinsic reasons | 52% |

| Appearance Motives | Cited (%)* |
|---|------------|
| Popularity | 84% |
| To fit in | 42% |
| Desire to look attractive/get attention | 29% |
| To impress others/be looked up to | 42% |

*Percentage of children who cited motives fitting into one of the above categories, bearing in mind most children cited multiple motives (e.g., 84% of all children in the sample cited 'popularity' as a motive for materialism at least once).

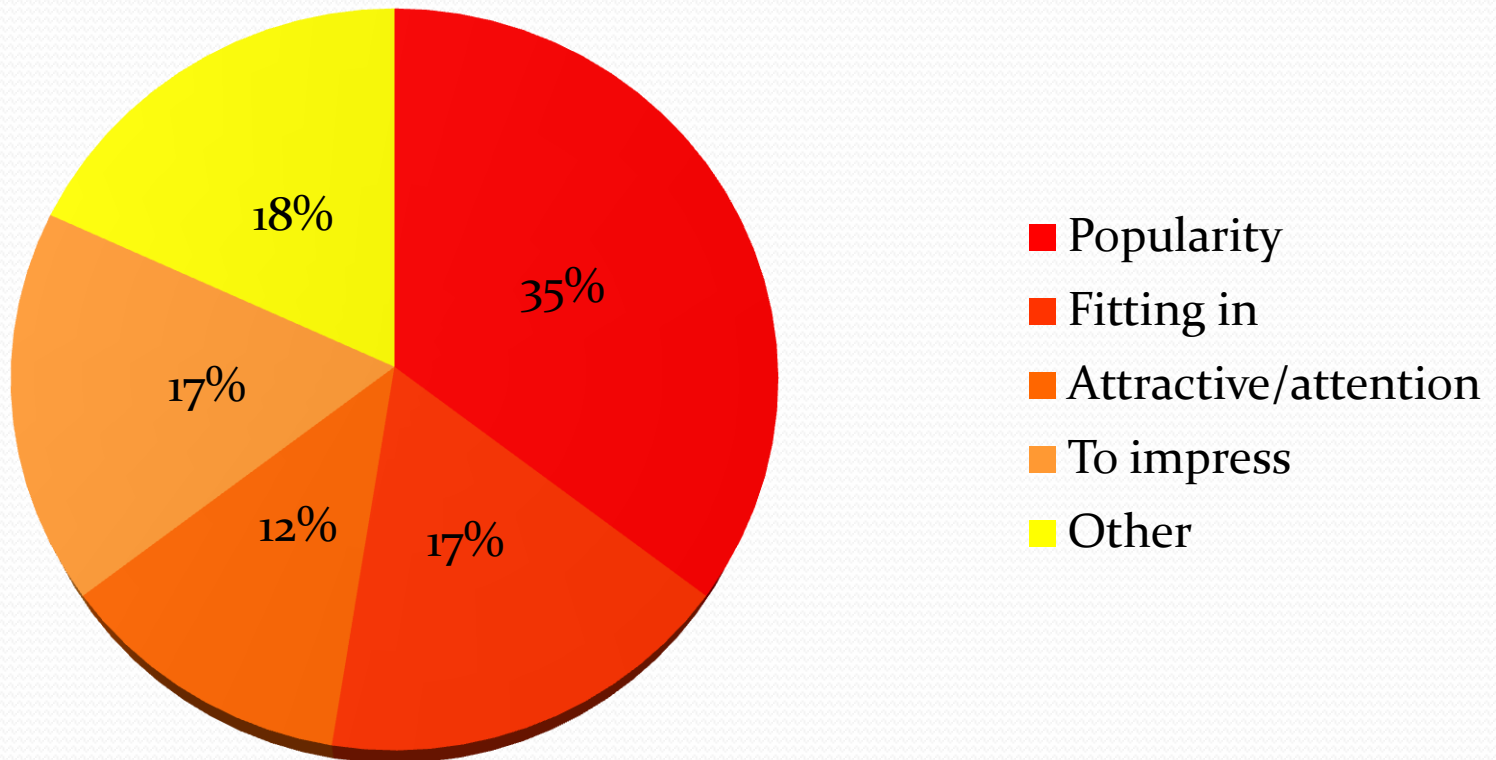
Materialistic motives

Percentage of materialistic motives by category



Appearance motives

Percentage of appearance motives by category



Conclusions

- Children have myriad motives for why they want money and material things and to look good
- These motives appear to be overwhelmingly both extrinsic and social in nature
- Knowing children's motives key to understanding why they internalise consumer culture ideals, and why they may be linked with lower well-being

Development of motives measures from interviews

- Children's responses used to create questions across these categories
- E.g., It is important to have money and cool things because...
 - 'It makes you more popular'
 - 'Everyone else has those things'
 - 'It would make me look good'
- Two separate measures created: *Motives for materialism* and *appearance motives*