Ipsos MORI
Social Research Institute

In partnership with Dr Agnes Nairn

Children's Well-being in UK, Sweden and Spain: The Role of Inequality and Materialism

A Qualitative Study

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Executive Summary

UNICEF's Report Card 7 put the UK at the bottom of the child well-being league table, including on three key well-being measures. UNICEF UK commissioned Ipsos MORI and Dr. Agnes Nairn to undertake this piece of qualitative research that digs behind the statistics to understand why this may be the case and what happens in Spain and Sweden, countries where child well-being, according to Report Card 7, is higher. This research paid particular attention to the role of materialism and inequality in children's well-being, as there is a growing consensus in the literature that these three concepts are inextricably linked – materialism is thought to be a cause, as well as an effect of negative well-being, and countries that have higher levels of inequality are known to score lower on subjective well-being indicators. Overall, however, there is relatively little qualitative research exploring how children themselves experience the interplay between materialism, inequality and their own subjective well-being. It is specifically this gap which this research aims to fill.

Well-being

We met around 250 children age eight to thirteen from all walks of life across Spain, Sweden and the UK and we then discussed our findings in-depth with our three national steering groups of fourteen year-olds. The message from them all was simple, clear and unanimous: their well-being centres on time with a happy, stable family, having good friends and plenty of things to do, especially outdoors. We also observed and filmed the everyday lives of twenty-four equally diverse families across the three countries. Family life in the three countries was strikingly different. In the UK homes we found parents struggling to give children the time they clearly want to spend with them whilst in Spain and Sweden family time appeared to be woven into the fabric of everyday life. We also noticed that the roles played by mothers, fathers and children within the family and the rules which governed family life were much more clearly defined in Spain and Sweden than in the UK. Moreover by the time many British children had reached secondary school their participation in active and creative pursuits – pursuits that children said made them happy - had in fact dwindled, whilst this occurred less in other countries. It was also clear in the UK that children from less well-off families had less access to the stimulating outdoor activities which most children would like.

Behind the statistics we found British families struggling, pushed to find the time their children want, something exacerbated by the uncertainty about the rules and roles operating within the family household. And we found less participation in outdoor and creative activities amongst older and more deprived children.

Materialism

Materialism is often seen as related to excessive individualism or greed and it has been suggested that low levels of child well-being in the UK may be related to an increase in these traits in children. However, the evidence gathered from the wide range of children and families we engaged with across three countries suggests something rather more complex, perhaps most notably that materialism appears to be problematic for UK adults as well as children.

Whilst technology and clothes brands were actively coveted, for the majority of the eight to thirteen year olds across the three countries, new toys, fashion items and gadgets were not central to their well-being. Rather than wanting to acquire things for their own sake, material objects and consumer goods tended to fulfil a range of purposes in children's lives: utilitarian, symbolic and social. Whilst the more functional aspects of consumer goods such as a hockey stick to enable playing in a local team seem benign, the symbolic use of brands either to confer superior status or to avoid bullying is much more problematic. The role of consumer goods in the lives of children is therefore complex and multi-faceted and not easily reduced to a single notion of greed or acquisitiveness. Moreover most children across the countries agreed that it was not desirable to get everything you wanted with 'spoiled' children being universally derided. The notions of waiting, saving up for and earning material rewards were highly regarded by the vast majority of children.

However, whilst most children agreed that family time is more important than consumer goods, we observed within UK homes a compulsion on the part of some parents to continually buy new things both for themselves and their children. Boxes and boxes of toys, broken presents and unused electronics were witness to this drive to acquire new possessions, which in reality were not really wanted or treasured. Most parents realised that what they were doing was often 'pointless' but seemed pressurised and compelled to continue. We also noticed that UK parents were often buying their children status brands believing that they were protecting them from the kind of bullying they experienced in their

own childhood. This compulsive acquisition and protective, symbolic brand purchase was largely absent in Spain and Sweden where parents were clearly under much less pressure to consume and displayed greater resilience.

Behind the statistics we find many UK children do not refer to material goods when talking about what makes them happy, and also understand the principles of moderation in consumption, but may have parents who feel compelled to purchase, often against their better judgement.

Inequality

The links between unequal societies and poor well-being are well documented. In this research difference and inequality were more prominent for the older children in secondary school when distinctions between groups of children started to be made on the basis of outward appearance rather than personality. At this stage material goods and brands began to play an important part in identifying and categorising people. In the UK and Sweden high status brands tended to be more important to children from less affluent backgrounds, presumably as a means of masking financial and social insecurities and bolstering self-esteem. Inevitably, expensive brands symbolised wealth with the rich and the poor marked out clearly by their possessions. Nonetheless, the children's attitudes to the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' were highly contested and ambivalent. Although they were keenly aware and highly articulate in telling us that fashionable brands did not bring lasting happiness and were quick to deride 'posh people' who could afford all the latest technology and designer labels, it was clear that they also hankered after some aspects of their lifestyle and themselves used brands symbolically.

Whilst the links between brands and inequality created tensions and anxieties for children in all three countries to some extent, these feelings were only shared by UK parents. Swedish and Spanish parents seemed not to belong to a 'consumer generation' in the same way. Deprivation for Swedish parents was understood as living in an area where personal safety was threatened, whilst for Spanish mothers not being able to spend time with your children was seen to confer disadvantage relative to others.

In the UK inequality was also seen in access to outdoor, sporting and creative activities, with poorer children spending more sedentary time in front of screens whilst the more affluent had access to a wide range of sports and other pursuits. It was also noticeable that the most important feature of these activities for many affluent children was demonstrating superiority over others by winning a match or coming first in a race or a test. The impetus to succeed in Spain was more motivated by pleasing parents and personally doing well in school (rather than better than others) whilst in Sweden sporting and creative activities were rarely associated with social comparison.

Behind the statistics we find children's growing awareness of inequality as they approach secondary school and the role of consumer goods in identifying and creating status groups within peer groups. Children have a very ambivalent attitude to those who appear to be able to afford all the latest status goods. Whilst many UK parents are complicit in purchasing status goods to hide social insecurities this behaviour is almost totally absent in Spain and Sweden. Inequality also has its part to play in access to sporting and creative activities in the UK.

The research paints a complex picture of the relationship between well-being, materialism and inequality across Spain, Sweden and the UK. Children want time with their parents, good relationships with their friends and lots of stimulating things to do. In the UK we find parents struggling to find time to be with their children or to help them participate in sporting and creative activities but instead feeling compelled to purchase consumer goods which are often neither wanted nor treasured. Consumer goods play a multi-faceted role in children's lives – sometimes positive and sometimes negative – and there is no doubt that status technology and clothing brands play their part in creating or reinforcing social divisions between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. Whilst we see all of these dynamics in Spain and Sweden, the pressure to consume appears much less and the resilience much greater than in the UK.

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Introduction

Introduction

UNICEF's Report Card 7, published in 2007, put the low well-being of children in the UK firmly on the agenda.[1] Compared with 20 other OECD[2] countries, including substantially poorer countries such as Poland and Greece, the UK came bottom on three out of six dimensions of well-being, and came bottom overall in the league table. Other indices of children's well-being have also found the UK to be doing badly.[3] [4]

UNICEF UK wished to understand this poor performance and how it relates to children's rights and well-being within the UK. To explore some of the potential drivers worth further investigation, UNICEF UK commissioned a scoping study.[5] This reviewed the available data and literature to consider the factors which appeared to account for between-country differences in child well-being at an international level. As a result of the scoping study, UNICEF UK commissioned Dr. Agnes Nairn and Ipsos MORI to conduct this qualitative research project to explore the links between inequality, materialism and experienced well-being in children, and the policy implications of this for the UK context.

A key issue which has been associated with low well-being in the UK is inequality. Amongst wealthy nations, the UK has some of the highest levels of inequality.[6] Even before the recession, inequality had reached the highest levels in the UK since records began in 1961.[7] This has direct impacts in terms of deprivation and child poverty, with the UK ranking 18th out of 21 in terms of material well-being in UNICEF UK's child well-being league table, despite being one of the wealthiest countries in the OECD. However, there is also some evidence that inequality harms everyone in society, not just the poor. The recent book, *The Spirit Level*, for example, found correlations between inequality and a broad range of social

[1] UNICEF (2007) *An overview of child well-being in rich countries*, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Report Card 7
[2] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
[3] Bradshaw J and Richardson D (2009) 'An index of child well-being in Europe' *Child Indicators Research*
[4] OECD (2009) *Doing better for children* (Paris: OECD)
[5] See appendix 1 for scoping study
[6] United Nations Development Programme (2009) *Human Development Report 2009* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan)
[7] Brewer M, Muriel A, Philips D and Sibieta L (2009) *Poverty and inequality in the UK: 2009* (London: Institute for Fiscal Studies)

indicators, including life expectancy, crime levels, mental health, social cohesion and obesity.[8]

The scoping report also identified materialistic values as strongly related to well-being in children. *A Good Childhood: Searching for Values in a Competitive Age* from the Children's Society, for example, argues that a lack of confidence, on the part of adults, in talking about values, has created a void which is being filled with excessive individualism, materialism and consumerism.

Evidence base and evidence gaps

The links between materialistic aspirations and negative well-being are well documented.[9] However, the causal direction of this dynamic remains ambiguous: insecure people may seek solace in a new phone or clothes, or those who orientate their lives around accumulating wealth and possessions may end up experiencing feelings of low self-worth when the goods fail to deliver lasting emotional benefits. There is a particular lack of qualitative research on the link between materialism and well-being.

The relationship between inequality and materialism is also less extensively studied although researchers into materialism have identified clear links with poverty, social exclusion, and low status which are likely to be exacerbated in conditions of greater inequality. For example it seems that children from low-income families are more likely to engage in conspicuous consumption[10] often in order to address a disconnect between their ideal self and their

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[8] Wilkinson R and Pickett K (2009) *The Spirit Level: Why more equal societies almost always do better* (London: Penguin)

[9] Wright, N.D. and Larsen, V. (1993), *Materialism and Life Satisfaction: A Meta-Analysis*, Journal of Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction and Complaining, No. 6, pp. 158-165
Cohen, P. and Cohen, J. (1996), *Life Values and Adolescent Mental Health*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mawah, New Jersey
Ahuvia, A. and Wong, N. (2002), *Personality and Values Based Materialism: Their Relationships and Origins*, Journal of Consumer Psychology, No. 12, pp. 389-402
Kasser, T. (2002), *The High Price of Materialism*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts
Nairn, A., Ormrod, J. and Bottomley, P. (2007), *Watching, Wanting and Well-being: Exploring the Links. A Study of 9-13 Year Olds in England and Wales*. National Consumer Council, London

[10] Nairn et al. (2007) ibid.
Elliott, R. and Leonard, C. (2004). *Peer pressure and poverty: exploring fashion brands and consumption symbolism among children of the "British poor*. Journal of Consumer Behaviour, 3 (4) 347-359

actual, attainable self and to deal with insecurities which can result from poverty.[11] Much of this valuable work has been qualitative in nature.

Overall, however, there is relatively little qualitative research exploring how children themselves experience the interplay between materialism, inequality and their own subjective well-being and there is a particular lack of comparative qualitative research. It is specifically this gap which this research aims to fill.

Research aims and objectives

The main research aim is to understand how, and to what extent, inequality and materialism affect children's experience of life in order to improve children's well-being in the UK. We have endeavoured to dig beneath the statistics on child well-being to discover the lived experiences of children.

Research questions

- How, and at what group level, is inequality understood and experienced by children?
- In what ways does inequality impact on children's well-being?
- What role does inequality have in determining children's aspirations and materialistic attitudes?
- Does materialism impact on children's well-being? How?
- What do the findings suggest in terms of changes required in UK policy and at the societal level?

This research was funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and was commissioned before the new UK Government took office on 11 May 2010. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy and may make reference to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DFE). The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

[11] Elliot, R. (1995). *How do the unemployed maintain their identity in a culture of consumption?* European Advances in Consumer Research, , 273-276

Methodology

Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology used to explore children's lived experience of inequality and materialism, and the link between these two phenomena and well-being. A qualitative approach was used in the UK, and our comparator countries Spain and Sweden. The research took place in two phases with different methodologies – firstly an exploratory ethnographic phase, which focused on the family, and secondly a phase of in-school discussion groups with children, to ensure the various contexts of children's lives and relationships were well represented in the research.

Comparator countries: Sweden and Spain

The research compares life for children in UK with Spain and Sweden. These two countries were chosen by UNICEF UK to provide sufficient contrast between countries, in terms of policy and cultural background, but also in terms of their scores for child well-being as laid out in UNICEF Report Card 7. Of particular interest were the scores for material well-being and subjective well-being. The material well-being score consisted of three different components – relative income poverty (percentage of children living in homes with income 50% below national median), children in households without an employed adult, and children's reported deprivation. The subjective well-being score comprised the proportion of young people rating their own health no more than 'fair' or 'poor', the proportion who report 'liking school a lot', and a measure of children's overall satisfaction with their own lives. The UK is rated in the bottom 4 on both measures. Swedish children fare well on both dimensions (4th in terms of relative income equality and 7th for subjective well-being) whilst Spain tells an interesting story scoring 5th from the bottom on relative income inequality yet at the same time 2nd from the top on subjective well-being. The research thus sought to explore why inequality in the UK is also associated with poor subjective well-being whilst in Spain it is not.

Figure 1 shows how the three countries compare on the well-being indicators in UNICEF Report Card 7. The figure shows rankings such that a score of 21st (out of 21) indicates very low well-being and 1st (out of 21) very high well-being.

UNICEF Report Card 7 rankings for comparator countries

	UK	Spain	Sweden
Material Well-being	18th	12th	1st
Health and Safety	12th	6th	1st
Educational Well-being	17th	15th	5th
Family and peer relationships	21st	8th	15th
Behaviours and risks	21st	5th	1st
Subjective well-being	20th	2nd	7th
Overall ranking	**21st**	**5th**	**2nd**

Figure 1: comparison of countries on Report Card 7 well-being indicators

Sweden is top in three of the six dimensions. Sweden suffered economic problems in the 1990s which led to a change in the role of the state, enabling it to remain relatively unaffected by the recent recession. Therefore young people have grown up in a stable, prosperous country. Sweden as a society has also shown to be very equal and, according to the European Social Survey, materialism is also low.

Spain, on the other hand, has gone from being a relatively poor European country to seeing a lot of growth in the last 10 or so years. At the same time it has been hit hard by the recession and childhood poverty appears to be increasing. Nonetheless there are strong family structures in Spain that offer a high level of support in the face of current challenging economic circumstances. Inequality in Spain is lower than in the UK, but not particularly low compared to the rest of Europe. Materialism amongst under 25s is 2nd lowest in Europe, based on the European Social Survey. It may be for these reasons that Spain was ranked 5th overall for child well-being in UNICEF Report Card 7 and 2nd for subjective well-being.

Child Rights Social Ecology Perspective

Our methodology is underpinned by Ecological Systems Theory (e.g. Bronfenbrenner, 1979[12]; Comer et al., 2004) which sees child development as part of a broader social, cultural, economic and political set of systems. Bronfenbrenner suggests research to inform policy should take place within natural settings and that theory finds greater practical application when contextually relevant. He famously stated that "*basic science needs public policy even more than public policy needs basic science*".[13]

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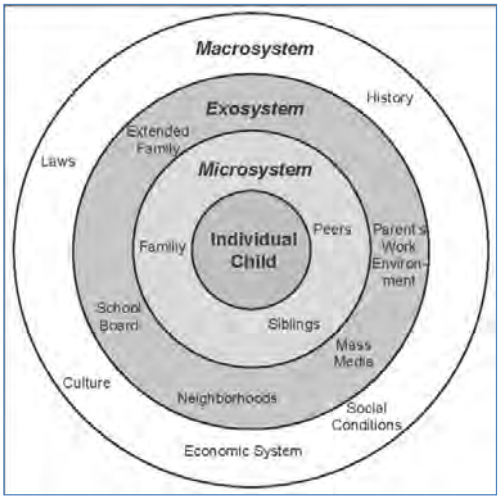

Bronfenbrenner, 1979

In Bronfenbrenner's seminal social ecology model, children are presented in the centre of a series of concentric circles which represents a range of influences; from the most immediate microsystem including friends and family to more remote shapers such as the extended family and the media and finally the macro system including culture and the political system. We are working with an updated visualisation of the concept by Victoria University, Canada which sees the child's well-being as more directly contingent on each of the systems (as represented by the child as a core pillar running through each tier). This 'child rights' social ecology model also acknowledges the child's right as an active participant in each of these spheres.

[12]Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
[13]Idem, p. 8

It should be noted that whilst this contextual way of studying childhood is by no means new with regards to well-being or inequality it is a radical departure within the relatively new field of materialism research. Materialism has hitherto been conceptualised as a psychological construct and most notably as a personality trait[14] or, more recently, as a component of an individual's value-set[15]. Materialism has rarely been studied as a social phenomenon. Underpinning our research with the Child Rights Social Ecology Model thus allows us to take a fresh contextual look at the interplay between materialism, inequality and well-being.

Overview of methodology

The research process spanned eight months and followed the sequence shown in figure 2 below. We used a two-phase qualitative methodology consisting of ethnographic family case studies followed by a series of friendship groups with children. Exactly the same methodology was used in each country to enable meaningful comparison.

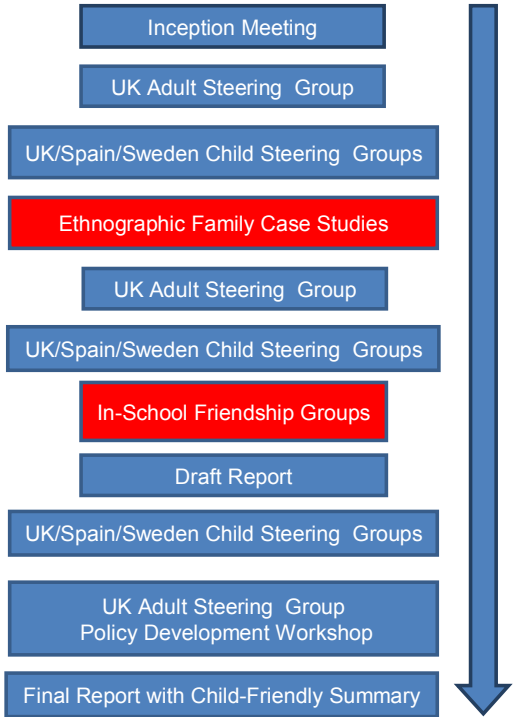

Figure 2 Summary of methodology

[14] E.g. Belk, R. (1984) *Children's recognition of consumption symbolism in children's products.* The Journal of Consumer Research Vol. 10(4), 387-397

[15] E.g. Kasser, T. and Ryan, R.M. (1993) *A dark side of the American dream: correlates of financial success as a central life aspiration*. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Vol 65(2), 410-22
Richins, M., L. and Dawson, S. (1992). *A consumer values orientation for materialism and its measurement: Scale development and validation.* Journal of Consumer Research, 19(3) 303-316

Guidance from steering groups

In line with a child rights approach, our research process has been guided not only by an international adult steering group which met three times in the UK (see appendix 4 for membership) but also a young person's steering group in each country which met three times and had representation at the final adult steering group. A Young Advisor sat on both the UK adult and young person's steering groups. The young person's steering groups helped pilot materials for each stage of the research and gave feedback on the findings in order to ensure that the research team maintained a child-centred approach throughout.

Filmed ethnographic family case studies

Data collection began with trying to understanding the child in the 'microsystem' context of the family. Ethnographic case study allows us the opportunity to observe what naturally occurs in family life, and how this is experienced by children rather than restricting responses to a set of preconceived questions. We chose to film each of our case studies, not only to make a record for analysis but in order that we could create edited clips to capture and present to stakeholders the totality of our findings: what was heard, what was seen and what was felt.

We worked within the natural setting of the family unit in Spain, Sweden and the UK, using non-participant ethnography where the researchers played the part of observer. An average of six hours was spent with each family and the time was split between group interaction and time alone with children and parents. This division of time was arranged according to what happened naturally on the day. Visits were made at different times of day, on week days and weekends to suit the families. The researchers had a loose discussion guide (see appendix) but were guided by what the family had planned to do on the day of the visit. The emphasis was on watching and listening rather than asking.

Two researchers were present during each family visit: one to engage with the family members and the other to operate the camera. We thus had an international, multi-lingual team of six data collectors all highly experienced in ethnographic method who could adapt and respond to the different circumstances in each family and could clarify what was said and done by family members. By observing families we were able to make explicit layers of behaviours, feelings and opinions which were often implicit to the family members.

Purposive Sampling

Given the brief to understand the role of inequality we used a quota sampling method to allow us to ensure that our case studies included the experiences of families in very different circumstances. This quota system allowed us to look for themes which crossed a range of types of family circumstances in each country as well as getting an understanding of what might drive differences both between and within countries. The families were carefully recruited to represent a range of levels of deprivation, geographical spread, family structure, age of children, and employment patterns. Figure 3 provides a more detailed breakdown of those recruited for participation in the research.

Figure 3: recruitment matrix for families involved in ethnographic research

Family No.	Family Structure	Family Work Patterns	Socio-Economic Group	Child Ages	Location
1	Single	Working	BC1	1 under 7	Urban London Madrid Stockholm
2	Single	Sporadic or not work	C2D	2+ 4-14	Taunton Malmo Barcelona
3	Couple	One working	BC1	2+ 4-14	Rural village outside: Cardiff Härnösand Asturias
4	Couple	Both working	C2D	2+ under 7	Belfast Sevilla Härnösand
5	Couple	Both part time	C2D	2+ 0-14	Cardiff La Coruna Växjö
6	Couple	Both working	C2	2+ 4-14	London Barcelona Malmo
7	Couple	One full one part-time	AB	2+ 7-18	Suburban: London Madrid Stockholm
8	Single	Not working	DE	2+ 7-18	Village outside: Glasgow Cadiz Vaxjo

Ethnographic Data Analysis

The case studies were conducted simultaneously in the three countries with debrief discussion amongst the researchers between cases. This allowed the team of researchers to formulate theory through an iterative process, test it, reformulate it and look for patterns. In the event, strong and consistent themes were evident across the case studies giving us confidence that 24 case studies were enough to produce core patterns of family behaviour and that any further cases were unlikely to have revealed additional important themes.

The 24 case studies generated around 120 hours of film, 300 pages of transcripts and 50 pages of field notes. We produced a variety of films: an hour long film for each country, a half hour film for each country and a 30 minute comparative film with footage from all three countries. In line with data protection and market research ethics regulations these can only be shown to stakeholders of the project and never to the general public.

Ethnographies should be able to convince the people studied of their credibility[16] and the intended reading audience of their trustworthiness[17]. In an ideal world then our interpretations of the case studies would be presented back to the participants for scrutiny. In an international study with budget constraints this was not possible. Instead we presented the interpretive themes to UNICEF UK staff, to UNICEF staff from the comparator countries, to our international adult steering group and to our children's steering groups in each country. Both adults and children agreed that the films depicted life as it is in each country.

[16] Lincoln, YS. and Guba, EG. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
[17] Melanie Wallendorf and Russell W. Belk (1989), *Assessing Trustworthiness in Interpretive Consumer Research* in Elizabeth C. Hirschman, ed., Interpretive Consumer Research, Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research, pg 69-84.

In School Friendship Groups and individual interviews

For the second phase of the research, we conducted discussion groups with children aged 8-13 years, who were friends, and individual interviews with children who were more isolated. We did not feel this methodology would be appropriate for children under the age of 8 years as it relies on the development of certain cognitive abilities and on children feeling fully comfortable with the researcher.

From a methodological perspective friendship groups offer children a comfortable, child-led research environment and are therefore highly effective in eliciting truthful and natural responses from children. When children are friends with one another, they tend to be more confident talking honestly than if they are in a group of people they do not know or do not like.

Friendship groups also allowed us to observe the importance of peers in how children interpret the world. Thinking about the child rights social ecology model, peers are a crucial part of children's social development and it is here that distinctions or inequalities are often forged. The group size was kept to a maximum of six children to ensure all children had a chance to speak and were comfortable in the discussion.

We were conscious that some children are rather isolated and may not belong to friendship groups. We wanted to ensure that the views of a range of children were involved in this phase of the research, and explore whether the experience of children with fewer friends experienced inequality and materialism in different ways to other children. In two of the seven schools, individual interviews were therefore held with children who were identified as more socially isolated by their teachers.

Sampling and Recruitment

Purposive sampling was once again used for the friendship group/interview phase of this research project to highlight which groups were of specific interest, with quotas and locations mirroring the ethnographic phase of the research as far as possible to ensure we included the experiences of as broad a range of children as possible.

A range of schools were recruited including different types of school (private, grammar and state), and location (rural, suburban, urban). We also applied quotas on the relative affluence of an area to ensure we spoke to children from all backgrounds.

Within each country we also included a geographical spread as shown in the table overleaf, which mirrored the ethnographies as closely as possible, although it was not always possible to retain the same locations given the willingness of schools to take part in the research.

A total of seven schools were recruited to take part in this research from each country (21 schools in total), with two discussion groups, (or one discussion group and two in-depth interviews) in each school, making a total of 36 groups and 12 in-depth interviews. Across the seven schools we also included one group of children with behavioural difficulties and one group of children with special educational needs, as well as 2 groups where the majority of pupils were from ethnic minority backgrounds to ensure the full range of children were represented as part of this research.

We asked schools to select the children to take part on our behalf, but stressed the importance to the teacher that the children chosen were not necessarily the 'best' pupils in the school, but represented the demographics of the area, with a good gender and ethnic mix, so far as this was possible within friendship groups. Figure 4 on the following page outlines the breakdown of the different groups involved in the research.

Figure 4: recruitment matrix for in-schools discussion groups

School No.	School Type	Parental Affluence	Age /type of children	Location
1	Private School (UK and Spain) Sweden: Free school	Affluent	Age 8- 9 Age 10-11	Chester Sevilla Malmö
2	State school	Poor	Age 8- 9 Age 10-11 (with behavioural problems) BME group	Urban London Parla (Madrid) Urban Växjö
3	Private boarding (UK) or day school	Very affluent	Age 11-12 Age 12-13	Edinburgh Madrid Stockholm
4	State school	Poor	Age 9-10 Age 10-11	Taunton Cudillero (Asturias) Suburban Stockholm
5	State school (UK and Spain) Sweden – Free school	Mixed affluence – poorer families	Age 9 -10 Age 10-11 (2 x in-depth interviews with isolated children)	Suburban London Castillejo (Sevilla) Urban Härnösand
6	State school (UK and Spain)	Poor	Age 11-12 Age 12-13 (with special educational needs)	Wokingham (Berkshire) Barcelona Rural Härnösand
7	Grammar School (UK and Spain) Sweden – free school	Mixed affluence – more affluent families	Age 11-12 Age 12-13 (2 x in-depth interviews with isolated children)	Belfast Gijón (Asturias) Rural Växjö

Discussion guide

A discussion guide including some exercises was developed for the friendship groups and individual interviews in collaboration with UNICEF UK, and piloted with the children's steering group to test for the acceptability and pertinence of the topics being discussed and the exercises used to explore the topics. A copy of the discussion guide and exercises is included in the Appendix to this report.

The guide included a number of topics which emerged from the ethnography as important themes in child well-being and inequality (such as, for example the importance of rules and roles in the family), in order to test the validity of these findings with a wider group of children. It also sought to remain as open ended as possible in order that children were able to explain

to us their views on difference, materialism and well-being from their own perspective, without feeling 'prompted' by the researchers. Role-plays and scenarios, as well as written 'spider diagram' exercises were included to ensure data was collected in a variety of ways and the discussion was stimulating for the children taking part.

The discussion guide was translated into Swedish and Spanish, and checked for consistency with the UK version; minor adaptations were made to the scenarios for a better cultural fit (such as, for example, changing the names of the children and the activities they pursued).

Schools data analysis

All of the discussion groups were audio recorded, and moderators were asked to make a comprehensive set of field notes using a template to clarify important areas to focus upon, which included verbatim quotations from the audio files. In order to ensure comprehensive analysis which allowed us to compare across social groups and all three countries, field notes were entered into an analysis spreadsheet which could be used to filter and compare results according to levels of affluence, country and age of children.

The research team also held a series of analysis sessions in which commonalities and differences between each researcher's experiences, and between the discussion groups and ethnography phases were explored. From these discussions, key themes/hypotheses were developed in order to structure the narrative of the report. A similar process was undertaken in order to develop policy recommendations.

Where relevant, the emerging data from the discussion groups was also examined in the light of the literature around topics of child well-being, inequality and materialism in children – references to which have been included throughout the discussion of findings.

Interpretation of qualitative data

Unlike quantitative surveys, qualitative research is not designed to provide statistically reliable data on what groups of people as a whole are thinking. Qualitative research is intended to shed light on *why* people have particular views and *how* these views relate to demographic characteristics and the experiences of the participants concerned. This approach, in other words, facilitates deeper insight into attitudes underlying the 'top of mind' responses to quantitative studies – it is a rich source of data about a small group of people.

However, this also means that it is illustrative rather than statistically reliable and therefore does not allow conclusions to be drawn about the *extent* to which something is happening. Therefore, the findings of this research should not be taken to be valid for all parents or all children in any of the three countries explored in this study – the views and ideas expressed here are the product of discussions with a small number of parents and children, and care should therefore be taken when making generalisations at country level.

In addition, we must be mindful in all research, both qualitative and quantitative of the potential difference between what people *say* they think and do, and what they *actually* say and do. There is an element of social desirability bias (where participants give answers they think the researcher wishes to hear, or are more 'socially acceptable' than the reality) present in most research, but we would expect this to emerge relatively strongly when working with parents and children around issues of status, purchasing and parenting. However, the approach we have chosen - with ethnographic research with families complementing in-school discussion groups and interviews - is a good way of exploring first hand the 'dissonances' between what children say about the role of consumerism in their lives, and what we observe to be happening in the family. Where these dissonances have been observed, we highlight this in the findings chapters which follow.

Research findings

Research Findings

Well-being

Our working definition of well-being was taken from the Department of Health's New Horizons strategy: '*a positive state of mind and body, feeling safe and able to cope, with a sense of connection with people, communities and the wider environment*'[18] and the Foresight Review: '*a dynamic state, in which the individual is able to develop their potential, work productively and creatively, build strong and positive relationships with others, and contribute to their community*'.[19] However, we wanted to know what children themselves in Spain, Sweden and UK thought contributed to or took away from their well-being. We therefore began the schools discussion groups by asking children what a good day and a bad day would be like for them.

The Child's View

What constitutes a 'good day' for children was very simple: time with those they love (friends, family and even pets); creative or sporting activities; being outdoors and having fun. These were spontaneously mentioned by almost every child we interviewed in all three countries. Across the three nations there was a distinct lack of material possessions in children's descriptions of a good day; it was people, and not things that made them happy. This accords with Youth Target Group Insight (TGI) data which shows that between 1997 and 2008 friends, family and love were consistently rated as really important by upwards of three quarters of 11-19 year olds whilst only around 30% reported that money was really important.[20]

[18] Department of Health (2009) *New Horizons: A shared vision for mental health* (London: HM Government), pg.18.
[19] Foresight Mental Capital and Well-Being Project (2008) *Final project report* (London: The Government Office for Science)
[20] Advertising Association (2009): *Children's Well-being in a Commercial World: A Contribution by the Advertising Association to the DCSF Enquiry*.

The importance of family time

Time with family was mentioned in most groups across the three countries. In particular, children thought a good day with the family was one when they all engaged in an active pursuit although simply being with their family was also highly valued. Youth TGI data for 2008 showed that almost 80% of 11-19 year olds and almost 90% of 7-10 year olds like to spend time with their family.[21]

"The three of us [boy and parents] go for a drink and then also to watch sport"
Spain, School 7, Boy, Depth, Age 12

"It was a great day on Sunday because it was Mother's Day and I spent time with my family, we had a day out, we rode ponies and we had a picnic. Everyone was there."
UK, School 7, Mixed Group, Age 12

"I like to pick mushrooms in the forest together with my family when we are at our country home."
Sweden, School 4, Mixed Group, Age 10

Children who did not live with both of their parents tended to mention visiting or seeing their absent parent as part of a good day, while others felt that their family being together (i.e. not divorced or separated by distance) was important in making them happy.

In Spain, the definition of family seemed much wider than that observed in the UK and Sweden, including the extended family of grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Spanish children in particular mentioned birthdays and other celebrations as opportunities to see their extended families, as well as holidays and trips.

"I'd like to see my family more, not just my parents but my aunts and uncles too"
Spain, School 4, Girl, Group, Age 10/11

[21] Advertising Association (2009) op.cit.

The features of bad days that children told us about were strongly related to disruption to stable family life. Some Spanish children explicitly made the link between children being unhappy and disrupted family lives.

"What I really hate is when my parents argue, and you're just like 'stop' and they won't, it's really annoying"

UK, School 1, Girl, Group, Age 8/9

"There's this boy in my class who is always getting into trouble, I think it's because his parents are never around"

Spain, Steering group, boy

Bereavement was also mentioned in all three countries as something that would make a day bad or make you unhappy. Many of the Spanish children talked of losing a grandparent and how much this had upset them. This is likely to be rooted in the close relationships many Spanish children had with their extended family as seen in the ethnographies.

"It made me really sad and I nearly cried. My parents really cheered me up"

Spain, School 7, Depth 2, Boy, Age 11

Amongst the UK children we talked to serious family problems were more strongly in evidence amongst more deprived children. Several children in these groups spoke of family separation, substance-abuse and fighting between parents when talking about bad days. This chimes with literature that documents the connection between poverty and family problems.[22] Households where no one is in work and lone-parent families have been shown to bring not only economic disadvantage but also family tension.[23]

However, it was not only serious family problems that make children unhappy, many children from all backgrounds spoke of what may seem to adults as smaller family arguments making them upset and contributing to a bad day.

"When you fight with your brothers and they hit you [it's a bad day]"

Spain, School 3, Mixed Group, Age 8/9

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[22] Rutter, M.(2009) *Family Commission Recommendations on Child Poverty*. Available at: www.familyandparenting.org/.../384_Family_Poverty_COLS_(2).pdf

[23] Micklewright, J. and Stewart, K. (2000) *Is child welfare converging in the European Union?* Innocenti Occasional Papers, Economic and Social Policy series No. 69 Florence: UNICEF Child Development Centre

"[It was a bad day] when my mother punished me"

Spain, School 5, Mixed group, Age 9/10

Missing extended family overseas was a common theme amongst those who were first or second generation immigrants in all three countries. In one particular UK school, where the majority of the children were second generation immigrants, most of the children spoke of how happy they are when they get to see their extended family, and how much they miss them when they are at home in the UK.

"When I have to come back from Saudi Arabia [it's a bad day]"

UK, School 2, Mixed group, Age 9/10

Friendship and companionship

Along with family, friends were another important part of what makes a good day in all three countries. The essential role of friends in childhood happiness and stability is well documented.[24] In the TGI survey friendship was really important to almost 100% of 11-19 year olds.

"I had a pyjama party with my friend and it was really fun"

Spain, School 6, Girl, Group, Age 10/11

"If it's going to be a good day I need to spend time with my best friends"

Sweden, School 1, Girl, Group, Age 9

It is not just time with peers that is important to children; they also stress the quality of the friendships and the attitudes of their friends. Younger children in particular mentioned friends 'being nice to you' as part of a good day, and most children also talked about fights with friends, or peers not talking to them or making fun of them, as something that happens on a bad day. The notion of 'being bullied' featured strongly with UK children.

"Being told you're not longer someone's friend [makes a bad day]"

UK, School 5, Girl, Mixed Group, Age 9

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[24] Crowley, A., Vulliamy, C. (2007) *Listen Up! Children and Young People Talk: About Poverty*. Save the Children: Wales.

"[It was a good day when] my best friend said something really nice to me"
Spain, School 3, Mixed Group, Age 10/11

"[It's a bad day] when you break up with your friend"
UK, School 2, Mixed Group, Age 9/10

"On a good day it's important that your friends are in a good mood and that you all support one another"
Sweden, School 4, Boy, Group, Age 10

The growing importance of peers over parents as children move toward adolescence is a noted trend.[25] In all countries, friends were far more important to the children who had moved on to secondary school. Older children in all three countries were more likely to mention time with friends as being essential to their happiness when asked to choose between different things that could make them happy.

"I'd lose sport before I'd lose my friends"
UK, School 7, Depth, Boy, Age 12

Pets were also mentioned by many children as part of a good day or when asked to tell us about something they really wanted. In fact pets seemed for many children to be treated as members of their family and they arguably represent that type of relationship that makes children happiest, one where lots of time can be spent together and each is always there for the other. This was explicitly stated by a number of children in the discussion groups.

"Playing with my cat makes me feel good, because he's loyal"
Spain, School 7, Depth, Boy, Age 11

Researcher: "Why are pets so good?"
"If you've got a secret you can always tell them"
UK, School 1, Group, Girl, Age 8/9

"It's fun to have a pet as you can go out with it, and play with them. It's like having a sister or brother"
Sweden, School 2, Girl, Group, Age 11

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[25] Banerjee, R. and Dittmar, *H. (2008) Individual Differences in Children's Materialism: The Role of Peer Relations*, Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, *34; 17*

It was thus quite clear that the children's spontaneous and universal focus on friends and family (including pets) indicates that from a child's point of view relationships and their quality play an absolutely crucial part in their subjective well-being.

Being active and outdoors

Across all three countries being active and being outside were also important elements of a good day. Many of the children mentioned the good weather or sunshine as a feature of a good day, which they seemed to value as an enabler to being outside, playing sports or going to exciting places such as the beach.

"[It's a good day] when I can hear the sound of birds and seagulls"

UK, School 4, Girl, Group, Age 10/11

"On this Saturday it was very nice weather and I was outside a lot...I had soccer practice outside for the first time this year and that was very fun... it was very nice to be outside being active!"

Sweden, School 3, Girl, Group, Age 11

Children were much more likely to talk about outdoor and other active pursuits such as music and dance, than to mention television, using the internet or playing on games consoles as part of a good day. Conversely, inactivity was seen as having a negative impact on children's well-being; children in the discussion groups told us that they dislike being bored, and being stuck indoors with 'nothing to do' because of bad weather, or parents and friends having other commitments.

"When it's raining and it's grey and no one gets to go out. You have to stay in and watch boring movies"

UK, School 2, Mixed group, Age 8/9

"I like to do something! I don't just want to sit by my computer; I want to actually do something!"

Sweden, School 1, Boy, Group, Age 10

What We Observed

Whilst children in the UK, Spain and Sweden all agreed that friends, family and stimulating activities contributed to their well-being, we observed stark contrasts between the countries in the extent to which these things actually featured in children's everyday lives.

Family Time

It became clear from the UK case studies that families from all backgrounds struggled to give children the time that they so clearly want within the natural fabric of daily life and, indeed, children in the discussion groups also voiced concerns about a lack of quality time with their parents. It seems that while the importance of family time was a dominant theme of conversation, in reality families find it hard to create that time together. A number of British parents in the ethnographies complained that they were simply too tired to play with their children when they came home from work, and children in the discussion groups also complained about their parents not making time for them.

"I get home from work absolutely shattered, [because my job] is really demanding, and I get home and my daughter wants to play! And I think 'Oh no!'"

UK ethnography, Family 1, Mother

"I like it when I spend time with my mum, but only when she is in a happy mood...if she's in a grumpy mood and she's doing the cleaning and you want to hang out with her, she's like, 'X, go away!' and you're like, 'I just want to spend time with you'"

UK, School 4, Boy, Group, Age 10/11

"One time my Dad had to miss a holiday because he was working...we were really disappointed"

UK, School 1, Girl, Group, Age 8/9

The lack of quality family time observed in the UK stands in marked contrast to both Spain and Sweden. In Sweden, family time appeared in the ethnographies to be simply a part of the natural rhythm of everyday life be it making dinner, driving children to organised activities or watching a film. Most Swedish families who took part in the ethnographies talked about the importance of finding time to talk with their children, every day, and especially felt it was important to eat meals together on a regular basis. A number of the parents mentioned the idea of 'cosy evenings' where they stayed in to share treats and time with their children as a vital part of each week. Children also seemed to share the idea that family time was important, and clearly made the effort to safeguard it themselves.

"On Fridays and Saturdays, we have cosy evenings, then the children should be in bed, the little ones. It's very important that she (11 year old) gets that time with me alone. Even if we just watch telly and eat candy – we did that yesterday"

Sweden, Ethnography, Family 4, Mother

Mother: "Driving your kids to their training is also a very important time, quality time. To sit together and talk in the car, that gives more than sitting in front of the TV.
Father: "I was told off by X [daughter] the other day because I was on the phone when I picked her up from school"

Sweden, Ethnography, Family 3

In Spain, while fathers often work late, time spent together by mothers and children is often quite natural through the course of the day, with sporting or creative activities and mealtimes bringing the family together, while extended family are never far away and tend to play an active role in looking after children. The importance of spending time with children was a dominant theme of the discussions with all the Spanish mothers.

"My parents, my aunts and my cousins, and also my brother live in Seville. X stays at his grandparents every week, on Friday or Saturday, and he loves it....they adore their grandparents"

Spain, ethnography, Family 4, Mother

"My sister picks them up after school and takes them to her house for lunch, I prefer that they spend time with family, rather than more time at school"

Spain, ethnography, Family 7, Mother

Rules and Roles

The ethnographies in particular allowed us to observe differences and similarities in attitudes to childhood across the countries which in turn provided insights into how and why family time in the UK seemed more constrained and unnatural than in Spain and Sweden. We found that childhood seemed to have different cultural meanings in the three countries and that this impacted on the household roles and rules and ultimately on the amount and type of time children spend with their families.

Sweden: Childhood as preparation for responsible adulthood

A distinctive feature of life in the Swedish households we visited, which was echoed in the discussions with children in schools, was the notion that children should take a share in the tasks around the home, and a sense of childhood as a preparation to become a responsible adult. In line with a strong culture of equality, children were expected from an early age to play an active role in the running of the household, from laying the table, cooking and gardening to saving money and deciding rules. Children in the Swedish groups seemed to endorse the need to help out, talking about children not helping as being lazy and thoughtless.

"X helps me with laying the table, taking out the rubbish, and babysitting. I think it's important that everyone contributes"

Sweden, ethnography, Family 7, Mother

"We would be fat and lazy if we don't help out and instead just lie on the couch with a bowl of crisps on our stomach"

Sweden, School 6, Girl, Group, Age 12

Although mothers did tend to play a more active role in household tasks than fathers the relatively equal balance of men and women in the workforce meant that children observed a sharing of tasks between the adult members of the household. Being able to cope when you leave home was a consistent theme in the discussions of Swedish children around helping out at home – they saw doing housework as part of their development, rather than a pointless or tiresome exercise.

“I cook as much food as he does, we both do the washing, transport the children around and so forth. I think that's fairly typical for Sweden, really.”

Sweden, ethnography, Family 6, Mother

“If you don’t help out when you’re a child you’ll grow up thinking that you never have to do anything yourself and when you move away from home everything will be strange and unfamiliar for you!”

Sweden, School 1, Girl, Group, Age 10

Spain: Childhood as a joyful time

If the Swedish adults saw childhood as preparation for responsible adulthood then in Spain childhood was seen as a cherished, special time which is full of joy. The role of children was mainly to learn: be it to study or to learn an instrument or a language or a sporting skill. Supported by a willing extended family, mothers by and large nurtured the children whilst the father’s role was to provide financially. The allocation of roles in the households we observed was very different from Sweden (with Spanish fathers almost entirely absent from the ethnographies due to work commitments) but just as clearly defined. In the Spanish ethnographies, we saw that the mother was the epicentre of the family, providing stability and structure for children as they grow up. Mothers in Spain saw this role as their primary one, and often sacrificed other areas of their lives, such as socialising, to do this. Mothers in Spain saw time, rather than possessions, as the most important thing they could give their children.

Researcher: So you don't have much time for yourself?
Mother: “No, but that's the sacrifice you have to make, but it has its rewards. I see them growing up, that they are doing well, but as a woman I feel I don't exist”

Spain, ethnography, Family 3

“Time is not free, you either use it for work, or to be with them, your work, children, the shopping, the meals, the laundry, you can't do it all, you have to choose”

Spain, ethnography, Family 4, Mother

UK: Struggling to find time for childhood

Rules and roles within the households in the UK seemed much less clear. Whilst some children were asked to help out with chores, others seemed to be left to their own devices (both literally and figuratively). Children were resentful of helping around the house. With a blurring of boundaries we found parents who were tired and finding it difficult to find time to be with their children; family time seemed constrained. Families rarely ate together during the week, except for the more affluent families who made a point of doing so.

Other studies have also reported the perceived 'time squeeze[26]' that was very evident in our filmed UK case studies. It has been suggested that this pressure may come from the abundance of leisure activities and products available for families to consume[27] and as a result of the transformation of children's bedrooms into 'media bed-sits'[28] where they have private access to TV, internet, games consoles and phones independent of the rest of the family. Members of a family may well all be in the home at the same time but they co-exist rather than share time and space. Indeed, for younger children, television was often used as a babysitter, keeping children occupied while parents got on with other things.

"We've got the Playstation in here, the Wii's in the other room, there's the Xbox upstairs, I can't be arsed[29], I just leave them alone…"

UK, ethnography, Family 6, Father

There was also a sense in the UK ethnographies that children were more 'in charge' than in Sweden and Spain – our ethnographers encountered a number of situations where children ignored their parents' wishes and 'got away with it' or 'bossed' their parents around. Parents talked about not being able to get their children to eat what they wanted them to, or go to bed at a 'sensible' time. Some parents felt able to discipline their children, but tended to do this by taking away 'things' that their children valued, such as their computers rather than by talking to them about the issues they were causing.

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[26]Martens, L., Southerton, D., and Scott, S. (2004): *Bringing children (and parents) into the sociology of consumption*, Journal of Consumer Culture 4 (2) 155-182

[27] DCSF/DCMS (2009) *The Impact of the Commercial World on Children's Well-being: Report of an independent assessment*

[28] Mayo E., and Nairn, A. (2009) *Consumer Kids*. Constable Robinson, London

[29]Slang word, similar to 'bothered'

The parents that we met across the UK households talked a lot about “being a good parent” and often referred back to their own childhood as some sort of benchmark to which they compared themselves. Behind this comparison was a sense of parenting being a sort of performance on which they were being constantly judged. This created anxiety meaning that childhood in many UK families had thus somehow become uncertain terrain.

Outdoor, sporting and creative activities

Another difference observed between the UK and the other two countries was that the outdoor, sporting and creative activities which children clearly wanted were not an integral part of many children’s lives. Unlike in the comparator countries, most parents did not appear to be actively involved in encouraging children to take part in outside interests, although this was less true of those families who were more affluent. Although younger children were often taken to the park and to other fun activities, children from less affluent households (especially the older ones) were observed in the ethnographies to spend most of their time in front of screens. The least affluent parents in the ethnographies talked of having given up on organised activities for their older children, because they were too expensive, too far to get to, and they felt their children weren't all that interested.

In Sweden on the other hand, creative and outdoor activities, and in particular sport, were framed by parents as a positive alternative to spending time watching TV or using the computer. Parents often saw themselves as collaborators in their children’s active pursuits, whether through taking part themselves or taking them to the place where the activity is held.

“We often go down there of an evening with a fishing rod. The whole family, or they go on their own”

Sweden, ethnography, Family 3, Mother

“My father is like a hooligan parent, he goes to all my floor ball practices and games and always stands and shouts by the sidelines”

Sweden, steering group, girl, Age 14

In Spain mothers facilitated a range of organised activities for their children which kept them busy, and were scheduled to be part of the normal weekly routine, even if it meant they spent a great deal of time driving their children around. These activities included music, sports and often supplementary academic lessons such as English classes.

"On Mondays and Thursdays, X goes to swimming, and X does rhythmic gymnastics, and one Wednesday they have music lessons. And their mother? I'm the taxi driver!"

Spain, ethnography, Family 7, Mother

"In our class most pupils have a lot of activities after school. For example guitar, tennis, handball…"

Sweden, School 1, Boy, Group, Age 10

"She goes to classes on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, after school. …She really enjoys it, what I'm doing is, it gives her time away from thinking about her father [*parents are separated*] and rather than going out and buying toys, or treating her with food or things like that, I take her to these classes".

UK, ethnography, Family 1, mother

The role of material objects in well-being

One further thing that was most striking in trying to understand children's well-being was that almost universally, the children in all three countries did not see material possessions as essential to their well-being. However, there was one exception to this trend: poor children in the UK. Although it was not possible to explore the reasons behind these children's choices in great depth in the context of the discussion groups, the literature around this area suggests that consumer goods and particularly brands are often used to cover up for feelings of inadequacy such as poverty[30], unemployment[31] or family problems. Indeed, a child who mentioned buying shoes as part of a good day also noted that her parents are separated, and that she receives £10 every time she sees her father.

"I love getting new shoes, I have loads of different ones"

Girl, School 5, Group 10, Age 9

[30]Richard Elliott and Clare Leonard (2004) *Peer pressure and poverty: Exploring fashion brands and consumption symbolism among children of the 'British poor'*, Journal of Consumer Behaviour, Vol 3. No, 4 p347-389

[31]Rucker, D. and GalinskyA, (2008) *Desire to acquire: Powerlessness and compensatory consumption.* Journal of Consumer Research, 35 (2) 257-267

Materialism

A key aim of this research was to explore materialism in children and their families, in order to understand the interplay between materialism, inequality and children's well-being. The impact of the commercial world on children's well-being has been a concern of the last two UK governments with two separate reviews commissioned over the past two years.[32] There has also been a flurry of books in the USA, UK and other parts of Europe voicing concerns about the influence of corporations on the lives of children.[33] Whilst much of this work looks at the effects of media and marketing, our focus was more on the lived experience of children and how materialism affects relationships with family and friends.

In the school groups we asked children what things they would most like to have, and then explored how they expected to receive these things. We asked them to think about which of two imaginary children was happier: the one with lots of toys but little time with their family or the one with fewer toys but lots of family time. Some of the children also enacted a role play between a child who really wants something and a parent who does not want to buy it. Through these exercises we tried to understand how children perceive and use consumer goods in their daily lives. We compared the findings from these discussions with our ethnographic observations of the kind of items children had in reality and how the acquisition of new things was negotiated within the family.

[32]DCSF/DCMS (2009) op. cit.
Bailey R.(2011). *The Bailey Review on the Sexualisation and Commercialisation of Children*. Department of Education.
[33]Linn, S. (2004). *Consuming kids: The hostile takeover of childhood*. New York: New Press.
Schor, J. B. (2004). *Born to buy: The commercialized child and the new consumer culture.* New York: Scribner.
Palmer. S. (2006) *Toxic Childhood.* London: Orion
Desbordes, J-P. (2007) *Mon enfant n'est pas un coeur de cible.* Actes Sud.

The Child's View

Technology – status item or social enabler?

When asked directly about the things that they most wanted, children mentioned a variety of different types of items, some material and some non-material. Children from all backgrounds across the UK and Sweden (although less so in Spain) mentioned technological items and gadgets such as new phones, iPods, laptops and game consoles. Children were very specific about the brands and models that they desired, and these were nearly always the most recent releases which were undoubtedly the most heavily advertised. Some children even said they were hoping to 'join the queue' for the latest phone on the day of its release.

"I want a Blackberry Bold and an iPhone 5, when it's out, I don't know why, I just want them. I'm going to join the queue with my dad when it first comes out"

UK, School 5, Mixed group, Age 9/10

"A Playstation 3 or a Nintendo, the latest ...!"

Spain, School 1, Boys, Age 8/9

This focus on the latest technology was also seen in the children involved in the ethnography in the UK. One girl wanted the latest iPod even though she admitted that she had yet to use up all the space on her current one and another boy shouted out to the researcher that he wanted a Playstation 3 despite the fact that as he spoke he was engaged in a PC game and had previously shown us another games console upstairs. Another girl told us about wanting a new phone:

Girl: "It's a touch screen LG"
Researcher: *What's wrong with it?*
Girl: "It's old. You kind of just want a different one.... and then... after another year I could get a new one"

UK ethnography, Family 7, Girl, Age 13

"I want new consoles because I want to give my old stuff to my sisters and be like 'I got the new stuff, na na na na na'"

UK, School 5, Mixed Group, Age 9/10

"I've got an iPod nano, but I just kinda want something better, with cool apps and stuff, the iPod I have it can only hold up to a limited amount of songs, I haven't reached that limit yet, but still…"

UK ethnography, Family 6, Daughter, Age 13

This obsession with the 'newest' suggests that for many children, technology items are perhaps becoming the latest form of 'status item' which denotes their membership of a social group, or marks them out as special. Technology may, in many cases, also replace other things in children's lives, such as outdoor activities or family time. However, although much literature has been devoted to the negative aspects of consumer technologies on children's well-being[34], when we asked children directly about technology, they suggested that these desirable gadgets also had a functional and positive role to play as a social enabler. For example having a laptop allowed children in boarding school to stay in contact with friends and family in term time, and other children made friends by playing networked computer games together. As we saw in chapter one, these social connections were things that children felt contributed strongly to their well-being.

Equipment – fulfilling desires to be active

Different children involved in the research identified other items which were desirable for their utilitarian or functional benefits, for example, equipment for various sporting and creative pursuits such as musical instruments or football boots. Thus from their point of view consumer goods could not only facilitate relationships but could also enable the kind of active, outdoor lives which children told us were so important for their well-being.

"More sports equipment so I can do active stuff. A sailing boat!"

UK, School 3, Mixed group, Age 12/13

Although in Sweden these desires crossed all social groups (perhaps reflecting the greater prevalence of outdoor and creative activities observed in the ethnographies), in the UK and Spain, the desire for sports and musical equipment was mostly limited to the children from more affluent backgrounds.

[34] Greenfield, S. (2008). *The quest for identity in the 21st century*. London: Sceptre

Clothing

Girls from poorer backgrounds in the UK and Spain discussed clothing as something they really wanted and although branded items were often mentioned, the idea of simply going shopping for shoes and getting nice clothes was quite important to these children even at the ages of 10 or 11 years.

"I like my Uggs, because they're comfy and they're warm and there's loads of Ugg things…they just look nice with me. I love shoes"

UK, School 5, Mixed Group, Age 9/10

As with technology, clothes served a functional purpose to of being nice to wear but also a symbolic one which made them feel they belonged. Thus fashion items could be positive for children's well-being but we were also aware that they could exert a negative influence when they were implicated in social inclusion and exclusion, something we discuss in more detail in the next chapter.

New and different lives

Rather than choose specific consumer items when asked what they would most like, many children expressed a desire for larger things which would denote a radical change in their lives such as winning the lottery, going on nice holidays, having a bigger house or a sibling, or in some cases their parents getting back together.

"First thing is to go on holiday with all of my family together, instead of just one part of them, because the last time I did that I was 7…even if it wasn't somewhere fancy, just to be with them"

UK, School 1, Mixed Group, Age 10/11

I'd love a little brother…it would bring the whole family together"

UK, School 7, Depth, Girl, Age 12

Some of these desires seem to further reinforce what children told us made them feel good, namely relationships rather than consumer goods. Others, however (such as winning the lottery, or having a really big house or a swimming pool) suggest that children are also attracted by the idea that one's whole life can be improved by having more things and money. Interestingly it seemed to be the less affluent children who were more focused on these larger status items in the UK and Sweden whilst in Spain it was the children from more affluent backgrounds who tended to mention expensive holidays and luxury cars, perhaps suggesting that conspicuous consumption is a more socially acceptable phenomenon in Spain than the comparator countries.

"I want to be queen so I can be rich and have lots of jewels!"

UK, School 2, Mixed Group, Age 8/9

"People think you're awesome if you've got a Ferrari!"

UK, School 4, Mixed Group, Age 9/10

"I'd like a mansion!"

Spain, School 1, Boys, Age 8/9

Swedish children seemed more likely than children in the other two countries to talk about winning the lottery, or having specific sums of money when asked what they would most like. It is unclear why this might be the case although it possibly reflects our finding (reported below) that Swedish children tended to be more financially 'savvy' in terms of knowing the value of things than children in the UK appeared to be.

"A good day for me is if I get breakfast in bed and then maybe win 1 million SEK together with my mum and dad and multiply that by 3 so you get 3 million SEK. Then I would just feel happy!

Sweden, School 5, Boy, depth interview, Age 11

"On Cartoon Network they have a competition that's called "Christmas in November" and you can either win that a limo picks you up at home and then you can go to a toy store and get all the toys you want or you can also win something else. I signed up for this competition and after a while I got a package with a 1000 SEK gift card, all the Harry Potter movies, a lot of stickers from Carton Network and a trip to LEGOLAND for four persons."

Sweden, School 4, Girl, Group, Age 9

Waiting is part of the fun of receiving

Although there seems to be a popular conception that children, especially in the UK are becoming more and more greedy and individualistic, the children involved in the discussion groups demonstrated a considerable understanding of the complexities of material culture. Whilst this is not to deny that many of the children engaged in pestering their parents for consumer goods, children of all ages also talked about the importance of appreciating what one had, and waiting to receive things. Indeed, when we asked children how they expected to get the new things they most wanted, most children across all three countries thought they would have to wait for a birthday or Christmas, especially where the items were much larger or more expensive such as, for example, a laptop.

"I usually get new things for my birthday, so when I want something that's when I ask for it"

UK, School 2, Mixed group, Age 9/10

Moreover, children from all social backgrounds felt that the anticipation of receiving something you really wanted was part of the pleasure and so it was better to have to wait for something you had asked for rather than simply being given it straight away. Although this attitude appeared to be much more prevalent in Sweden and Spain, a number of British children also felt this way.

"I saved up for ages and ages to get a Star wars vehicle, and it took quite a bit of a while, and when I got it, I really liked it, but if you get bought it out of the air, and you get given it straight away, there's no cherishment in there – you can't say 'Yes! I got it!"

UK, School 4, Mixed group, Age 9/10

"It's more fun if you have to fight to get the toys you want! It wouldn't be fun to have all the best toys already…"

Sweden, School 4, Boy, Group, Age 9

Spoiled children

Most children were at pains to tell us that not only was it undesirable to get what you wanted straight away it was also undesirable to simply get everything that you wanted. This, they agreed, would make you spoiled – a trait universally derided. Although all children clearly did have desires for consumer goods, spoilt children were seen as unpleasant to be with and unappreciative of what they had. There was also a general view that these spoiled children tended to discriminate against other children who did not have the same things they did. In many groups, children identified particular individuals in their own school who they considered to be spoiled.

Researcher: "Do you think there are any people who have easier lives than others?"
Girl: "Yeah, X, she gets anything she wants. She's got a huge house, she's spoilt, she doesn't care what she says to her mum, she just gets on with anything she wants to do…she thinks all that life's about is money"
Boy: "She's like that girl from Charlie and the Chocolate factory who gets everything she wants! But she gets her comeuppance!

UK, School 4, Mixed group, Age 9/10

"It's not good to get everything that you want from your parents because when you don't any more you'll probably be very angry as you have learned to expect that you get whatever you want!"

Sweden, School 5, Girl, Age 10

To further explore how children understood the balance between having things and other elements of well-being, we presented the children with a scenario in which there are two children. The first child has fewer things, but sees his parents a lot and does a number of sporting activities. The second child does not see his parents much but has lots of material things (see the discussion guide in the Appendices for the wording of the scenario). Across all countries, most of the children thought that the first child was happier. This was in part because time with parents and access to outdoor, sporting and creative activities are so important for children but in part because of the perception that the second child must be in some way spoiled, and unappreciative of the things that he has. It was interesting that the children projected ideas onto these children which were not contained in the scenarios.

"[Boy 2] has everything but appreciates nothing"

Spain, School 6, Girls, Age 10/11

"I think [Boy 1] is happier because he gets to see his dad and doesn't get spoilt he has to actually earn his things."

UK, School 4, Mixed group, 9/10

"I think [Boy 1] is happiest as he gets to spend time with his family and that's more important than having all the latest stuff"

Sweden, School 2, Boy, Group, Age 11

What emerged from listening to these children was, rather surprisingly, an approach to consumer culture which seemed, at least on the surface, rather sanguine. There were clearly things that children would like and whilst some of this desire was for the symbolic status which certain possessions could confer, many objects were desired for their social, functional and utilitarian benefits. Beyond this, however, there was also a clear appreciation not only that it was undesirable to get everything you wanted but that family, friends and an active life were much more important than material possessions.

What We Observed

Perhaps one of the most striking findings of the research was that whilst children by and large would prefer time with their parents to heaps of consumer goods and had a rather balanced approach to consumer culture, UK parents seem to find themselves under tremendous pressure to purchase a surfeit of material goods for their children. This compulsive consumption was almost completely absent in both Spain and Sweden.

Boxes and boxes of toys

During the ethnographies we were immediately struck by the volume of toys children in the UK appeared to have. Our ethnographers observed boxes and boxes of toys, many of which were broken, and children appearing to 'rediscover' toys which they had even forgotten that they owned. Parents spoke of having to have 'clear-outs' of children's toys in order to make room for new things, and not being able to control what other family members and friends

gave to their children. This suggests somewhat of a disconnect between what children say they need (family time and creative, outdoor and sporting activities) and what parents give to them (consumer goods).

"It's like, X, when we're having a clear out, she'll suddenly find something and remember it, and it's just like it's just been bought"

UK, ethnography, Family 5, Mother

"They have so much, I'm constantly getting rid of stuff because they're being given stuff, because things are so cheap, they're just given stuff constantly"

UK, ethnography, Family 3, Mother

UK parents almost seemed to be locked into a system of consumption which they knew was pointless but they found hard to resist, and found themselves 'sucked in'. One mother in the UK ethnographies felt that she had bucked the trend because as she told us, "I don't buy something for the girls *every* time I go out". This is a telling statement which implies that she sees the norm in UK culture as making purchases each time you leave the house. This implicit cultural assumption was also evident in conversations with children in schools. One child considered that he was not spoilt simply because he did not always get what he wanted every day, again implying that this is the case for some children.

"I'm not spoilt or nothing, but I do have quite a lot [he'd just got a new laptop to replace the laptop he got for Christmas which broke on Christmas day], but I'm not really spoilt because I don't really get everything, every day"

UK, School 4, Mixed group, Age 9/10

As we met families across the UK we observed how this cultural norm manifested itself in everyday family life. One mother from a less affluent background in the UK explained to us as we stood in her recently decorated hallway how she *had to* replace her bed and her bedroom furniture this year and that she changed the carpets and decorated her house every year.

Whilst the focus of this research was not on the role of advertising, parents spontaneously mentioned this as a source of commercial pressure. One parent, when discussing buying shoes for her daughter, complained that "they've ruined us mothers" by advertising very particular brands (in this case Clarks shoes with dolls in the heels) to children and fuelling their desire for new things.

"When she goes to buy shoes, they have to be Daisy shoes or nothing"
UK, ethnography, Family 1, Mother

Other parents talked of their struggle to keep consumer influences away from their children, such as Argos catalogues, or only allowing their children to watch CBeebies because it did not have toy adverts between programmes.

Faced with this pressure, parents in the UK expressed concern about how to decide at what age you should buy new technology items such as games consoles for very young children. One mother of a three year old boy expressed her turmoil; she didn't want to buy a Nintendo DS for her three year old son, but she was worried that he would be stigmatised by his friends if he didn't have one.

"Do I get him a DS or do I not? What do I do?"
UK, ethnography, Family 8, Mother

Parents and children alike knew that this sort of vicious cycle of consumption would not bring the happiness they intend but somehow they were compelled to continue:

"Like the Wii....all their wee[35] pals had it and so I bought it and then they don't look at it. It sits there. It's like an ornament. It's all they need it, they need it, they need it. It's like a novelty for a wee while and then they're not interested."
UK ethnography, Family 8, Mother

"Parents might be happy because they're making their children happy, but they (parents) are not really happy themselves because they think 'what's the point if they're not going to use it in a month?'"
UK, School 4, Mixed group, Age 10/11

This compulsion to consume against parents' better judgement was encapsulated by a visit to one household where a mother told us that she had to limit what she bought her children because she was on a low income.

[35] A word used in Scotland and Northern Ireland to mean "small"

"I say to them, 'their mum and dad's working so they can afford to do that. I'm not and I'm here myself and so what I can give you is what I can give you. I can't give you what I've not got.'"

UK, ethnography, Family 8, Mother

Yet almost in the next breath she confided that she did, in fact buy her children more than she could afford taking out loans, and using catalogues[36], to pay for her children's Christmas presents.

"For helping me with Christmas I had to get money, a loan to help with that, and obviously you're using catalogues as well"

UK, ethnography, Family 8, Mother

We can surmise from the words of the mother above that part of the drive to consume comes from social comparison ("their mum and dad's working") and this is something that will be addressed in the next chapter.

Compulsive Consumption – a UK phenomenon?

This level of overconsumption or compulsive consumption was much less in evidence in Sweden and Spain, regardless of the affluence of the families involved.

In the Spanish ethnographies children had many fewer toys and those they had were treasured – often for their educational value. It was very noticeable that Spanish children were much more likely than those in the comparator countries to show the researchers books, puzzles and other educational toys when asked to talk about their favourite things. These items seemed to be cherished and well looked after with many stored in special boxes to keep them 'nice'. This was also the case for some Swedish children, but notably different from the boxes of broken and discarded toys belonging to the British children who took part in the ethnographies. The culture of looking after possessions was clearly nurtured by Spanish mothers who actively admonished their children for not putting toys away properly.

[36]A reference to shopping via catalogue – some retailers produce these and allow subscribers to start a credit account, paying in instalments after items are delivered.

In Sweden, children also had fewer possessions and told us that in most cases their parents would attempt to repair broken items before being bought a replacement, something that was never mentioned by children in the UK. In fact parents in the UK ethnographies admitted to buying new phones for their children numerous times in a year, because they had been lost, or damaged

"In the last two years, she's gone through about ten brand new phones. I think it's ludicrous. She's broken some of them, she's dropped one in the toilet (laughs)"

UK, ethnography, Family 6, father

"[When your jacket gets ripped] my mother tries to repair it and you can also ask your grandmother"

Sweden, School 6, Girl, Group, Age 12

In contrast to the UK, the Swedish parents we talked to actively denied buying things as an end in itself. Indeed this was borne out by observing family life.

"Just buying things for buying's sake? I don't do that. Of course I buy Christmas and birthday presents, but I don't go into town in the middle of the week just to buy some toy, just because they want it. I would rather go to Stadium and buy some football shoes, something that I think they will need"

Sweden, ethnography, Family 6, Father

Whilst Swedish parents did admit to buying branded goods for their children, this was generally due to a perception of higher quality and durability of these items (especially, for example in winter and outdoor clothing) rather than their 'status value'. Other Swedish parents noted that they were happy to buy second hand things, which was not something we heard about from parents or children in the UK, apart from one mother who chose to buy from charity shops as a lifestyle choice relating to reducing environmental pressures by overconsumption.

"We have always bought expensive outdoor clothes, because they need to use it to have fun outside, and there are some brands that you get cold and wet. If you get wet there are certain brands that if you hang them up it dries by itself, but other brands it's still wet the next day. Sometimes I buy branded things as it's connected with quality and I don't care about that [the brand] but I'd rather buy things that are good"

Sweden, ethnography, Family 3, Mother

"Most things I buy are second hand, if I can get it whole and clean then I will buy it second hand, because you save a lot on it"

Sweden, ethnography, Family 4, Mother

Building Resilience to Consumer Culture

We clearly saw that in Spain and Sweden the pressure to consume was much less integral to every-day life and family culture. Perhaps as a result of this, or perhaps because they seemed to have more time for their families, parents in those countries also seemed to have more energy and resources to resist consumer culture themselves and to help build that resilience in their children. We know from other studies[37] that a great many parents in the UK work hard to establish firm boundaries and rules for their children but it was abundantly clear from our comparative analysis of the ethnographies that this was a harder job for them than for their Spanish and Swedish counterparts. Moreover it was particularly noticeable that when we asked the UK children in the discussion groups to play the part of a parent standing up to a pestering child they were at a bit of a loss to know what to say which may imply that they do not have consistent role models at home.

Restricting and Moderating Commercial Influences

Whilst UK parents voiced worries about children spending time on social networking websites or playing networked computer games, when they should have been focusing on homework, they seemed to have given in to pressure to buy their children computers and consoles, and were at a loss as to how to control their children's screen time. In contrast, in both Spain and Sweden, families had clear rules about the amount of screen time they were allowed, or passwords on computers to control access. In a number of cases Swedish and Spanish parents actively intervened to ensure children were doing activities other than playing on the computer. One Spanish mother had a special switch installed so that she could disable the TV aerial and pretend to the children that it was broken!

"We've got the Playstation in here, the Wii's in the other room, there's the Xbox upstairs, I can't be arsed[38], I just leave them alone…it'll be a PS3 next"

UK ethnography, Family 6, Father

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[37] Care for the Family (2007): *Pester Power: Families Surviving Consumer Society*

[38] Slang word, similar to 'bothered'

Researcher: "Does he stay in his room all evening?"
Mother: "No, I forbid it, because I know the Playstation lures him"

Spain, ethnography, Family 8

"When we were little, there weren't too many options, so you were forced to be creative when playing...sometimes I think, if our children had the choice, they would spend the whole day going from the TV to the computer, to the Nintendo and do nothing else all day. That I don't think is a good thing".

Sweden, ethnography, Family 3, mother

Spanish parents in the ethnographies also talked about actively restricting the amount of toy catalogues that their children could look at, encouraging them instead to think realistically about what they wanted and needed when it came to Christmas and birthday presents. They used encounters with print adverts to teach their children the value of moderation, and what was affordable and what wasn't.

"She starts looking through the magazines, and says, Mum I want this one, buy me this one, and I say, I don't have the money, you'll have to write to Santa Claus. And so she writes to Santa, and if she has 5 things on her list, she just gets 2 or 3, and that's it. And I say, well Santa forgot about the rest, because there are many children and he can't give to them all".

Spain, ethnography, Family 6 Mother

In Sweden many parents made a point of restricting the amount of time they spent in toy shops, and the amount of things they gave their children, explaining to us that it was better to save for their children's futures and develop a culture of saving and moderation during childhood.

"I don't think it's a good idea to give them lots of things when they are so small. It's better to buy them things when they are older. Or for their education. We save for them as well".

Sweden, ethnography, Family 5, Mother

Earning the things you want: Spain and Sweden

Although children in the UK did have a sense of children being spoiled if they got everything they wanted, many did not really have a sense that the money for consumer goods had to be earned. Some children in the ethnographies did, however, talk about having to be 'good' in order to be bought the things that they wanted but this seemed to be more of a bribe, or reward for good behaviour.

“If I'm good, they'll buy me the stuff I want, if I'm not good they won't”

UK ethnography, Family 6, daughter

In contrast it seemed to be widely expected by Spanish children in the discussion groups and ethnographies that in order to receive something they desired they would always have to do something to 'deserve' it, such as doing well on a test. Spanish children also clearly understood, and were able to explain to our ethnographers what their parents could, and couldn’t afford to buy. They often said that they tried not to ask for things, as they knew their parents might not be able to afford them.

"Some kids, when they see a toy, they ask their mother for it. And if their mother doesn't get it, they get upset. And they don't value what they have. When I do ask her for something, she says "I'll get it when I can", and sometimes she says "by the end of the month", which is when she receives her pay check. And then she buys it for me"

Spain, ethnography, Family 2, son

The Swedish families appeared to handle providing their children with new things somewhat differently; children explained that their parents made a distinction between want and need. Where children *needed* something new, for example because they had outgrown their ice skates, these would be bought by parents. However, if it was more a case of wanting something, such as a new toy or computer game, many children said that they would have to earn this item through doing chores, or save up their pocket money to buy it for themselves.

“I always want new music stuff and therefore I can do anything for money! I could do anything from helping out in the garden to painting the house. This summer I’m going to help out as much as possible to earn a lot of money so that I can buy a new amplifier! “

Sweden, School 7, Boy, Depth, Age 13

"I wanted to have a specific toy and to get it I had to lay out my own clothes for the morning, I had to make my own breakfast as well as giving my mother breakfast in bed… I wasn't allowed to complain and had to do this for a whole month and then I would get the toy!"

Sweden, School 4, Boy, Group, Age 10

"If she wants something really expensive, I tell her that she has to save for it. And that I can contribute as well"

Sweden, ethnography, Family 2, Mother

These findings suggest that the Swedish children we talked to learned to be much more aware of the financial value of the things that they want, and the process of saving and earning money in order to buy what they want than children in the UK. We even found Swedish children who were familiar with the notion of debt and credit, and the problems that this could cause for people when badly handled.

"If you get everything you want than later when you grow up and move away from home to your own apartment… it's like Lyxfällan (Swedish show about people that live way beyond their means), some people are so used to getting what they want so they borrow money without paying it back just to be able to buy what they want. They don't have good finances but still buy a lot of things just because they are used to that!"

Sweden, School 6, Girl, Group, Age 12

Handling pocket money

Apart from general discussions with parents about family finances, handling pocket money was another way in which children learned the real value of consumer goods. Although some of the children in the UK received pocket money, those who saved their money to buy things they really wanted were rare. According to the ChildWise Monitor, regular pocket money in the UK has declined over recent years to be replaced by ad hoc handouts. This is something we witnessed in the ethnographies; pocket money emerged as something rather haphazard in many families, with children receiving sums of money from adults at various times such as a relative visiting or when there is lots of change in the household, rather than on a more regular and agreed basis. Some children received pocket money as a result of doing chores, but these tended to be children from the more affluent families and some older children.

“They get their wee pounds if they help out”

UK ethnography, Family 8, Mother

“I don't do a regular, oh, here's your pocket money, just like, when we have big loads of change, she pops it in her money bank”

UK ethnography, Family 1, mother

Researcher: “Do you do pocket money”
Mother: “No, not really, because generally they get the things they want, they need, so I don't see the point, because they'd just spend it on sweets anyway”

UK, ethnography, Family 8

In Sweden we observed a very clear structure around pocket money, which was often associated with chores that are done around the house and garden. Just as doing chores was framed as a way of learning to be independent in preparation for adult life, pocket money in Sweden appeared to be positioned very deliberately as a way of learning to save and earn as children will have to do when they become adults.

“We’ve been talking about that lately [with her 3 year old], about a weekly allowance, that way she gets a feel for money, the idea that if she saves for a few weeks, she can buy a Barbie or something like that”

Sweden, ethnography, Family 1, Mother

“I could give them 20 or 30 SEK every time they ask for it, but I think it's important to teach them that you don't get money for nothing! We make them fill this [chart of chores] in so that they realise they must have done something to deserve it”

Sweden, ethnography, Family 6, father

In line with our finding that the role of the child in the Spanish household was to learn, pocket money was very rarely mentioned in the school discussions or observed in the ethnographies.

Our research on materialism has shown that consumer goods play multi-faceted roles in children's lives, some positive and some negative and that children in general have a balanced approach to the commercial world. However, we saw an enormous difference in how consumer culture is embedded in UK culture in comparison to either Spain or Sweden with the result that UK parents find themselves under great pressure to consume – often in spite of themselves. Spanish and Swedish parents, in their different ways, used the family time they were able to carve out in everyday life to help their children navigate the commercial world.

Inequality

Even before the recession, inequality had reached the highest levels in the UK since records began in 1961.[39] In UNICEF Report Card 7 UK was 18th out of 21 for material well-being (including having one of the largest gaps between rich and poor) and 20th for subjective well-being (how children themselves feel). Sweden on the other hand was ranked 1st for material well-being and came 7th for subjective well-being. Spain came only 12th for material well-being, yet had the second highest ratings for subjective well-being. We hoped that our research would shed some light on these statistics.

Key questions that we thus addressed were how inequality was understood and experienced by children in the three countries, and how inequality related to well-being and materialism. We approached these questions in two ways. Firstly, we asked children directly how they perceived differences between peers in order to understand how inequality manifests itself amongst different sets of children. Secondly, we listened to children and observed the lives of families from very different social backgrounds and tried to understand the differences we encountered. We specifically met with four groups of people; affluent children living surrounded by other affluent people; affluent children living in areas of mixed affluence; poorer children living in areas of mixed affluence; and poorer children living surrounded by others in similar circumstances, because we wanted to explore the role of social comparison in the dynamics of well-being and materialism.

The Child's View

We asked children in schools to imagine that a new pupil had joined their class and they had to point out the different groups in their school and say whether any of these groups were happier than others.

The age of the children played a major part in how they approached this task with the primary school children (aged 8 to 11 years) in all countries tending to define groups of children in terms of their gender, the activities they liked to do (such as the 'football boys' and 'those who play Call of Duty[40]') or their personalities (e.g. how nice/sociable they were).

[39] Brewer et al. (2009) op.cit.
[40] A popular computer game. For more information see http://www.callofduty.com/

Some groups found this task very hard, particularly the younger Swedish children in small schools who simply said that everyone played together.

"[If I had to explain it to a new pupil] I'd say, this group like football, this group like playing tennis, this group just sit around and talk"

UK, School 5, Mixed group, Age 9/10

"There's the bad group, there's the funny group, there's the crazy group, and then just, the normal people"

UK, School 7, Mixed group, Age 11/12

"All the boys are friends. Girls with girls, boys with boys"

UK, School 2, Mixed group, Age 8/9

When asked directly about differences between rich people and poor people, younger children tended only to see and understand the extremes with "poor" understood in terms of being 'on the street', or children in Africa with no access to proper housing and clean water and 'rich' as those with a 'rock star lifestyle'. Income differences were rarely perceived amongst children they themselves knew, indicating that for younger children inequality was not something they associated with their own everyday lives.

"I feel sorry for the children and the babies in other countries, in Africa and that....it's just not fair"

UK, School 5, Mixed group, Age 9-10

"Normally you find people like that in like Oxford Street or Queensway, they pick just like any random blanket and sleep there, and they have like a cup and everything"

UK, School 5, Mixed group, Age 9-10

The notable exception was a group of 8-9 year old Spanish boys from a private school in an extremely affluent area who immediately classified children into rich and poor and were very disparaging about the poor who they further marked out as wearing inferior clothes. In the scenario exercise all of these boys, unlike most other children in the research, thought that the boy with lots of toys and little family time was happier because he could spend all day playing and having fun and he has the latest things. They also projected other attributes such as popularity onto this boy.

"He's rich… and is more popular at school… all he needs is to win the lottery"
Spain, School 1, Boys, Age 8-9

They thought that the other boy was unhappy because he was poor which meant he had no money to buy things. They also conjectured that he wore old clothes and fake brands ("Nipe" instead of "Nike") that his house was dirty, his furniture old and that his parents didn't have a car. Moreover they made the judgement that his parents needed to work harder to earn more money.

This kind of association between wealth, brands and popularity was much more common (although not as starkly expressed) amongst secondary school children in the UK and Spain (countries with dramatically greater income inequality than Sweden) and we witnessed this in both the ethnography and the in-school discussion groups. It was also very notable that the secondary school groups which were most animated, vocal and often bitter about these differences were those in the mixed affluence areas regardless of whether they themselves were richer or poorer. This reinforces previous work which suggests that when children rub shoulders with peers from different socio-economic backgrounds, social comparison impinges to a much greater extent on their everyday experiences.[41] Even in Sweden which had the smallest gap between rich and poor in the UNICEF study, living in a mixed affluence area brought problems such as bullying around the issue of mobile phones. This discussion was reminiscent of another UK study where poorer children were bullied for having the 'wrong' trainers.[42]

"The different gangs don't have any specific stuff or gadgets but sometimes I have seen examples of pupils that bullied other pupils just because they don't have their own mobile phone…"
Sweden, School 5, Boy, Age 9-10

[41]Nairn et al. (2007) op. cit.
[42]Elliott and Leonard (2004) op. cit.

'Chavs' and 'embusteros'[43]

Not only did older Spanish and UK children distinguish rich and poor on the basis of the brands they possessed but they often had specific (derogatory) terms to denote membership of a social class and had a strong common understanding of a 'typical' person from a particular class. UK children said they could tell if someone was poor (often talked about as 'on benefits'[44]), by what they looked like, what clothes they wore or what car their parents drove. There was also evidence of some interesting links children made between poverty and other social behaviours. The term 'chav'[45] in the UK was often linked to children who were naughty, or inappropriate in some way. There was also some sense from some older teenagers in the ethnography that people 'advertised' their poorer status (being on benefits) and almost made a social statement about this in school. In Spain, on the other hand there was an association between poor children and deceit with less affluent children often called 'embusteros' or 'liars'. Alternative terms which emerged in the Spanish steering group were 'chulitos' or 'malotes' (bad guys), meaning those who are rebellious and aggressive as well as having less money.

"There are some kids, they act all chavvy, they always mess around"

UK, School 5, Age 9-10

"Some people in our school are on benefits, and you can tell, it's not like a hidden thing, and they always say it's depressing that they can't have more than they have, but in our family, what is said in the house stays in the house, there's no need to share all your business"

UK, ethnography, Family 7, Daughter

A number of children also recognised social exclusion happening in their schools in the form of the rich bullying the poor who in turn often had to try to hide their lack of social status to protect themselves. This accords entirely with previous qualitative work with deprived UK children which showed income related bullying and social exclusion caused great anxiety.[46]

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[43]Spanish term meaning 'liars'

[44]Colloquial term used to denote those who are in receipt of social security monies from the state as a result of unemployment or incapacity to work.

[45]A chav is a stereotype of certain people in the United Kingdom. "Chavs" are said to be aggressive teenagers, of working class background, who repeatedly engage in anti-social behaviour such as street drinking, drug abuse and rowdiness, or other forms of juvenile delinquency.

[46]Ridge. T. (2002), *Childhood Poverty and Social Exclusion: From a Child's Perspective*, Bristol, The Policy Press.

Even some of the Swedish children from poorer backgrounds mentioned the idea that rich children bully poorer children when discussing the scenario exercise.

"[The poor children] don't get a lot of the things others have, the rich kids pick on them..... If you're rich, you don't hang around with the kids who are poor"

UK, School 7, Mixed group, Age 11/12

"If I was poor I wouldn't want to tell anyone in case they didn't want to hang around with me, and so other kids didn't pick on me"

UK, School 5, Mixed Group, Age 8/9

"I think that Tom is the happiest because Sam might get bullied by Tom because he is poor while Tom is wealthy!"

Sweden, School 2, Boy, Group, Age 9

Posh and 'pijos'

Again in Spain and the UK there was a particular term for the rich that was strongly associated with appearance and ownership of particular brands. 'Pijo' in Spanish has a very similar meaning amongst young people as 'posh' in UK, and was defined by children in the Spanish steering group as those who like to wear very specific brands, speak a certain way, and, above all feel superior to others. The Swedish also had a sense of the existence of this group although interestingly there was not a generally accepted term for it in Swedish. One group instead told us about the "Chloe gang" named after the favourite brand of this particular set of teenagers. The 'posh' groups of children were recognised in school as different from other children by their clothing (the brands that they wear) as well as the possessions that they owned especially newer models of mobile phone; or portable music players. As with the 'chavs' and 'embusteros', being 'posh', 'pijo' or a member of the 'Chloe gang' was associated with particular behaviours. One UK girl in the ethnography told us that posh people (synonymous with 'snobby' people) also walked and talked in a particular way (which she demonstrated to us). We discovered that teachers wanted her older sister to apply for the grammar school but she did not let her parents know. She told us that she didn't want to go because she didn't want to be with the 'posh' people who "*think they're better*".

"They care about how they smell, they care about how they look, they care about what they wear. Yeah, they're all posh really"

UK, School 5, Age 9-10

"The Chloe gang likes expensive things… they think that they are the best! They say – I'm the best, I'm better than you and you and I have expensive things!…. They have real Uggs!"

Sweden, School 3, Girl, Mixed group, Age 12

In these discussions it was notable that none of the children claimed to belong either to the 'chavvy' group or the 'posh' group. However, whilst no one wanted to belong to the poor group attitudes to the posh group were very ambivalent. Posh children were often negatively associated with the 'spoiled' children who were so universally derided and were criticised for being arrogant, selfish and show-offs. For example, the girl who told us she needed a new iPod despite hers not having reached capacity clearly was very derogatory about the 'posh' despite showing some of the same attitudes. Other children distanced themselves from boastful rich children who they felt might turn on them at any moment.

"They are always not happy with the things that they have, they always want more than the things that they get, but they don't understand that other people can't buy everything they want….It's like the posh brands, they are just their regular clothes, they've just been brought up like that"

UK, ethnography, Family 6, Daughter

"Some of the kids are…..check this out, this thing cost this much and this thing cost this much"

Sweden, ethnography, Family 2, Child, Age 12

"Sometimes they show off, they can be really nice, but sometimes really mean, they switch on you – spreading stuff about you that's not true"

UK, School 7, Mixed group, Age 11/12

Yet at the same time across the countries "posh" was often synonymous with "cool" which was usually a positive attribute. Some children we spoke to felt a desire to be included in these groups, and they felt that the way to gain access to these groups was through having some of the things that the 'popular' children had. For example, a number of children in the UK (from both richer and poorer backgrounds) expressed the desire to be able to 'keep up' with the latest types of phones, laptops and games equipment, so that they could take part in the activities other, better off children were involved in – such as having a Blackberry to be able to message other children, or having a laptop capable of being linked into a network of

games players. This is clearly a highly contested and complex area for young people where their attitudes and behaviours can be contradictory.

"The cool group get quite an easy life, as people in the cool group are mostly quite bright. And I think they get quite an easy life at home too because most of them have got designer clothes and got nice houses ....and their parents have good jobs. They are posh basically"

UK, School 4, Mixed group, Age 10/11

Yet, although children did acknowledge desires to have many of the things richer children had, most children did not feel that they were any less happy than the 'group who had everything'. In fact many felt that those children who were 'posh' or seemed to care most about designer gear and the latest technologies were unlikely to be happy as they were not nice to be around, often fought with each other or bullied other children, or indeed may have other problems in their lives.

"X gets everything she wants, she's got an iPad. But she's has a hard time at home...one time she was up until one in the morning because they were arguing"

UK, School 1, Girls, Age 10/11

"I think their lives are probably worse than ours because they're lonely, in their mansions.....and because they don't have any brothers or sisters"

UK, School 5, Mixed group, Age 9/10

Brands and friendship

Other commentators have noted that friendship is crucial in building secure identities for children[47] and that 'fitting in' and 'joining in' are pivotal parts of forming friendships and social bonds.[48] The role of branded clothes in facilitating or hindering fitting in is well documented.[49] Our research suggests that branded technology such as iPhones and commercial computer games have now also assumed this role. Given the price of a laptop in comparison to a pair of trainers the potential for social exclusion becomes even greater for children on a low income.

Whilst many children in all three countries were adamant that they and their friends didn't discriminate based on the clothes that people wear, or the things that they have, children from poorer backgrounds in UK and Sweden did tell us that 'others' in their schools and peer group did worry about these things and it was quite clear that inequality was inextricably linked to brands and was therefore very much part of the social landscape of these teenagers. Children in the UK steering group confirmed that technology was used as a symbol of fitting in for at least some children that they knew, even though they were adamant that their 'real friends' didn't judge them based on their technology.

"No matter how much money they have, people still manage to put up a front of like they have money – the way to prove it is like, say they have an iPod, even if they save their money for years [to buy it], and then instantly, they'll be accepted into whatever social circle there is….You could live in a dustbin, and as long as you have an iPod, a Blackberry, then you're accepted. Okay it's a bit of an exaggeration but you know what I mean"

UK, steering group, Boy, Age 14

It was striking, nonetheless, that although some groups of Spanish children were acutely aware of divisions between the rich and the poor, branded goods seemed to be less important to the poorer children and did not seem to be used to hide feelings of inadequacy in the same way as they did in the UK and (to an extent) amongst poorer children in Sweden. It is possible that the strongly nurturing environment of the Spanish extended family may play a part in protecting their children from the pressure to buy in order to communicate status.

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[47]Morrow, V. (2001). *Networks and Neighbourhoods: Children's and Young People's Perspectives.* National Institute for Clinical Excellence: London.
[48]R Ridge (2002) op. cit.
[49] Isaksen, K. and Roper, S. (2011). *The Commodification of Self-Esteem: Branding and British Teenagers*, Psychology and Marketing (forthcoming)

Other markers of difference

Amongst the children we spoke to in the UK, race did not appear to be a marker of difference that was given importance, even in the most ethnically diverse schools. Children explicitly rejected this idea when asked directly about cultural differences, although they did find it uncomfortable when children from different backgrounds used their mother tongue amongst each other to the exclusion of others, or couldn't understand the signs in a Chinese shop, for example and a few mentioned teasing around religious beliefs such as Muslim children not eating pork. Race was not mentioned at all in the groups which took place in Sweden although in Spain some children felt that some ethnic groups (such as the 'gypsies') were not as willing to integrate into 'mainstream' Spanish society as they should be.

What we observed

Whilst branded goods had at least some role to play in making distinctions between rich and poor amongst the children in all countries it was striking that amongst parents this was only the case in the UK. In particular, poorer parents in the UK talked openly about ensuring that their children had the 'right' clothes or toys/equipment. They often linked this to personal experience of being bullied during their own childhood, for example, for wearing the wrong trainers at school, and not wishing their own children to experience the same thing. They also told us that they deliberately bought items of clothing for their children that looked more expensive that their price tags.

"Obviously I try to give them what I can, and you don't want them to be left out. When I went to school it was like your trainers – it had to be a certain make of trainers. If you had these cheap ones on that was it - you were getting slagged[50] for your trainers. And that kind of stuck and I always thought never want my kids to be slagged for their trainers"

UK ethnography, Family 8, Mother

"X has a nice, pink and black checked coat…it's from Tesco, it's a Cherokee one, but it's actually really nice to look at, that's why I bought it, because it doesn't look cheap, I bought it for that reason, because it looks nice, it looks expensive"

UK ethnography, Family 2, Mother

[50]Colloquial term often used in Scotland to denote being bullied or laughed at, talked about in a negative way.

Even the more affluent parents appeared to be affected by this need to buy to show status – often talking about buying things for their children because they didn't have those things when they were children.

"I see something, and I think, she'd look lovely in that, but it's actually me thinking, wow that's beautiful, and maybe I wouldn't have had that when I was a kid"

UK, ethnography, family 1, Mother

This same mother was also at pains to let the ethnographers know that other parents considered her better off than them.

"Just talking with parents of children in her school, quite often when they come to my house, it's a bit embarrassing, because they're like, wow you've got a beautiful house....yeah ok, I own my house, but I'm no different to you"

UK ethnography, Family 1, Mother

Whilst they had their own sense of principles about the types of toys they wished their children to play with, other parents in the UK were also concerned that their children would be 'socially handicapped' and not able to engage with other children if, for example, they did not know how to play on a games console.

"The boy across the road, he's got a Wii, and another mother said that her boy, X, they couldn't really play together on it, because he doesn't really know how to relate to that. If you've got a lot of technology, it pushes children in different directions in terms of how they like to play"

UK ethnography, Family 3, Mother

Spanish and Swedish parents: not part of the 'consumer generation'?

UK parents' use of consumer goods to protect from bullying and to show status reflected the conversations of the children we met. However, this discourse was almost entirely absent amongst the adults we talked to in Spain and Sweden. Just as consumer pressure seemed less, so too the symbolic use of branded goods was much less in evidence, particularly in poorer homes where the desire to use brands to cover up social exclusion was simply not there. Parents, of course, perceived social differences between their family and others but this was rarely related to income or possessions.

In Sweden when less affluent parents talked with us about the lives of the 'more deprived' they talked about areas which were less desirable to live in because of threats to security such as fear of crime, children being followed, 'flashers' lurking in playgrounds, or teenagers burning down sheds. They were concerned primarily about how this affected their children's ability to go out and play unsupervised as opposed to any sort of social comparison.

"It's good that there are no cars on the street, and there's a playground on each yard, in the summer you just open the door and they run all day…everyone knows each other. The downside is there have been four burglaries in six months, and they have burned down the garbage sheds"

Sweden, ethnography, Family 6, Father

Deprivation for the Spanish mothers we met was understood as not being able to spend time with your children. The single mothers we met who were working regretted most of all that they had less time with their families and those who were housewives felt sorry for mothers who worked long hours and saw little of their children or those who did not have easy access to places to take their children.

"Before, when I was a housewife I didn't have anything else to do. But now I am everything. I'm the one that goes out to work, I'm everything. So I feel sad because I don't have as much time (pointing to her son)."

Spain, ethnography, Family 8, Mother

"I have a friend and she was telling me the other day that she can go for days without seeing her one year old daughter because she gets up before her daughter and comes back after she is asleep. She hardly sees her, she hardly sees her (shaking her head)."

Spain, ethnography, Family 3, Mother

One mother explicitly rejected the use of consumer goods in parenting and became quite angry about mothers who worry more about their ability to buy the latest toys than family issues.

"Those who can, buy their children lots of toys, and those who can't say it's so sad, my child can't have this toy. I say, sad? You feel sad when your child is sick, or doesn't have a father, or a mother but you are saying you can't buy a 100 euro toy and you feel sad for your child?!"

Spain, ethnography, Family 4, Mother

It was also striking that even the poorest families appeared relatively contented with what they had, and looked at the positive sides of their own houses and local areas, rather than comparing theirs to that of others better off than themselves. This attitude seemed to have been passed on to their children. We also noticed that for adolescents in Spain the symbolism of branded clothes and gadgets did not appear particularly important. Rather, the children appeared to understand and accept that in some cases their families could not afford to buy them the things that they wanted or that other children owned.

It was clear that Spanish children discussed with their parents issues such as family finances and the balance between spending time with people and having material things. Children were usually grateful for what they had. Spanish child steering group members recognised the hard work that their parents put in, especially in a time of economic downturn, and explained that their parents often reminded them of the value of the things they had.

"I try to tell them that they can't have everything, that mum and dad have problems, that there is an economic crisis, and that there are children who have more, but that we have what we have"

Spain, ethnography, Family 5, Mother

“This [Gameboy] cost about 300 euro or something…My mother [bought me this] for Christmas, she works hard to buy us these things, so I am grateful.”

Spain, ethnography, Family 2, Son

“When my Dad sees clothes in a pile on my bedroom floor he always says ‘do you know how hard I had to work to buy those for you?’”

Spain, Steering group, Girl

Whilst poorer children did talk about other children having branded clothes, or shoes, they did not appear to feel burdened by the fact that they did not have the same things. The more affluent families were also conscious of not encouraging children to value status labels: they could afford them but it was a matter of principle.

Researcher: What about brands?
“Oh no, I don't care about that. As long as it's something nice, I don't care about brands. Some people, when like a brand, they only wear that brand, but there's lots of other children like me, it's all the same to us”

Spain, ethnography, Family 8, Son

“We don't buy brands at home, and X because of his age is saying things like, I don't want this shirt because it's not branded. I tell him he has to wear it [unbranded clothing] and he does….it's about principles. It's the same for me if it's Adidas or La Campo [supermarket chain], because in a month it all wears out the same”

Spain, ethnography, Family 2, Mother

We also observed not only that Spanish parents tried to protect their children from the often divisive role which branded goods can play but that children also felt protective towards their parents and the rest of the family.

“I’d feel guilty because my mum has spent a lot of money on something that’s just for me. Maybe that money would be better spent on clothes and food for the whole family”

Spain, School 6, Girls, 10/11 years

Inequality and Activities

We noted earlier that an active life was very important for the children we met. Inequality had its part to play here too. We noticed both from discussions with children and the ethnographies that the UK children from more affluent backgrounds in our research had more access to creative and active pursuits such as music lessons, playing team sports, or being taken to dance classes after school. In contrast, the less affluent children appeared to have more sedentary pursuits such as watching television or playing on the computer. This reflects a recent survey which showed that twice as many children in deprived areas watch television after school than in affluent areas and almost five times as many poor children watch television on a Sunday afternoon.[51]

Ten years ago Ridge[52] noted that leisure time had become commodified, a finding supported by Mizen and colleagues[53], and a recent DCMS/DCSF report, both of which showed that sites of affordable activities for children in many areas have been replaced by commercial ventures.[54] Given the strong emphasis placed by children on 'getting out and about' and doing creative activities when asked about what makes them happy – it seems that a lack of access to affordable activities amongst poorer children may deprive them of an essential constituent of subjective well-being.

Other research has made links between the amount of time watching (commercialised) television and materialism[55] and it is perhaps no coincidence that children from less well-off backgrounds were more likely than their more affluent counterparts to mention material things (such as being bought a present, or going shopping for shoes) when asked what makes a good day, or makes them happiest.

Affluence, competition and stress

In contrast, more affluent children, who attended 'high-achieving' schools, focused more on performing well in their extracurricular activities, achieving good grades, and being recognised for their achievements. Sometimes, however, too many extra-curricular activities seemed to have negative impacts on well-being. In both the ethnographic work and the

[51] Nairn,et.al. (2007) op. cit.
[52] Ridge (2002) op. cit.
[53] Mizen, P., Bolton, A. and Pole, C. (1999) *School age workers: the paid employment of children in Britain*, Work Employment and Society, Vol. 13 no. 3, September, pp. 423-38.
[54] DCSF/DCMS (2009) op. cit.
[55] Nairn et al. (2007) op. cit.

discussion groups, some children from more privileged backgrounds in the UK, and from a variety of backgrounds in Spain could almost be said to be overactive in their pursuits with a demanding schedule of sports and music lessons. Often they actually craved more free time and relaxation. One child in a UK grammar school described a good day as one that was 'casual' and where he could do what he liked, as normally his days were always full and highly organised. Spanish children in the steering group also felt that they had too many achievement focussed activities such as English or music lessons in their schedule, and wished for time just to 'hang out' with their friends in the park.

There also seemed to be stress when activities were viewed as competitions to win or as goals to achieve rather than pure enjoyment. Particularly the more affluent children in UK talked about getting good grades in a test, or winning a sports competition as components of a great day. This attitude was also strong in Spain, where the ethnographies showed that working hard on schoolwork was expected of all children, not just those in specific schools or areas. Many Spanish children in the groups talked about bad results, not being successful at school and academic failure when describing bad days. In the ethnographies, Spanish children were shown to spend a lot of time on homework, and extra tutorials, and families structured their evenings around the children's homework, discussing school with them whenever they had the opportunity. In Sweden competition and winning were rarely mentioned and it seemed that the cultural emphasis was on doing *well* for oneself rather than doing *better* than others, as was the case in the UK and Spain.

"When I failed at language…I couldn't play or do anything"
Spain, School 1, Boys, Age 8/9

"[It was a good day when] I won most improved in hockey club"
UK, School 1, Girl, Age 8/9

"A bad day can be if you get a bad grade on your exam! I feel very disappointed if I do because I have very high expectations of myself"
Sweden, School 3, Girl, Group, Age 13

Conclusions

Conclusions

We were tasked with exploring the everyday lives of children and their families across the UK, Spain and Sweden in order to understand what lies behind the statistics that show children faring so much better in Sweden and Spain than in the UK.

The research paints a complex picture of the relationship between well-being, materialism and inequality and uncovers stark contrasts between the three countries.

The Importance of Time

Behind the statistics in UNICEF Report Card 7 we found that children want time with their parents, good relationships with their friends and lots of stimulating things to do. However, in the UK we met parents struggling to find time to be with their children or to help them participate in outdoor, sporting or creative activities and lacking in time to establish and enforce the rules and roles operating within the family household. The children told the same story. In Spain the active role played by extended family and the personal sacrifices made by many mothers meant that children were afforded a lot of the time they crave and their organised activities were made a priority. In Sweden on the other hand the sharing of roles whether earning a salary or running the household meant that everyone in the family had more time for each other within the fabric of the day and for an active outdoor lifestyle. The overriding impression was that being a parent was natural in Spain and Sweden whilst it was strained in the UK. Indeed, in Spain and Sweden it emerged from both the ethnographies and the discussions with children in schools that it is socially expected that time with the family is prioritised over work and other commitments and this expectation appeared to be embedded within national culture.

We observed that UK parents find it difficult to spend time with their families for lots of different reasons. One of these was low wages. Where parents are paid at, or close to the minimum wage they often must work long hours or take several jobs in order to make ends meet and this can impact on their ability to spend quality time with their children. Other parents found it difficult to see their children due to long hours that were demanded by their particular jobs, rather than economic necessity. Furthermore, some more affluent children

complained of the 'bleed' between work and home time, with parents unavailable to them even when not in the office as they are working remotely outside of standard hours or even on holiday. In Sweden, we spoke to many families who worked a range of fractional hours (e.g. 85%) and flexibility to fit in with family life seemed to be the norm. In Spain, on the other hand, where parents are struggling to juggle work and family commitments, the extended family often step in to look after children. Children in Spain appeared to thrive with this additional family support.

The Role of the Commercial World in Children's Lives

Behind the statistics in UNICEF Report Card 7 we also found that consumer goods play a multi-faceted role in children's lives – sometimes positive and sometimes negative. However, there is no doubt that status technology and clothing brands play their part in creating or reinforcing social divisions between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. Particularly as children enter secondary school, clothing and technology brands become increasingly important to help create identity and also to signal membership of particular social groups. The need to use brands symbolically in this way is stronger amongst those from more deprived backgrounds and particularly in areas of mixed affluence where rich rub shoulders with poor.

Whilst the use of display objects to create and reinforce social distinction has a history as old as mankind, consumerism appears to have become inextricably enmeshed in children's relationships with family and friends: those things so precious to them. It also appears to be the case that families in the UK, more so that in Sweden and Spain, use the purchase of new material objects (particularly new technology) in an attempt to compensate for relationship problems and social insecurity.

The children themselves across the three countries had a very ambivalent attitude to those who appear to be able to afford the latest status goods, simultaneously deriding them and envying them. However the response by parents was quite different. Whilst many UK parents were complicit in purchasing status goods - indeed almost seemed to be compelled to do so - this behaviour was almost totally absent in Spain and Sweden. We found children who were eager to tell us that they had a fairly sanguine approach to consumer goods but in

the UK parents and children seemed to be locked into a compulsive consumption cycle. This was not the case in Spain and Sweden.

Consumer culture in the UK appeared in our research to be “disposable” with households full of broken and discarded toys and a compulsion to continually upgrade and buy new. This stands in stark comparison with Sweden and Spain where toys and electronic gadgets were looked after, often mended when broken, and were cherished as long-term companions.

Nurturing Resilience

Behind the statistics in Report Card 7 the Spanish and Swedish parents we observed appeared to be more confident in their ability to draw and enforce boundaries, and had more confidence to say ‘no’ to their children than was the case in the UK families. Negotiating the commercial world was distinctly more problematic in the UK and this was the case regardless of social circumstances. Spanish and Swedish children seemed to have a clearer sense of rules and roles in the family and there was a stronger sense of resilience in both parents and children in Spain and Sweden than was the case in the UK. Although these parenting norms are deeply embedded in culture the lack of time we observed in UK households is not unrelated to the lack of clarity around family rules and roles for time (and energy) are required to negotiate and establish these..

Children from Spain and Sweden also displayed a degree of understanding of their parents’ financial circumstances which was less evident amongst many of the children in the UK. Along with more family time there seemed to come more discussions around money, how it is spent and how consumer pressure can be resisted.

Dealing with Inequality

Behind the statistics in UNICEF Report Card 7 we find that the notion of inequality is understood in very different ways in Spain, Sweden and the UK. For Spanish families, those who have no time with their children are “the deprived” whilst in Sweden a family is unfortunate if they live in a neighbourhood where they are not free to roam outside. In the UK inequality is firmly related to the amount of money (and by extension consumer goods) that we have. It is not surprising, then, that consumerism is as enmeshed in the inequality agenda as firmly as it is in family life.

Inequality also had its part to play in access to outdoor, creative and sporting activities in the UK with the more deprived children spending more time in sedentary pursuits. Moreover although the more affluent children in the UK seemed to have more access to the sort of active life children wish for this was often dominated by a need to show superiority over others by winning and coming first. Access to stimulating activities appeared to be more universal and less competitive in Spain and Sweden.

The children in all three countries have the same needs and wants and concerns. Yet the response to these by each society is quite different. It seems that children are more likely to thrive where the social context makes it possible for them to have time with family and friends, to get out and about without having to spend money, to feel secure about who they are rather than what they own, and to be empowered to develop resilience to pressures to consume.

Appendices

Appendices

Appendix 1: Scoping study (summary)

Summary of scoping study for invitation to tender

This document has been prepared to accompany UNICEF UK's (UUK) invitation to tender for '*a qualitative international comparative study of the impacts of inequality and materialism on children's well-being*.'

The document summarises the purpose and findings of a scoping study commissioned by UNICEF UK and carried out by the *centre for well-being* at **nef** (the new economics foundation) in late 2009/early 2010.

The document includes:

1. A description of the purpose of the scoping study, as per its terms of reference laid out by UUK.
2. A summary of the process
3. A list of all the topics for research considered in the scoping study, and the short list of overall themes considered further
4. A note on why inequality and materialism was selected
5. A note on why the chosen countries were selected

Purpose of the scoping study

The aim of the scoping study was to formulate the research questions and scope for a tender specification document which UUK will use to commission a qualitative research study comparing child well-being in the UK with that of children in two or three other OECD countries.

This process required the selection of specific well-being themes and two or three countries for comparison as well as some guidelines on how to conceptualise child well-being and its determinants, particularly in relation to the child rights social ecology model, and the notion of the 'evolving capacities' of the child. The scoping study also informs governance arrangements and practical considerations for the delivery of the full research project.

The qualitative research study will build on existing work from UNICEF and UUK and will seek to 'get behind the numbers' of the data grid[56] and explore some of underlying reasons for the variations observed at an international level. It specifically aims to

[56]A data grid had previously been prepared by the University of Kent bringing together figures on different factors relevant to children's well-being for the UK and a few other countries. This is available on request from Senay Camgoz at UNICEF UK.

understand the 'lived experience' perspectives of children and young people across different countries to inform UUK's policy, advocacy and programme activities in a UK context.

Selection process

A rapid literature review was carried out to identify a long list of potential topics to consider. The majority came from five key sources:

- UNICEF (2007) *An overview of child well-being in rich countries*, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Report Card 7
- OECD (2009) *Doing better for children* (Paris: OECD)
- Bradshaw J and Richardson D (2009) 'An index of child well-being in Europe' *Child Indicators Research*
- Data grid prepared by the University of Kent (available on request)
- Good Childhood Inquiry (www.childrenssociety.org.uk/all_about_us/how_we_do_it/the_good_childhood_inquiry/1818.html)

A number of potential topics were identified on the basis of these data sources and literature. Importantly the issues were all things that can be considered as *drivers* of well-being outcomes in terms of subjective experience and health. Subjective experience or child mortality rates themselves, for example, were not included.

These topics were then assessed against a set of criteria agreed upon between **nef** and UUK. These included:

- Links with well-being (and well-becoming)
- Policy relevance, and potential appeal to main UK political parties
- Existence of comparative quantitative data
- Potential for qualitative research
- Fit with other UNICEF work and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Rather than select individual topics based on these criteria, it became clear that it made sense to identify possible *themes* which brought together several potentially interesting topics. Four themes were identified, from which UUK selected one (inequality and materialism).

Topics and themes considered

Approximately 60 issues were considered, grouped into three types:

- Direct policy
- Societal / infrastructural
- Individual behaviours or values

Direct policy areas

- Education system
  - testing
  - starting age
  - sport in schools
  - purpose of education
  - pedagogical style
  - positive psychology in school
  - teacher's pay
  - apprenticeships
  - decentralisation of system
  - achievement
- Family Policy
  - parental leave
  - parenting classes
  - birth ceremonies
- Welfare system
- Immunisation rates
- Legal ages
- Children in criminal justice
- National civic service
- Childcare
  - universal services
  - expenditure levels

Societal / infrastructural

- Inequality
- Material conditions
  - average income
  - housing and overcrowding
  - unemployment
  - possession of books, etc.
- Dispersed families
- Media
  - commercialisation of sex
  - rates of TV viewing
  - advertising related to children
  - celebrity culture
  - violence in media

- Places for young people
    - green spaces and sports facilities
    - traffic-free streets
    - youth clubs

Individual behaviours or values

- Family
    - parenting styles (inc. corporal punishment)
    - single parent households
    - quality of family relations
    - working hours (adults)
    - breastfeeding rates
- Peer relations
    - play without supervision
    - violence and bullying
- Values and aspirations
    - materialism / consumerism
    - individualism / competitiveness
- Perceptions / stigmatisation of young people
- Parental anxiety over safety
- NEET (Not in employment, education or training) rate
- Physical activity
- Healthy eating
- Risky behaviour
    - binge drinking
    - under-age sex
    - drug misuse

From this list, four sets of issues were shortlisted:

1. **Active children** – including play and play opportunities, physical activity and passive leisure, and children's role in shaping their own education
2. **Time and family** – exploring family relationships and activities together and how they are affected by parental working hours.
3. **Aspirations and status** – looking at materialism, values and the roles of inequality and media.
4. **Valuing childhood** – looking at testing in schools, potentially children's role in shaping their education (as in 1), stigmatisation of children, and (to some extent) starting age at school.

Theme selection

Option 3, on aspirations and status was then refined into a focus on inequality and materialism. The theme addresses the selection criteria as follows:

- **Links with well-being:** Much work has been done to show the relationship between materialism and low well-being (in terms of life satisfaction, mental health, risky behaviours, low self-esteem, obesity, etc.). Inequality has many further negative impacts as well, as the *Spirit Level* (Pickett and Wilkinson, 2009) shows, including reduced social cohesion, reduced educational achievement, and increased social problems such as crime.
- **Policy relevance:** May lead to policies around education on critical understanding of media. If the links between inequality and materialism are corroborated, then this adds support to the idea that inequality is bad for all of us, not just the poor, and should be tackled by government for its own sake. Reference to values becoming more acceptable in current political climate.
- **Quantitative data:** There is plenty of cross-national data on materialism and, of course, inequality. Under 25s in the UK are amongst the most materialistic in Western Europe, based on European Social Survey data.
- **Potential for qualitative research:** Values and aspirations very much lend themselves to qualitative research. Little pre-existing research on experiences of inequality, particularly amongst children.
-

Country selection

Nordic countries. All four Nordic countries considered in Report Card 7 do well (Sweden comes 2nd, Denmark 3rd, Finland 4th and Norway 7th). They all also do reasonably well in terms of subjective well-being. Inequality is very low in these countries, and, according to the European Social Survey, materialism is also low (particularly in Sweden, Denmark and Finland).

Spain. Comes 5th overall in Report Card 7 and 2nd in terms of subjective well-being. Materialism amongst under 25s is 2nd lowest in Europe (behind France), and TV watching is relatively low, both based on the European Social Survey. However, whilst inequality (according to GINI coefficient) is lower than in the UK, it is not particularly low for Europe. This disconnect between high well-being and low materialism on the one hand, and average inequality on the other, is potentially interesting.

Other potential countries:

- France (low inequality and very low materialism, but also low well-being)
- Switzerland (low materialism, high well-being, but not that low inequality)
- Netherlands (high well-being, low inequality, but middling materialism)
- Germany (low inequality, but middling materialism and well-being)
- Belgium
- Austria
- Czech Republic (very low inequality, moderate well-being for income levels, but relatively high materialism)

Appendix 2: Ethnography Discussion Matrix

Understanding the effect of Inequality and Materialism on childhood well-being

Discussion	Observations
Daily activities and people – *important to understand who they spend time with(friends, parents, step-parents and extended family e.g grandparents, cousins etc.), and what the social norms are for kids – **WELL-BEING**!!*	
Daily routine Talk me through your normal day during the week, at week-ends and in the holidays	What are the most prominent objects in each room. TV? Photos of family? Decorative objects?
Close circle How close are you as a family? What do you do together? What's your favourite thing to do together? What sorts of things do you argue about? How does your family compare with other families? Who does what in the family? e.g. who works, looks after the kids, cooks, cleans, etc/ What chores do the children do?	Meet all the family and get good introductions. Want to see how family interacts with one another – do they look like a close family? IMPORTANTLY does it look like there is any family conflict? Look for parenting styles: permissive, consultative, authoritarian
Wider circle Tell me about your friends What do you do with them?How do your friends compare with other groups in school? Where do you meet? What toys do they have? Who do you hang out with if you want to have fun? Also LOOK for smoking, drinking, drugs Who is your best friend? What makes them special? Who is the coolest kid at school? Tell me about them. What do they have / own? Who do you go to for advice? Who do you go to if you need cheered up?	Try to meet friends of children and parents. Are parents of children friends? Grandparents?? Any pictures? Living close by? Can we meet him / her? Try to go to activities with children. Is it a club? Is it part of the community? Is it a commercial venture (e.g. ballet lessons) or a voluntary organisation (e.g. scouts) Are activities talked about in terms of grades, certificates and other markers of achievement?
Environment – *where do people live, what are their neighbours like, and how do they evaluate themselves based on this? SOCIAL EVALUATIVE THEORY*	

What is it like living here? Who else lives in the area? Who do you talk to / don't talk to around here? What are your neighbours like? Would you say you live in a community? How would you compare yourself to: Your neighbours? You work / school colleagues? Your friends Do you think it's the same for everyone living round here? Do you think it's the same for everyone living in the UK? What do you think it would be like to live in the UK? What do you think the UK is like as a place to visit?	Guided tour of area Get them to comment on buildings / shops / people living locally Take us to community centres / youth centres locally that they go to and see how they fit in – do they participate? Get them to discuss a lot of this when doing a guided tour
Communicating and Media – *How do kids stay in touch, what level of privacy do they have from their parents, what image do they give of themselves through social networking sites. What role does the media play in their lives* Do you have a mobile phone? Who do you call? How do you use your phone? Are you on Facebook? Other sites? How many posts do you put up? How many friends? What games do you play on the computer? Why do you like them? How much telly do you watch? What are our favourite programmes? Do you watch TV on your computer? What magazines and books do you read? What do you like about them? Do your parents control how much time you spend on the internet or watching telly? Do you think it's fair?	See them using computers and mobiles phones – how sophisticated a user are they? Are their parents involved? Are their parents also using social networking sites? Try to watch a favourite TV programme with them and encourage them to comment on it. Do they watch alone in their room or with their parents in a living room? How much technology do they have in their own room? (TV, computer, internet, iPod, CD player, Xbox etc.) What sorts of reading material is in the house? How much freedom do the children have to make their own mistakes? How much are they controlled?
Aspiration, Emulation and Acquisition – *what are the influences upon the children in terms of the future* ***INEQUALITY*** What would you like to do when you are older? Where would you like to live? Which car would you like to drive? What would your parents like you to do when you are older? Do you think you will be rich? Famous? What will you do when you start earning money?	Are there any posters / magazines of idols / cars / desired belongings? Do parents talk about issues in front of kids? What is the interaction between parents and kids when this is being discussed? What sort of ambitions do parents seem to

What are you most proud of in your life so far and what would make you proud in 20 years? What do elder members of the family do? What do you think of school? How do you think you are getting on at school? Are you getting on as well as everyone else? Who are your friends at school? What do you like about them? How do you think your school compares to others in the UK? What's good and bad about it? Who would you say is your role model? What type of things have you got that your friends don't have? Vice Versa. What do you do when you really want something?	have for their kids? Get them to show us school work. Is it a source of pride in the family? What sort of achievements are valued? School work, sports, music, being in the local paper, helping out in community? Any pictures?? Certificates etc. on walls? Why do they say they want particular things?
Purchasing, shopping and brand awareness – *what level of understanding do children have about different brands, what role do shops play in child development, and how do they get what they want* ***MATERIALISM*** Brand understanding – *for all products that participants bring up:* Awareness: What types of brands do they like? Why? Which brands do they not like? What other brands are there? What brands do cool people wear? Association: What's a cool brand? What's not a cool brand? Tell me about people that have cool brands / do not have cool brands Availability: What have you got? What would you like? Do you think you will get it? What will you do if you don't? What kind of toys do you like? Which are your favourites? Where do you get them from? What type of things have you got that your friends don't have? Vice Versa. Where do you go shopping? What is it like shopping there? What about shopping online?	Do a wardrobe/bedroom audit. What clothes and things in their room do they really care about and why? Note how many of these things are heavily branded/advertised. Get them to talk through brands in shops when we are there Look at how important it is to act cool. How do people talk about their friends who have the right / wrong brands. Get them to compare brands What brands are they wearing? How prominent are brands in the house? See toy collections See kids playing with toys Get them to take us to the shopping mall!! How are kids interacting with brands in the shop? How do they navigate stores?

Where do you learn about different brands? Which adverts can you remember? Can you recite any adverts? Sing the songs? Do people you know get bullied for having the wrong brands? Are big brands worth the money? Parents Do they feel under pressure to buy particular brands for their children How do they try to get their children to manage expectations	Do brands and possessions seem to be important to the family? What evidence is there of this around the home? Do parents and children shop together or separately?
Work and finances – *try to understand what work and finances are like in the family, including attitudes towards debts and how kids are taught to manage money* *Parents* What work do you do/ have you done for work? How much do you earn? (if comfortable) Tell me about your childcare arrangements. How are finances dealt with in the family? Have you ever had any financial difficulty in the past? Have you ever run into debt? Do you give your children pocket money? What are the rules? *Kids* Where do you get your money from? Who has money? Who doesn't have money? Do you have more or less than your friends? How important is money? What do you spend your own money on? Do you save any of your money? Do you give any of it away to other people? What are the money rules in the house?	Look at what money is spent on What is it not spent on – are there obvious things missing? What do parents feel they HAVE to buy for their kids. How are finances filed / dealt with How do people look when discussing money? How do parents teach children about money? Do they talk about money in front of them? Are the rules about pocket money and things like chores (done for money) clear? Are there any sticker charts/rotas and things like that around the house? Do kids ask parents for things when we are present? How do parents respond?
Health and well-being – *would like to understand how health is prioritised compared to other factors* What does health mean to you? What kind of foods do you eat? What are favourite foods? Classic dishes? How often do you eat as a family? Who chooses what's on the shopping list each week? Do you go shopping with your parents?	Do kids look healthy? Look in kitchen / fridge cupboards Who chooses food? Do kids always eat the same food and at the same time as their parents?

Do the parents take an interest in their life? (this is a big one!)_ How important is it to you to exercise? Do you play outside? Where? Do you play any sports? Do parents take them out to play games? What other activities do you do? What makes you happy and sad? Do you feel satisfied with your life? What stops people having the best possible life?	Get them to play games while we are there – who plays with them? Takes an interest? Go with them to places where they play out or exercise outside the home. Are parents involved in other activities How competitive are the parents and the children? Do they pressurise kids to excel in activities? Try to get a sense of whether children do things for enjoyment or achievement.
Christmas – *What plans for Christmas; source of fun or stress? Pressures??* What would the kids like for Christmas? Presents? Anything emotional that isn't a present? How are parents feeling about Christmas? Are parents feeling the pressures of Christmas? Who is choosing Christmas presents – parents or kids? What does Christmas mean to you? What do you do at Christmas time?	Where do they get these ideas from? Magazines / catalogues etc. Are parents talking openly about Christmas? What rituals seem to be important to the family at Christmas time? Eating? Visiting relatives? Going to special places? The presents?

Possible activities:

- Tour of the area
- Go shopping
- Youth clubs etc.
- Drawing
- Mealtime!
- Write a letter to Santa Claus.

Appendix 3: Discussion guide for in-schools groups

UNICEF UK
In-schools discussion groups guide

The purpose of this document is to act as a guide to the moderator. We will have to be flexible with the length of the group to fit into the school timetable, and as such, not all of this material will necessarily be covered in every group.

Research questions (from UNICEF UK brief):

- How, and at what group level, is inequality understood and experienced by children?
- How is this inequality reflected in their lived experiences? What does it look and feel like to them?
- In what ways does inequality impact on children's well-being? (consider for example issues of self-esteem and perceived status)
- What role does inequality have in determining children's aspirations and materialistic attitudes?
- Does materialism impact on children's well-being? How?
- What do the findings suggest in terms of changes required in UK policy and at the societal level?

Timings	Key Questions	Notes
5 mins	**Welcome and introduction** • Explain that we're doing some research for the charity, UNICEF UK, and we want to find out what it's like to be an X year old growing up in the UK/Spain/Sweden today. • We're going to be doing some activities and talking about a few things for the next XX mins. • Ask that they speak one at a time, and listen to each other's opinions. There aren't any right or wrong answers – we just want to know what they think. Also, they don't have to agree with one another. • Emphasise that this is not a PSHE/Citizenship lesson, so they don't have to say what they think teachers or other adults would want to hear, but they should focus on what they really think. • Gain permission to record. • Explain confidentiality - tell them no one will know what they say (not their teachers or parents), unless we hear something that means they are at risk, then we might have to tell a responsible adult. Remind that everything that is said in the room stays in the room after the group (don't go telling other people what was said)	**Welcome**: orientates participant, gets them prepared to take part in the group. Outlines the 'rules' of the group (including those we are required to tell them about under MRS and Data Protection Act guidelines). Emphasise confidentiality but we're also required to explain about child protection issues here.

	Let them know they are free to leave the group at any time, and they don't have to talk about things that are private/upset them if they don't want to.	
10 mins	**<u>Happiness and well-being</u>** GET PARTICIPANTS TO THINK OF A GOOD DAY THAT THEY HAVE RECENTLY HAD. • How did you feel on this day? FLIP CHART RESPONSES GET PARTICIPANTS TO THINK OF A BAD DAY THAT THEY HAVE RECENTLY HAD. • How did you feel on this day? FLIP CHART RESPONSES **ACTIVITY: Give participants two spider diagrams with 'Good' and 'Bad.' Referring to previous flip charts, get them to draw off arms with what makes them feel good (like on a good day) and what makes them feel bad (how they feel on a bad day)** MODERATOR NOTE: GET EACH PARTICIPANT TO EXPLAIN THEIR DIAGRAM TO THE GROUP AND DISCUSS WHY THOSE THINGS MAKE THEM FEEL GOOD/BAD • Looking at what's on your collage / diagram what do you think you could live without, while still feeling happy? • What do you think you really need to be happy? E.g. if you didn't have this you would be very unhappy?	*This approach will ensure we get their 'top of mind' thoughts, without prompting at all*
10 mins	**<u>School and friendship</u>** **ACTIVITY: Imagine the moderator was a new student at your school. How would you explain the different people in your year to them? Are there different groups of people?** **MODERATOR NOTE: IF CHILDREN FEEL CONFIDENT, GET THEM TO MAP THIS OUT ON A PIECE OF PAPER (IF NOT, MODERATOR TO DO IT). IF NOT DONE SPONTANEOUSLY, ASK FOR A 'NICKNAME' FOR EACH GROUP** • How would you describe each of these groups? • What do they like doing? • What do they look like? • What do they have? • What brands do they wear? • Which group do you fit into? • How do you feel about the members of your group/other groups? • How do you think it feels to be a member of each of the groups? What do you think they feel like?	*This activity is designed to explore their experiences of inequality and differences between people. It also touches on how differences impact on well-being (happiness) and also how status items are associated with identity.*

	• How do the different groups get on with one another? • Who does/doesn't get on? Why? • Are there any people in your school who are not part of a group? • Do some of the groups have easier lives than others, or not? Why? **ACTIVITY: CREATE A SCALE FROM LOW TO HIGH HAPPINESS – GET THE GROUP TO SITUATE EACH OF THE GROUPS ALONG IT** MODERATOR NOTE: LISTEN FOR WHY SOME ARE MORE/LESS HAPPY THAN OTHERS	*Use the scale of smiley faces for younger children to position each of the groups on. Be aware that this is their perception of how happy other groups are (the groups themselves may think differently*
	ASK IF TIME TO AGES 11+ • Thinking about other young people you know outside of school/other people of your age who live in other parts of the UK/Spain/Sweden, would they fit into the groups in your school, or are they different? PROBE: - How would you describe these people? (What are they like, what do you THINK they do, what do they have – as above) - How happy do you think they are compared to people in your school?	
10 mins	**Home and outside school** • What sorts of things do you do when you're not at school? PROMPT: - Spend time with friends - Do activities (e.g. play in the park, play computer games, play football) - Spend time with your family - Anything else • Are there any of these things you'd like to do more / less? Why? • What do you think mums/dads/children should do in the house? Who should do what? (cooking, cleaning, relaxing, washing etc) • Do you have to help around the house? What do you have to do? Is this how it is for your friends? • Do you think it is important, or not, that children help around the house? Why? MODERATOR NOTE: LISTEN FOR MENTION OF REWARDS FOR HELPING (E.G POCKET MONEY, GETTING TO WATCH TV), AND FOLLOW UP IF MENTIONED, BUT DON'T PROMPT **IF TIME:** READ OUT SCENARIOS	*Older children may not want to be seen to want to spend time with family – it's 'cooler' to be with friends. Be aware this isn't necessarily directly spending time with the family, but having them around and accessible. Try to unpick what is being said because children really believe it and what reflects peer pressure or the school context – children may give responses they think adults want to hear.* *As a key finding from the ethnography, we need to explore 'roles' and responsibilities children have in their household and whether they think this is important* *Adapt names and activities so country appropriate*

Sam's parents work part-time. They don't have a lot of spare money to spend, so he doesn't have many toys/much cool stuff. Sam often goes swimming with his mum at weekends, and is now good enough to be in his school's swimming team so he often competes in competitions! His mum is always around after school to help with his homework, and they always eat their dinner together.

Tom's parents both work long hours, so after school, Tom either goes to a childminder or goes to his friends' homes. As his parents are not around much, Tom has more time to do the things he wants. His parents buy him all the latest toys / cool stuff. He plays on his playstation most days, so he is the champion among his friends!

	• Who do you think is the happier person? Why? • What might make Tom happier? Why? • What might make Sam happier? Why? • Do you think it's important, or not, for families to spend time together – eating together and doing activities? Why? • Which family would you rather be a part of? Why? POSSIBLE ACTIVITY FOR IF CHILDREN ARE FLAGGING AND HAVE NOT DISCUSSED THE IMPORTANCE OF SPENDING TIME WITH THE FAMILY AND HAVING STUFF DRAW AN IMAGINARY LINE FROM ONE SIDE OF THE ROOM TO THE OTHER – ONE END IS LOTS OF MONEY TO SPEND ON COOL STUFF, THE OTHER SPENDING TIME WITH THE FAMILY. GET PARTICIPANTS TO POSITION THEMSELVES ALONG LINE ACCORDING TO WHAT MAKES THEM FEEL HAPPIER (NEED TO EXPLAIN TO STAND WHERE THEY FEEL MOST WELL-BEING / HAPPIEST… DIFFERENT FROM 'IMPORTANCE'), AND THEN EXPLAIN WHY THEY ARE STANDING WHERE THEY ARE.	
15 mins	**Materialism** **GET PARTICPANTS TO THINK ABOUT SOMETHING THEY REALLY, REALLY WANT (DON'T PROMPT AT FIRST, BUT IF NECESSARY: THIS COULD BE ANYTHING – A HOLIDAY, AN IPOD, A BABY BROTHER).** **IN PAIRS THINK ABOUT THE FOLLOWING (WRITE UP ON PAPER)** • Why do you want that? • What makes it so good? • How do you think you'd feel if you got that? (might save / earn it not just gifted). • What made you think about getting/ having that? **GET THE PAIRS TO FEED BACK TO THE GROUP**	

	ACTIVITY: While still thinking about what you really, really want, get the group to think of a scenario where they've asked their parents for something, and a) they've said 'no'; and b) they've said 'yes'.
	
	Split group into teams with one side playing the role of the child arguing for what they really want, and the other playing the role of the parents who says 'no'. Then switch the sides, with the parents then saying 'yes'
	
	MODERATOR NOTE: LOOK FOR THE PERSUASIVE TECHNIQUES CHILDREN USE, AND HOW ANY PARENTAL RULES GOVERNING WHEN THEY GET WHAT THEY WANT
	
	• How did it feel playing the parent / child?
	• How does it make you feel when your parent says you can't have something you want?
	
	MODERATOR NOTE: OR USE PROJECTIVE TECHNIQUES IF NECESSARY
	
	• How does it make you feel when you get something new? How long does this feeling last?
	• Do you know anyone who gets all the things they want?
	  - What do you think about this person?
	  - Do you think it's a good or bad thing that their parents buy them all the things they want? Why?
	  - Do you think this person is happy or not?
	• Do your parents have any rules about when you can have something new, or what you can have?
	• Can you do anything to get around these rules, to get what you want?
	• What usually happens in your home if something gets broken?
	
	IF TIME WITH AGES 11+:
	
	Imagine if all clothes and toys / gadgets / products were produced by one company (i.e. there weren't any different brands).
	
	• Do you think that would make young people's lives any different? How/why?
	• Would it make a difference to the different groups at your school?
	• How do you think people would feel if all clothes and toys/gadgets were made by the same company?
	
	<u>Conclusion</u>
	
	• Is there anything else you'd like to add?
	
	THANK AND CLOSE
	
	GIVE RESEARCHER CONTACT DETAILS IF NEEDED.	

Appendix 4: Adult Steering Group Members

Anita Tiessen	Co-Chair, Deputy Director for Communications and Programmes UNICEF UK
Alison Marshall	Public Affairs Director, UNICEF UK
Agnes Nairn	Professor of Marketing EMLyon Business School
Sean O'Halloran	Chair of Young Advisors Waltham Forest Young Advisors
Helene Brembeck	Professor of Ethnology and Deputy Director Centre for Consumer Science, Gothenburg University, Sweden
Ed Mayo	Secretary General Co-operatives UK
Richard Bartholomew	Chief Research Officer, Department for Education Joint Head of Government Social Research Service
Julia Wilcox	Economist, Analysis and Research Division Department for Education
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