

The materialist part of “me”

Linking teenagers’ identity and materialistic attitudes

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Abstract

In contemporary sociology of consumption, the supposed link between self and possessions is one of the main themes. The value that represents the importance that is attached by people to their goods and their use in individual expression is called materialism. Individuals who place “having things” at the centre of their lives are said to be materialistic. One of the reasons why expression through possession gained weight in contemporary society is its post-modern condition. As tradition and ascription lost significance, the construction of identities became crucial and thus, also the theme “express yourself” has gained power. Teenagers in particular, have to construct and express their selves to a larger extent than ever before, and the expression of selves through things is especially popular among them. With their peers and the images from the media in mind, teenagers carefully build their own “me”. This paper explores the link between self-image, peer-group-influence and materialism among teenagers from a quantitative perspective. Data for this research come from a large enquiry of a representative sample of more than 3500 youngsters in Flanders who attend secondary school (ages 12 to 18), about socio-economic background, self-image, peer-group, consumption (income, expenses, attitudes, shopping, parental influence) and media-use.

Keywords: teenagers, identity, materialism, consumption, peergroup

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LINKING TEENAGERS’ IDENTITY AND MATERIALISTIC ATTITUDES
Jeremi Van Gorp

1. Introduction

In the lives of people it is more and more important what one has, instead of what one is. Or even more, what one possesses has become more significant of what kind of person someone is than other characteristics that originally had more to do with this “identity”. It doesn’t matter anymore that you are a gentle and friendly person, if you can buy drinks for others you are, otherwise you are not. It doesn’t matter anymore that you are good in sports, if you don’t have the right brand of sporting clothes, this does not mean a thing. Some kinds of sporting brands even help people to become good in sports, as some cookies help children to perform well in school. If you don’t drink *this beer*, you are not a man, because men “know why”. If you don’t use *this deodorant* in the morning, then it is no surprise that you have no success in your job. If you don’t eat those certain cereals at breakfast, how one earth do you think of ever getting fit?

Things matter. They do not only help in getting where you want to get in life, they are more and more deterministic of being who you want to be. This means that you can “make” your life by looking for, buying and/or having the “right” products and brands. Being an attractive person starts with using those brands that make you so. Being into sports, starts with having those products and brands that make you seen by others as being into sports. At least, this all is what materialists believe.

People with materialistic attitudes are convinced, more than others, that things can make the difference. These objects are not only to be used in practice or in trade; they are symbols of much more. One of the things these objects are said to represent is the “self” of individuals. The most inner part of people is exteriorized in products and brands, ready for others to be read and interpreted and acted upon. In things, people can read the communicated identity of others, meant or not meant to be sent.

In this paper, an exploration is made of the link between the identity of teenagers and their materialistic attitudes. Is the story that was somewhat ironically outlined above a true one? Of course, it is not the purpose of this paper to go into detail. The data collection that feeds this paper has no information on specific brands. Instead, a more general approach on products was used.

This paper is constructed as follows. First a brief outline of theoretical approaches on materialism and identity is given. Afterwards the methodological approach of data collection and measurements are outlined, after which results of univariate, bivariate and multivariate analyses are presented of a model that is built up on a step-by-step basis. In the discussion, the hypotheses that had been put forward are scrutinized and accepted or rejected. In the conclusion, space is made available for an overview of the paper, some setbacks of the presented research and some directions and suggestions for further research.

2. Theoretical framework and construction of hypotheses

During the past decades, a material culture has come into being in society and is sometimes even seen as the booming aspect of current Western culture (Miller, 1998; Twitchell, 2000). Generally said, materialism is the theoretical approach that states that things matter in life. How this works, is not always neatly defined. In a philosophical way, materialism puts forward that there is nothing more than “matter” and its movements (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Clearly, this is not the approach that is chosen here, even though for materialists, the importance attached to goods can be so high that all other aspects of life vanish into the void when things are present. With the notion that materialists choose worldly things over spiritual matters in mind (Ahuvia & Wong, 2002), the working definition of materialism in this research is the following: materialism is the importance attached by individuals to worldly possessions (Ger & Belk, 1990).

An imported remark here is that not those products that are necessary for life are at stake, but most often those products that are not really of life importance. Everyone is concerned with food and lodgings. Wanting to have something to drink or eat or aching for a home to live in, are no materialistic traits. Those are just normal aspects of human behaviour. In materialistic behaviour, not the regular products of daily use are important, but products that can be classified as luxury (Twitchell, 2000). Materialistic attitudes can find their way to regular daily use products as well of course, but are not defined as such.

Materialism can be explained more in detail by looking at some fundamental characteristics. Focussing on obtaining things is one fundamental characteristic (Tatzel, 2003), but this remains rather obscure. One could discern people who are more materialistic from people who are less materialistic, just by measuring the time they invest in dealing with their possessions. Nevertheless, time spent on things only is no good approach of materialism. Materialists do not only spend more time on objects, they also approach objects in a different way (Tatzel, 2002).

Important indicators of materialism are put forward by Belk (1985) and Richins and Dawson (1992; 2004). Ahuvia and Wong (2002) state that Belk’s approach sees materialism as an aspect of personality and that the approach of Richins and Dawson takes materialism as a personal value. Belk grasps materialism with possessiveness, nongenerosity and envy. Richins and Dawson approach materialism as the centrality of things in life and the link of happiness and success to possessions.

Possessiveness means that materialists are never happy with what they have and always want more and more (Tatzel, 2003). Possessiveness is also defined as the tendency to obtain and keep control over possessions (Ger & Belk, 1990). Possessions are viewed in a very broad sense. Not only things, but also experiences (a holiday or a party) and persons (children or a husband/wife) can be seen as possessions. This finds expression in an increased longing for photos, videos, souvenirs and other things to grasp a certain experience into matter (Belk, 1985; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Tatzel, 2003). In later research, Ger and Belk (1990) attached the label tangibility to the latter. Also, lending or losing things is like hell on earth for materialists.

This rejecting of lending of things has also to do with the characteristic of nongenerosity. This term is negatively formulated. One could also opt for frugality as a more neutral or even

positive term, but that is not what is meant here. Sharing things is not something a materialist is likely to do. Although nongenerosity and possessiveness are strongly related, they are not the same. Furby (in: Belk, 1985) for example, mentions research among children where they are keen to lend things to others in a very generous way, but these others are not allowed to take things away. They have to be offered and of course remain possession of the lender.

Envy is defined as dissatisfaction with others' superior position, in whatever aspect (Ger & Belk, 1990). Mostly it concerns happiness, success, reputation or possession. Often this feeling is accompanied by an almost pathological desire to make an end to that superiority. Sometimes this results in stealing things from others or from stores to "also" have what others have or in destroying what others have. Also in non-material things, envy is a well-known aspect. For example, in relations, newspapers often even report of murders where envy was the guiding devil of the murderers. Rivals are killed, only to rule out the competition in a struggle for a particular person. However, also for material possessions, sometimes murders take place (Belk, 1985).

A common characteristic of materialists is that they place objects and obtaining them at the centre of their lives. Consumption for the sake of consumption will be an all-energy-absorbing activity throughout the day (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). The centrality of objects however, is the most common and least specific aspect of materialism.

The link between objects and happiness is a proven one for materialists. Well-being and happiness are not only influenced by possessions, they are determined by them (Ahuvia & Wong, 2002; Belk, 1985; Tatzel, 2003; Twitchell, 2000). Moreover, in a spirit of utilitarianism, striving for happiness becomes the one and only hallmark of value (Chaney, 1998). Possessions play an important role in this striving, in positive, but certainly also in negative way. Having things may contribute to being happy, but not having things certainly is responsible for not being happy (Tatzel, 2002). This results in materialists often being more unhappy than others, because the never ending struggle for possessions can only end in a deeply rooted unhappiness as one just cannot have everything (Achenreiner, 1997).

Materialists do not only link happiness to objects, they also see success and possessions as one package deal. Social prestige and the success that is bound to this, can only be obtained through possessions (Tatzel, 2003). Possessions and their quality are a measure for success in the eyes of materialistic persons. People with a lot of possessions or a lot of money are successful, end of story. In contemporary Western society, success is for example indeed often more and more defined in terms of money (Wong, 1997). In this way, possessions form a bridge to the life people would like to have or at least to the image of having this life in the eyes of others. In this reasoning, Veblen (1899) is never far away.

It is indeed true that success is not measured in terms of privately consumed goods, but in terms of consumption that is open for the general public to be witnessed. Materialists are convinced that all people see objects as outer marks of leading a "good life". This is why it is much more important to buy an expensive car or to go on a holiday at a very exotic destination, returning with lots of souvenirs and a nice brown tan, than buying a very expensive and personally designed closet for the bedroom, where only few persons will ever see it. Even though some research suggests that materialists put less focus on interpersonal relations (Fromm, 1976; Richins & Dawson, 1992), the image of the ever present other lives certainly among them (Achenreiner, 1997; Ratner & Kahn, 2002; Tatzel, 2003).

In this public nature of materialism, its link with peer pressure is highly present. A materialistic way of consumption is often equated with a conspicuous way. Typical aspects of conspicuous consumption, like consuming more than others and focussing on status products, are also characteristics of materialism (Wong, 1997). Gaining esteem of others involves more than having power and wealth, displaying this is a necessary part of this struggle (Veblen, 1899).

In contemporary times, watching television seems to be an important go-between for both materialism and peer pressure. Ahuvia and Wong (2002) state that television promotes materialistic attitudes and encourages social motivations for consumption, leading towards consumption as a means in self-expression (Achenreiner, 1997). A reason why this would be the case could be found in the lower self-esteem and insecurity that is said to be common among materialists (Richins & Dawson, 1992), which pinpoints them in relation to others.

Thus, for this research, it is important to investigate this link. Therefore, hypotheses one and two are formulated as follows:

H1: Teenagers with a worse self-image, are more susceptible to peer pressure

H2: Teenagers with a worse self-image, are more materialistic

The social aspect of materialism is not new. In a material culture, the software and hardware of our social lives are melted together (Ilmonen, 2004; Pels, Hetherington, & Vandenberghe, 2002), sometimes even resulting in socio-materiality like, for example, food. It is physical of nature, but heavily loaded with all kinds of meanings. It is prepared by some for others, taking into account different social specifications it brings about (Harbers, Mol, & Stollmeyer, 2002). Not only for food, but for lots and lots of products, its symbolic communication aspects have become ultimately important. Therefore, hypothesis three is formulated as follows:

H3: Teenagers who are more susceptible to peer pressure, are more materialistic

Symbolic characteristics of products however, are not part of the products on their own. Objects do not communicate as people do (Ilmonen, 2004), people communicate using products and what exactly it is that products communicate, is determined by humans. How this process of giving meaning to products works, is extremely unclear. Often it is said that the public meaning of products is constructed out of different opinions of individuals, but how these separate opinions got known, is subject to interpretation. One thing that can be concluded from this is that peers are highly influential in the construction of these meanings. Thus, for materialistic oriented persons, peers would play a more important role in their lives.

Discussions on the link between self and things have become more important in a so-called post-modern society. However, there is no agreement on what “post modernity” really is and whether the contemporary society really has post-modern conditions as defining

characteristics. The approach chosen here sees post-modern societies as those societies in which individuals have to construct their identities themselves, to a larger extent than ever before. Stating this self-construction is not the same as stating that there are no *classic* constructing elements anymore. However, the importance of these “narratives” as grand interpretations of reality that are universally applicable (Harvey, 1989) has diminished. Typical examples of these narratives are the nation state, the Church, the industry (Lyotard, 1984), class, family and ethnic group (Lash, 2003). Only the market and the media are said to be withstanding are structuring backbones in society, even though they are approached in a different way than before (Jameson, 1984). They are not perceived as rulers anymore, they are seen as guides.

“People have their lives in their own hands”, is the paradigm that is being proclaimed in contemporary times. The *bricolage* or active construction of individual life biographies has become a duty of everyone (Pollock, 2002). Each individual has to find his or her way in the labyrinth of possibilities and meanings (Halkier, 2001; Ilmonen, 2004; Sassatelli, 2001; Southerton, 2001).

Defining what identity is, is far from easy. Sociological and socio-psychological literature often seems overwhelmed with research about identity and its social construction, but agreement on what exactly constitutes identity, is rather uncommon (Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston, & McDermott, 2003). Different concepts are used as pointing to identity, like the “me”, the “ego”, the “I”, the “subject”, the “self” or the “individual” (Craib, 1998). Generally speaking, identity is seen as an abstract, ungraspable concept (Grotevant & Cooper, 1998) that forms a whole over all kinds of different concrete parts. Perhaps, an identity is not really a whole, but it is often seen as such (Adams, 1998) by as well the individual himself as surrounding people. Identity then, may be consisting of different parts (Blustein & Palladino, 1991; Firat & Venkatesh, 1993; Fournier, 1998; Smeets, 1997) that sometimes conflict (Mandel, 2003) but are more often consistent in one way or another (Blustein & Palladino, 1991; Schlenker, 1975; Snyder, 1992).

Measuring identity however, is a different question. Common practice in the measurement of identity is trying to grasp one of more aspects of it. Measuring someone’s real identity is an illusion and this approach is generally accepted in dealing with this known problem. Researchers then often do not grasp individuals’ real identity but their self-image (Adams & Montemayor, 1983; Jones & McEwen, 2000), but as this is actually what is communicated and is seen as identity by individuals themselves, problems are not likely to arise.

3. Methodology

The theoretical model that will be under consideration is constructed out of four different parts. A measure of materialism will be used as final dependent, influenced by aspects of the peer group on the one hand and aspects of identity on the other. The link between the last two will also be focussed upon. These three conceptual blocks are also seen as dependent of more socio-demographic and socio-economic background variables like gender, age, ethnicity, SES and income. Of these, income is also seen as dependent of the other four.

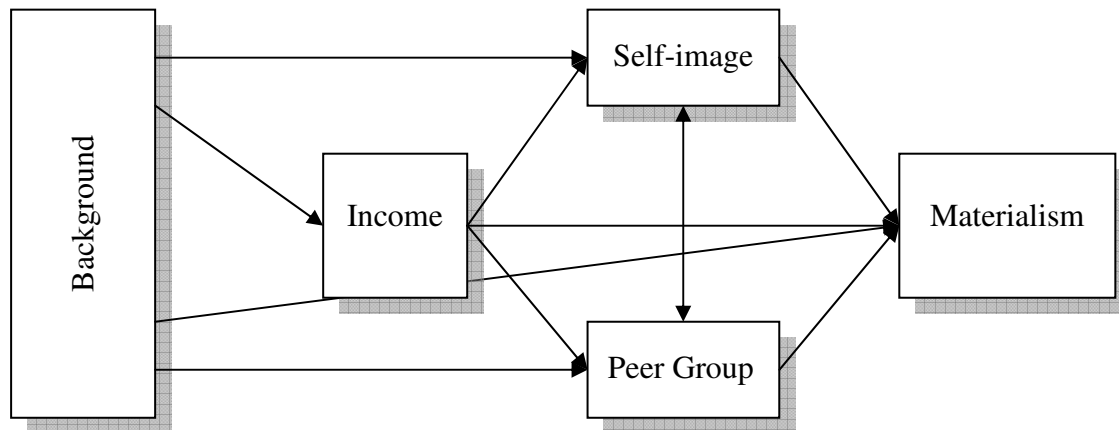
Self-image will be measured using measuring instruments of self-esteem, assertivity and body image. Peer group will be approached measuring popularity, attention to social comparison

information and acceptance of others. Materialism is measured using the Possession Satisfaction Index. The mentioned aspects will now be elaborated.

3.1. Suggested model

Graphically, the model that will be scrutinized looks like Figure 1.

Figure 1: Theoretical research model



All arrows in the model will be investigated. Nevertheless, the three main hypotheses that were elaborated in the theoretical consideration sketched above, will receive special attention. The four background variables will be dealt with as control variables, no specific hypotheses using these variables will be put forward. The three hypotheses that were outlined above, will be the main guiding lights of this paper. However, as said before, also the link with background variables and with income as a special aspect of the latter will be investigated.

3.2. Data

Data for this paper come from a large scale study among 3.472 teenagers in Flanders. The original dataset contains data on for instance social background, identity, friends, income, parental influence, consumption, shopping and media use. Only a selection of data will be used here.

Data gathering started in November 2005 and lasted until June 2006. Based on data given by the Department of Education of the Flemish Government, a sample of secondary schools was selected, representative on education year (1st to 6th (or 7th)) and educational type (general, technical, vocational or art). The schools in the sample were asked to participate in the study. Participation consisted of having all students in a specific year of a specific education type completing the questionnaire “Youth & Consumption”. Due to the fact that for this study a lot of time was needed and due to the fact that we were not the only ones asking for participation, a second, third and fourth sample had to be constructed, in order to make and keep the sample representative on type and year.

The first sample was constructed in October 2005, the second in December 2005, the third in January 2006 and the fourth in March 2006. Finally, 3.472 usable questionnaires were collected.

3.3. *Measuring instruments*

3.3.1. **Background variables**

Gender and age are aspects that can just be asked. In the sample 55% are boys and 45% are girls. Age varies from 12 to +20, although 90% of the teenagers are between 13 (incl.) and 18 (incl.) years old.

Ethnicity is a more difficult concept to tackle. A question on nationality was integrated in the questionnaire but this does not tell the whole story. Immigrants of the second and third generation can be Belgians, but often they do not see themselves as such. Therefore, a measure of ethnicity was created based on the language spoken at home. Teenagers not speaking Dutch at home or speaking another language besides Dutch at home, will be considered as migrants. This approach is not new as it has been used in other research on Flemish teenagers (see e.g. Mortelmans, Van Assche, & Ottoy, 2002). The other teenagers will be seen as natives, even though these terms do not really always fit well. Based on this approach, 84% of the teenagers will be considered as native.

A fourth and final pure independent variable in the proposed model is the socio-economic status of the teenagers, measured using only the educational level of the parents. A problem with this variable was that a lot of teenagers, almost one third, answered that they did not know the educational level of their parents, as can also be read from Table 1. As exclusion of the teenagers who did not know this piece of information would have a serious impact on the total model, it was decided to give to those teenagers the mean value for educational level. Thus, no education was scored 0, lower education was scored 1, secondary education got the value 2, answering “I don’t know” was labelled 3 and stating higher education yielded value 4. No education means that education was stopped before reaching a degree from primary school. Lower education means that primary school (normally 6 to 12 years) was finished. Mid-level education indicates the completion of secondary school (normally 12 to 18 years of age). Higher education includes as well high school as university as higher.

Table 1: Educational level of the parents (column-percentages)

Educational level	Father	Mother
No	1,9	2,6
Lower education	3,8	4,1
Mid-level education	32,9	31,0
Higher education	30,9	33,1
I don't know	30,5	29,2
Total	100,0	100,0

Based on these data, a new variable was constructed, indicating the educational level of both parents. Adding both resulted in a new variable with a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 8 so nine categories were defined.

3.3.2. Income

The real income of teenagers is constructed of as well pocket money as money they earn themselves, during holidays or weekends. In this model however, only pocket money will be used. For this decision, two reasons can be discerned. First, theoretically, in the model, putting pocket money *causally* before other factors like self-image, peer group pressure and a materialistic attitude can more easily be done than when self-earned money would be integrated. Pocket money is something that is received, often even automatically or at least without persistent asking. The influence of teenagers on whether they get pocket money or the amount they get is suggested to be low¹. Whether they will be working during weekends or holidays is supposed to be more in their own hands. A second reason for the inclusion of pocket money only is that earning money on their own is in Belgium only accepted when teenagers are 15 year or older. As giving pocket money often does not stop when teenagers earn own money, it would be an attack to our model when we would include self-earned money as well. Teenagers who are younger than 15 years of age would be disadvantaged. In this research, teenagers get approximately €9,80 per week.

3.3.3. Self-image

Self-image in this model will be measured using a combination of three aspects of identity. Measuring identity is often done using separate approaches to it and combining them afterwards, as “identity” can not be grasped and thus, also not be measured. Therefore, as in many other researches, the self-image of individuals will be measured using several aspects of it (Adams & Montemayor, 1983; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Schau & Gilly, 2003). In this model, self-esteem, assertiveness and body image, are included as approaches to identity.

Self-esteem was measured using probably the most famous scale of an aspect of identity: the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1968). The 10 items of this scale were translated and some translations were adapted after the pilot study. Finally, we used the scale as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale ($\alpha = ,77$): items and factor loadings

Items	Factor loading
I am at least worth as much as others	,553
I wish I had more respect for myself* ²	,278
I can do the things at least as good as others	,481
Sometimes, I feel useless*	,292
I think positively about myself	,696
It's difficult to be proud of myself*	,419
Generally, I am satisfied with myself	,726
Sometimes, I think I am good for nothing	,439
I think I have some good qualities	,630
Generally, I think I am a looser*	,619

All items scored on 6-point Likert-type scales going from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. We decided not to use a “neutral” answering category to prohibit the teenagers to use the easy

¹ It is not said that this influence can't exist at all. Teenagers with peers receiving more pocket money, are likely to ask their parents for more money too and perhaps these parents will agree. Nevertheless, for this model, this is supposed to happen only very rarely.

² Items with an asterisk require reverse scoring.

way to get it over with. In the analysis, respondents with impossible answering patterns were excluded. The internal consistency of the scale was ok as it's Cronbach's Alpha reached 0,77. In the model, we will use the sum score on this scale as measure of self-esteem for each respondent. This method was chosen above working with factor scores because the latter impose a certain distribution. Theoretically, the minimum on this scale was set on 0. From analyses, it could be read that the mean sum score was 33,77 with a minimum of 9 and a maximum of 50. A recalculation was made so that the minimum would be 0, the maximum thus lowering to 41.

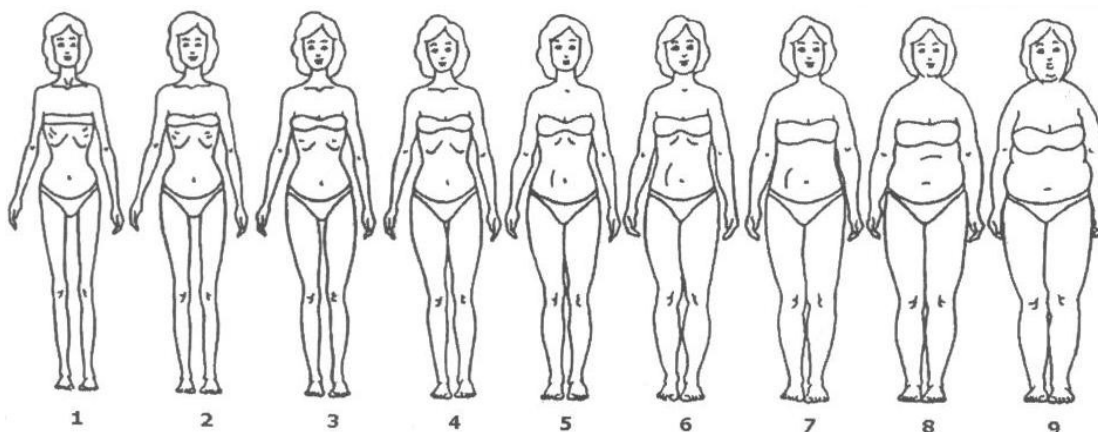
A second integrated aspect was based on the Need for Uniqueness-Scale of Snyder of Fromkin (1977). The original scale consisted of 33 items, but for the pilot study some were already excluded because they were judged not to fit for teenagers. Of the 19 items that were selected, 8 were kept after the pilot study. Using these 8 items that theoretically measured a need to be unique, 4 combined to a factor with a Cronbach's Alpha of ,817. However, this subscale measured something like assertiveness which is of course not entirely the same as a need to be unique. Nevertheless, correlation of this subscale with the larger scale of 8 items with a satisfactory Cronbach's Alpha of ,668 was ,882 ($p = ,000$), so it does not really matter, on statistical grounds, which one to use. We decided to use the smaller one. An overview of the items and their factor loadings is given in Table 3.

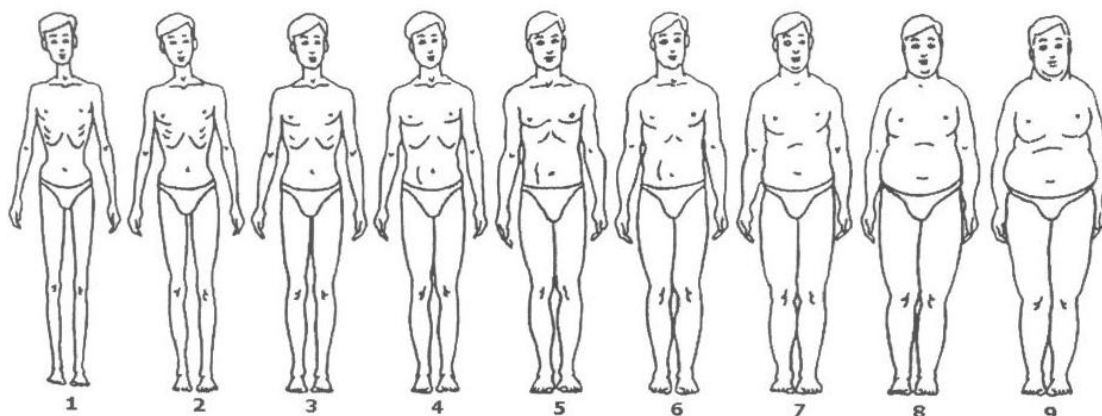
Table 3: Assertiveness scale ($\alpha = ,817$): items and factor loadings

Items	Factor loading
I do not hesitate stating my own opinion, not even for strangers	,727
If I do not agree with the teacher, I let him know	,668
I always say what I think, whatever others think of it	,809
I always strongly defend my own viewpoints	,710

Again, sum scores were used in the model. The theoretical and analytical minimum and maximum were 0 and 20 respectively, mean on this subscale was 12,80.

A third aspect of self that is included, concerns the body image. The body is sometimes said to be the aspect of the self that is so closed connected to it, as it can not be hidden. Several approaches can be used in the measurement of this aspect, but the one chosen in this paper starts from a comparison of images of body figures with the own form. A difficulty is that there is no way to draw human figures with which persons can compare themselves in a 100% realistic way. Nevertheless, these figures can be drawn in such a way that there is no focus on details. In the research, the figures below were used, based on Thompson (1995).





Each time, a respondent did not have to indicate only what figure corresponds the most to their own, they also had to indicate what body figure they would like to have. After erasing a few impossible answers, a calculation was made that would indicate body satisfaction. The absolute value of the difference between actual and wanted body figure was used as a measure³. A third of the teenagers seem to be happy with the body they have and almost half would like a small difference. The others are *unhappy* to a higher degree.

3.3.4. Peer group

Measuring aspects of the peer group of teenagers in a quantitative survey is perhaps as difficult as grasping aspects of identity. Again, choices had to be made. For this paper, the estimated popularity among friends, the attention to social comparison information and a measure of acceptance by others are used as indicators of inclusion in a peer network. Thus, one probably has an estimator that is close to peer group pressure, even though it only takes into account the attention to peers and acceptance by them and a close network upon which one can rely.

Asking how popular a person thinks he or she is, is a bit ambiguous as different definitions of popularity exist. Some think there are not popular because they are not as popular as they want to be among their friends and other teenagers give themselves a label of being popular, while their peers think not so. In the questionnaire, teenagers were asked to what extent they think they are popular in their peer group, on a scale from 0 to 10. Most teenagers think they are somewhat popular as the mean on this scale was 7,31.

A second integrated aspect concerned the extent to which teenagers compare themselves to others. Therefore, the “Attention to Social Comparison Information”-scale that was developed by Lennox and Wolfe (1984) was used. From a list of 13 items of the scale, 6 were selected on a theoretical basis and they reached an Cronbach’s Alpha of ,65. In Table 4, an overview of the items and their factor loadings is given.

³ Therefore of course, a recalculation had to be made, as the absolute value as outlined measures body dissatisfaction

Table 4: Attention to Social Comparison Information ($\alpha = ,65$): items and factor loadings

Items	Factor loading
I don't wear clothes that are not in fashion	,437
It is important to me to fit in my group	,313
If others all behave in a certain way, this is the right way	,300
I pay attention to the clothes of others	,603
I keep my clothes up-to-date by looking at what others wear	,800
I behave as I think others would want me to behave	,451

As it is common in this paper, sum scores were used as measures of this attitude. The theoretical minimum was again 0, the theoretical maximum was 36. Respondents reached scores from 0 to 30. The mean was 13,38.

A third and final aspect of peer group concerns the acceptance by others. This scale was developed by Fey in 1955 (cfr. Wrightsman, 1991) and is, despite its age, still in good shape to measure to what extent people feel accepted by others. Based on the analyses of the pilot study, it was decided to leave one item out of the scale. In that item, the word *critical* was used and apparently, a lot of teenagers did not fully understand that word. This scale reached an acceptable Cronbach's Alpha of ,67. Items and factor loadings are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Acceptance by others-scale ($\alpha = ,67$): items and factor loading

Items	Factor loading
Other often don't want me in their neighbourhood ⁴	,347
Others seem to like me	,551
Other seem to appreciate my opinions	,775
Other seem to understand how I think about things	,687

In accordance with the other scales in the model, sum scores were used as measures. The theoretical and analytical minimum was 0. The theoretical maximum was 24, in analyses a maximum of 20 was reached. The mean on this subscale was 13,81.

These three aspects are used as measurements of the peer group in this model.

3.3.5. Materialism

The two most well-known scales that measure materialistic attitudes are created by Belk (1985) and Richins and Dawson (1992). Both scales consisted out of subscales of which the several dimensions have been discussed above. However, the scales constructed by Belk and Richins and Dawson do not always work well with teenagers. Previous research (Mortelmans, Van Assche, & Ottoy, 2002) and other small investigations in which this scale was used, gave proof of this. In the final questionnaire, a scale of materialism, based on the known scales, was used and it reached a Cronbach's Alpha of ,631. However, it was decided for this paper to use a scale that measured an aspect so closely related to materialism that it can even replace it. This scale is the Possession Satisfaction Index, developed by Scott and Lundstrom (1990). In theory, this scale consisted of 20 items, measuring 5 different aspects. These five aspects were "what possessions can do", "what possessions can not do", "the public image of possessions", "the extent to which possessions are seen as the outer marker of success" and "the more the merrier". In the pilot study, these five factors could not be distinguished.

⁴ Item required reverse scoring.

Therefore, the five best fitting items of the whole scale were used in the final questionnaire. This scale reached a Cronbach's Alpha of ,73. Items and factor loadings are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Possession Satisfaction Index ($\alpha = ,73$): items and factor loadings

Items	Factor loading
Money makes life a lot easier	,582
Being successful, means making a lot of money	,690
Rich people are respected	,531
The more I have, the better I feel	,581
Generally speaking, rich people are happier than poor people	,562

Also for this attitude, sum scores are used as measures. Theoretical minimum and maximum were 0 and 30. In the analyses, a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 25 were reached. The mean was 11,91.

3.4. Approaches to results

All variables are presented. Results of the data analyses of connection between those variables can start. A rather classical approach will be used. First, some bivariate analyses of relations in the model will be discussed. After that, the room is free for the multivariate step-by-step construction of the model. Regression analysis will be used, even though discussion may still arise on some causal paths. Therefore, in the end, correspondence analysis (a non-causal technique) is used to check some results of the path analysis.

4. Results

4.1. Bivariate explorations of measurements of self-image

When using several measurements of one larger concept, one has to be sure that these measurements do not correlate too highly. Otherwise the proposed model would not be working at all. Therefore, the correlations of the measurements of self-image and peer group were inspected. It seems that self-esteem, assertiveness and body dissatisfaction were significantly correlated, but not to a high extent. Teenagers with a higher self-esteem are more assertive. Youngsters with lower body satisfaction seem to have lower self-esteem and are a little less assertive.

Table 7: Correlations of the three measurements of self-image

		Assertiveness	Body Satisfaction
Self-esteem	Pearson Corr.	,266	,212
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000
	N	3222	3128
Assertiveness	Pearson Corr.		,070
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N		3231

4.2. *Bivariate explorations of measurements of peer group*

Two of the three integrated aspects of peer group are correlated to a larger extent. Feeling popular and feeling accepted are not at all two total different aspects. It also seems that teenagers who pay attention to others feel more accepted even though the correlation of ,112 is rather small. The relation here can also be interpreted in the other direction. As said before, causality is not an issue in this paper. Feeling popular and paying attention to aspects of social comparison are even so positively correlated.

Table 8: Correlations of the three measurements of peer group

		Soc. Comp.	Acceptance
Popularity	Pearson Corr.	,078	,410
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000
	N	3238	3336
Social Comparison	Pearson Corr.		,112
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N		3215

4.3. *Bivariate explorations of correlations between measurements of self-image and peer group*

Feeling accepted by others and having a higher self-esteem have a Pearson correlation measure of ,321. These two attitudes seem to go hand in hand. This feeling of being accepted by others will also bring teenagers more to stating their own opinions towards others (corr. ,264). Acceptance by others and body satisfaction are also positively correlated (corr. ,118). If a teenager does not like his or her own body, it seems that he or she also feels not accepted by his peers. Feeling popular and a high self-esteem go together as well. The same can be said of feeling popular and being assertive. Popularity and body image are also related in a positive way. Disliking the own body seems to be connected to not feeling popular among others. It also seems so that teenagers with a higher self-esteem or teenagers who are assertive pay less attention to others. A connection between liking the own body and paying attention to others seems to be non-existing.

Table 9: Correlations of measurements of self-image and of peer group

		Feeling of popularity	Social Comparison	Acceptance by others
Self-esteem	Pearson Corr.	,297	-,075	,321
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000
	N	3253	3107	3197
Assertiveness	Pearson Corr.	,210	-,042	,264
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,017	,000
	N	3370	3208	3301
Body Satisfaction	Pearson Corr.	,132	,011	,118
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,546	,000
	N	3269	3117	3201

4.4. *Bivariate explorations of correlations between materialism and the other dependent variables*

As can be read from Table 10 , the amount of pocket money a teenagers receives is related to a higher materialistic attitude. Self-esteem and assertiveness are also slightly positively

related. Body satisfaction and a materialistic attitude seem to be non-related. Teenagers who feel popular are slightly more materialistic and attention to social comparison is certainly related to higher levels of a materialistic attitude. Also, youngsters who feel accepted by others are a bit more materialistic.

Table 10: Correlations of materialism with measurements of self-image, peer group and pocket money

		Possession Satisfaction
Pocket money per week	Pearson Corr.	,125
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000
	N	3346
Self-esteem	Pearson Corr.	,042
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,018
	N	3199
Assertiveness	Pearson Corr.	,084
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000
	N	3314
Body Satisfaction	Pearson Corr.	,006
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,739
	N	3215
Feeling of popularity	Pearson Corr.	,057
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,001
	N	3344
Social comparison	Pearson Corr.	,290
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000
	N	3205
Acceptance by others	Pearson Corr.	,052
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,003
	N	3294

4.5. Multivariate analyses

All these relations will be focused upon again, but now from a multivariate perspective. The model as outlined above will be built up, step by step, using several regression models.

4.5.1. Model 1

In a first model, the amount of pocket money is the sole dependent variable. The effect of the several independent variables, gender, age, ethnicity and SES will be investigated. Pocket money consists of only 8 categories, but will be treated as a continuous variable, so linear regression will be used. In Table 11 we can read some results that could easily be expected. Boys seem to get a bit more pocket money than girls. Reasons for this are hard to find. Is it still true that boys are seen as those who will be economically responsible later and girls will become the mothers who stay at home – in a traditional sense? We don't know, but the difference of approximately €1,50 per week remains, as bivariate analysis gives as result. Boys get approximately €10,10 per week, for girls this is €8,70. As common sense could predict, the amount of pocket money raises when teenagers grow older. A 13-year old gets €4 per week, for a 17-year old, this is €12, again read from bivariate analysis. In bivariate analysis however, it seemed that non-native teenagers get about €3,00 more per week than native Flemish teenagers. From a multivariate perspective, this effect is not present anymore. As in bivariate analysis, as far as the effect of SES concerns, the direction of the effect and its presence remain. The higher the educational level of the parents, the lower the amounts of

pocket money teenagers get. Probably this has to do with a culture about economic responsibilities of children among parents with lower educational levels and with the fact that among parents with higher educational levels teenagers may get a lot but not in the form of pocket money. These independent variables explain 16% of the variation of the amount of pocket money, to a large extent by the integration of age.

Table 11: Regression analysis on pocket money (model 1)

	Beta	Sig.
Gender (0 = boy; 1 = girl)	-,063	,000
Age (continuous (10 cat))	,376	,000
Ethnicity (0 = native; 1 = non-native)	,020	,210
SES (continuous (9 cat))	-,053	,001
<hr/>		
R ² =	,162	

4.5.2. Models 2

The title of this paragraph is not wrong. There are several models to be tested in this phase. Each time, one of the variables of self-image or peer group will be used as dependent. The five variables that played the game in model 1 will be considered as independent. Results of the six different regression models are presented in Table 12.

Table 12: Regression analyses on self-image and peer group (models 2a-2f)

	β Self-esteem	β Assertiveness	β Body satisfaction	β Popularity	β Social comparison	β Acceptance
Gender (0 = boy; 1 = girl)	-,201***	-,111***	-,083***	,000	,042*	,055**
Age (continuous (10 cat))	-,009	,044*	,005	-,033	-,115***	-,012
Ethnicity (0 = native; 1 = non-native)	,092***	,114***	,015	,062***	-,025	,015
SES (continuous (9 cat))	,086***	-,002	,066***	,034	-,013	,050**
Pocket money (continuous (8 cat))	,019	,111***	,019	,123***	,081***	,066**
R ²	,052	,047	,010	,016	,013	,007

*** $\rightarrow p < ,001$; ** $\rightarrow p < ,01$; * $\rightarrow p < ,05$

A first thing that must be read from the data above, is that explanation power of socio-demographic and socio-economic variables on aspects of self-image and attitudes towards the peer group is not high. Self-image and peer group seem to stand apart from these background variables; a post-modern touch?

Taking a closer look at the significant effect, some relations can be discerned. Boys seem to have a higher self-esteem, are more assertive and are also happier with their body forms. They compare themselves to others more and feel also slightly more accepted in the group. On the whole, boys seem to be better off. Age explained a lot in model 1, when pocket money was at stake, but in the models 2, its influence is rare. When teenagers grow older they are less involved in social comparison and they are also slight more assertive. Non-native teenagers

have a higher self-esteem and are more assertive. They also judge their popularity to be higher than native teenagers. Teenagers with parents with higher educational levels seem to have a higher self-esteem and are more satisfied with their form of body. They also feel slightly more accepted by their peers. Finally, the amount of pocket money teenagers get seems to be in relation with how assertive they are. Pocket money is also positively related to all three aspects of peer group.

4.5.3. Model 3

The models above however, are not the main issue of this paper. What we want to know is to what extent all these variables are related to an attitude of materialism.

Table 13: Regression analysis on Possession Satisfaction Index (model 3)

	Beta	Sig.
Self-esteem (continuous)	,015	,433
Assertiveness (continuous)	,046	,010
Body Satisfaction (continuous)	-,023	,175
Popularity (continuous)	,012	,534
Attention to social comparison (continuous)	,314	,000
Acceptance by others (continuous)	,004	,848
Pocket money (continuous (8 cat))	,021	,244
Gender (0 = boy; 1 = girl)	-,166	,000
Age (continuous (10 cat))	,183	,000
Ethnicity (0 = native; 1 = non-native)	,035	,039
SES (continuous (9 cat))	,026	,124
R ² = ,159		

In Table 13, opposed to what would have been expected, the connections between aspects of self-image and aspects of peer group with a materialistic attitude seem to be non-existing for most of the variables. There is a strong connection between the attention to social comparison teenagers pay and their materialistic attitude, but this probably has to do with the fact that in the measurement of this attention to social comparison, consumer aspects like clothes were used. There are also strong connections between materialism and three of the four integrated background variables. Boys are more materialistic than girls, the older teenagers are, the more materialistic they become and native teenagers are a little less materialistic than non-native teenagers. A final connection seems to be existing between being assertive and being materialistic. As being materialistic could be seen as a belief in the showing off with things, assertiveness can be seen as the showing off with words, and they seem related.

4.6. Correspondence analysis

To tackle the critique on the causal order integrated in regression models (why indeed, would paying attention to others cause materialism and is it not the other way around), a correspondence analysis was used with all variables in the model.

As correspondence analysis works with categorical variables and linear regression analysis works with continuous variables, some categorisations had to be made. We decided to work with three categories as maximum, to keep the plot readable. For the continuous variables, the mean plus or minus the standard deviation was treated as the mid category. The two sides that were left (on the left and on the right side) constituted the two other categories.

A first HOMALS-analysis revealed that teenagers not receiving pocket money are such a different group that the model was hardly readable and thus, difficult to interpret. Therefore, those teenagers were excluded. In the plot that arose after this exclusion, some results from the regression analysis find confirmation. We can discern four quadrants in Figure 2. The PSI-values can be found in the upper left and lower right quadrant. The low PSI-value finds the youngest teenagers in its neighbourhood, girls, native Flemish teenagers and those teenagers whose parents have a higher educational level. In the lower right quadrant, the high PSI-value is found, as are the older teenagers, boys, migrants and teenagers with parents of lower educational level.

In the regression analysis, there was clearly no connection between getting pocket money and being materialistic. In this Homals-plot (and after the exclusion of those teenagers who do not get pocket money), it can be read that teenagers who get €10,00 per week or less are less materialistic than those teenagers who get more. Thus it, might be true that by giving more pocket money, a value on possessions is promoted. However, the connection with age might be an interfering one.

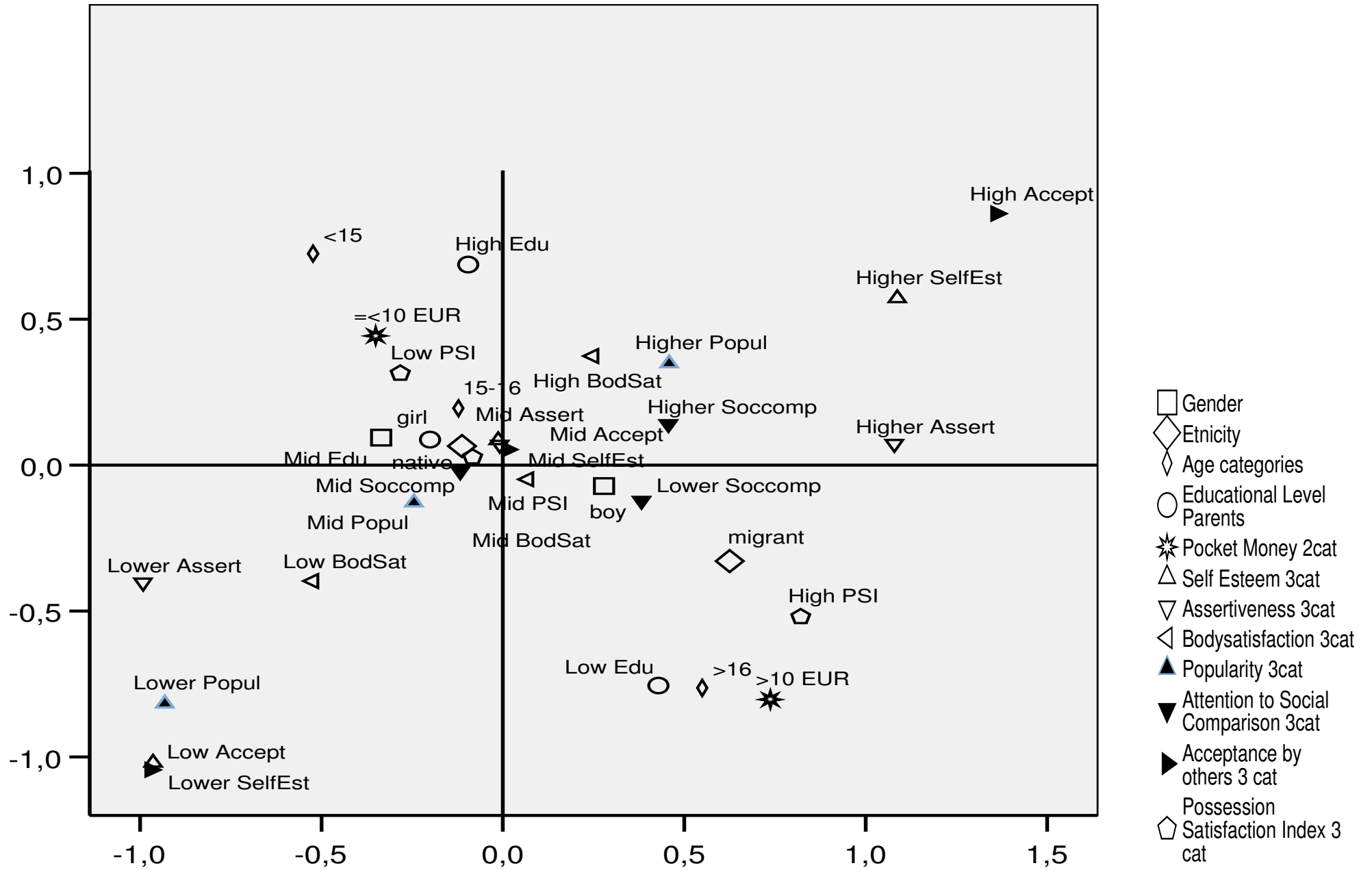
In the model, we can also discern that aspects of self-image and peer group can be found in the other two quadrants, seemingly independent of a materialistic attitude. One aspect that can be found in a quadrant where also PSI-values can be found is precisely the attention to social comparison, which also had a connection with PSI in the regression analysis. Different from regression analysis though, it seems that not only those who score higher on social comparison are more materialistic (as seen in the regression), but also those who score particularly low (maybe due to the small categories that were used in the analysis).

When looking at the other variables which were not the final goals of the analysis, it is clear that, from the lower left to the upper right, we can see the teenagers who score lower on these variables, followed by those who are mid-categories and those who score higher. A connection of self-image and peer group aspects seems clear; a connection with a materialistic value is not.

5. Discussion

In the discussion, we turn back to the three hypotheses we had put forward. First, we hypothesized that teenagers with a lower self-image are more susceptible to peer pressure. With three measures on self-image and three measures on peer pressure, one could find support for this hypothesis. Self-esteem, assertiveness and body satisfaction are related to feelings of popularity, attention to social comparison and acceptance by others in the way that was supposed. Teenagers with a higher self-esteem think of themselves as being more popular and more accepted and pay also less attention to social comparison information. The same can be said of teenagers who are more assertive. Stating this, is not repeating oneself, as we have seen that both aspects are not correlated to a too high extent, although they, of course, are related to one another in a way. A higher body satisfaction is related to feelings of a higher popularity and more acceptance. There is no relation with attention to social comparison information.

Figure 2: HOMALS-plot of all variables (Eigen value dimension 1 (horizontal) = ,164; Eigen value dimension 2 (vertical) = ,140)



Special attention must be paid to the used wordings above. Some relations are interpreted causally, but causality between these items is not at stake. It is just a way to view the correlations. When it is stated that teenagers with higher self-esteem feel more accepted by others, it is not stated that *because* they have a higher self-esteem they feel more accepted or that it is *due* to the fact that they feel more accepted, they have a higher self-esteem. A correlation is stated, a causal relation is not. Nevertheless, hypothesis H1, supposing that teenagers with a lower self-image are more susceptible to peer pressure, can be confirmed.

Hypothesis two put forward that teenagers with a lower self-image were more materialistic. Looking at the bivariate analysis, one would be inclined to find support for this hypothesis. Self-esteem and assertiveness are slightly positively correlated to possession satisfaction. A relation between body satisfaction and possession satisfaction could not be discerned. Multivariate analysis however, shed a totally different light on these supposed relations. Only assertiveness and possessions satisfaction seemed to be somewhat related, but in the opposite direction as what would have been expected. Also the HOMALS-plot did not show support for hypothesis 2. Therefore, it is considered as falsified.

The third hypothesis considered a possible relation between elements of peer group pressure and possession satisfaction as measure of a materialistic attitude. Bivariate analysis seemed to give backup for this relation. Feeling popular, paying attention to social comparison and feeling accepted by others were all positively related to possession satisfaction. From a multivariate perspective, only one connection remained. Paying attention to social comparison information and possession satisfaction were highly positively related. Seeing this payment of attention to social comparison information as an indicator of susceptibility to peer group pressure, it could be stated that teenagers who are more susceptible to pressure from the peer group attach more importance to satisfaction through the possession of things. However, this relation must be handled with care. The items used to measure attention to social comparison did have some consumption elements in them, namely clothes. When approaching clothes purely as consumer objects, the relation between attention to social comparison and possessions satisfaction becomes less sure. Clothes however, are more than consumer objects, they can be seen as indicators of a social identity, of which the choice highly influenced by peer group pressure. Then, it could be stated that teenagers scoring high on measurement of clothes as indicator of social identity, also see possessions as indicators of success and happiness. The HOMALS-plot did not really support this aspect of the regression analysis, but possibly this is due to small groups of teenagers with high and low attention to social comparison information. Thus, the position towards hypothesis 3 is ambiguous. Regression analysis would lead to support, correspondence analysis would not. Due to the critique on the correspondence analysis outlined above, we are inclined to support the hypothesis that susceptibility to peer group pressure and a materialistic attitude are related.

Other important elements that can be read from the HOMALS-plot are the close connections of background variables with possession satisfaction. Non-native, older teenagers (who earn more money) with parents of lower education seem to attach more importance to possessions as indicators of success and happiness. The post-modern condition that could be seen in the disconnection of aspects of peer group and

self-image from background variables, is not at all present in this relation. The amount of pocket money plays a role but probably just because older teenagers get more of it. However, it is also true that teenagers who do not get pocket money at all seem to take a totally different position. This can be deduced from the fact that they had to be excluded from the HOMALS-analysis to make the plot readable.

At the end of the discussion of the results, it must be admitted that explanation power of the different models was often low. The variation of the amount of pocket money teenagers get was explained for 16% and the same holds for the explanation of possession satisfaction. In both cases, it were the background variables that were of primary explanation. The variation of other integrated dependent aspects are explained for not more than 5%, which is low.

6. Conclusion

The models elaborated above are not put forward as state-of-art. They are part of a larger exploration of the link between identity, peer group pressure and consumption. Therefore, one must be cautious when drawing conclusions. Only few aspects of self-image and few aspects of peer group were integrated in this model. Furthermore, only one aspect of consumption, the attitude of possession satisfaction, is integrated in it. Only when more aspects of identity, peer group and consumption are linked, further reaching conclusions may be drawn. Furthermore, one must be aware that there can not be any research in which all aspects of identity, peer group or consumption can be integrated. Selection is always a central issue.

Nevertheless, from this analysis, we could state that the often supposed link between identity and consumer attitudes among teenagers does not hold if we control for peer related aspects and a few background variables. There is also only one peer related aspect that has a clear connection with a materialistic attitude (controlled for other variables) and this might be due to the wordings of the items, so this connection might not be pure. Further investigations into these possible connections are necessary. These first analyses can point to direction where this further research could go. At least, more background variables, more aspects of identity, more aspects of peer group and more aspects of consumption must be included. Then, more will be known about the connection between self-image and consumption and the role of symbolic consumer behaviour among teenagers. But as the game of consumption and identity is, also the results of analysis of it might remain unclear.

7. References

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