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Amy O'Connor

'If I could, I would': Desire Among Low Capital Consumers

This interpretive research studies consumer desire in low cultural capital consumers. Previous studies on the practices and decision-making processes of these consumers described functional tastes for the necessary due to a culturally shaped habitus. In depth interviews focused on desires revealed three key findings. Participants had sophisticated tastes that directly contrasted to their cultural capital and actualised consumption. They were willing to commit to the act of self-seduction, even when hope of completing consumption was slim to non-existent. Finally, desires were influenced by the portrayal of goods and lifestyles in the media more so than the desire to compete with the socially elite, as previous studies have argued. Desires were not framed by cultural capital or habitus; participants were simply unable to actualise desires due to economic limitations. This inability to recreate desired lifestyles resulted in a frustration between actual and desired consumption.

Keywords: Desire, cultural capital, taste, media, marketing



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INTRODUCTION

The focus of this paper is to explore consumer desire in low cultural capital (LCC) consumers. Cultural capital consists of a set of socially rare and distinctive tastes, skills, knowledge and practices (Bourdieu 1984) or a "culture of critical discourse" (Gouldner 1979). LCC consumers have previously been considered "unprofitable" and "risky" (Alwitt and Donley 1996) and academically have been of disinterest to marketers (Curtis 2000; Winnett and Thomas 2003). LaPoint and Hambrick-Dixon (2003) highlight that the majority of research in this field is predominantly focused on the "middle-class" population with Kotler (1982) adding that LCC consumerism is one of the most neglected areas in marketing; resulting in a gap in the literature. An issue of importance given that world unemployment figures are set to rise in 2013 (Rusche 2013).

The composition of the LCC consumer has changed, the proportion of UK pensioners living in poverty has halved since the early 1990s, while the proportion of working age adults without children in poverty has risen steadily, from 7% in 1981 to 20% in 2010/11 (Aldridge et al 2012). Mayo (2005) argues "the poverty in Britain is

worse than in poor countries because it is so isolating. The discrepancy is staring you in the face all the time—on TV, in the shops.” (p.23). Current policy is also changing which will directly the make up of this consumer. 2013 welfare cuts will hit LCC consumers more than once through cuts to both housing-related and non-housing benefits. Orsi and Duskow (2009) claim that more people are looking for sustainable ways of living, thus the market for profiting off low income consumers is increasing. Some brands have already profited, for example 22% of low-income consumers are more likely to buy Kellogg’s than any other cereal brand (MarketingWeek 2012). Economists have studied the rise of companies such as Amazon and iTunes which have succeeded in selling lower price goods en-mass to consumers who aren’t prepared to pay high prices, maximizing on the “long tail” of the economy (Anderson 2004).

Although some research does exist its focus is often the mundane spending habits and purchasing decisions of LCC consumers. Particular attention had been paid to food (Hamilton and Catterall 2005) and medication (Mills et al 2002) with the intention of informing health care policy. Recently, however, there has been increased interest in integrating elements of social context into models of choice. Allen’s 2002 study on choices made by female school leavers of LCC found their choices thoroughly infused by a culturally shaped habitus. This paper is useful in understanding the context in which choices are made and is a step forward in understanding passionate consumption but fails to examine the desires of these participants; focusing solely on choices and class. Similarly Holts 1998 paper on the tastes of LCC consumers compared to consumers with high cultural capital (HCC) argues that “a theory describing differences in consumption across groups must explain these differences in terms of tastes, pleasures, and desires rather than strategic action” (p.3). The paper, however, falls short by separating desires from taste and instead focuses on motivation and existing spending habits of LCC consumers, as opposed to desire to spend. The same can be said for Bourdieu’s influential text *Distinction* (1984) which explains that within the field of consumption, tastes are stratified on the basis of the objective social conditions that structure the habitus. This research recognises previous studies that establish how motivation to consume is ultimately framed by the habitus of LCC consumers. It will, however, shift focus on the desire of LCC consumers in order to better understand the significance of cultural capital in shaping tastes and desires, this will also add to existing work on desire.

The subject of desire has risen in popularity following a key paper by Belk et al (2003) which argues consumer desire is an overwhelmingly powerful emotion, often eclipsing other motivational constructs such as wants and needs. This has led to more recent work on the imagination (Jenkins et al 2011) and desire in the digital virtual world (Denegri-Knott 2010). This study will work on understanding elements of the cycle of desire which haven’t previously been prioritised; a theory which is key in consumer research as it can be described as a motivating force of consumption, which can be sparked by advertising and marketing or self seduction (Belk 2003). Work into desires of LCC consumers will not only answer calls for research into desire (Hamilton 2011; Belk et al 2003) but also inform gaps in the literature of LCC consumption answering Schors 2004 call for research into qualitative work in understanding consumption pressures in low income consumers. Understanding desire is key as the widely accepted consensus within consumer research is that consumption cannot be categorised as involving the need for fulfillment, reasoned choice and utility maximisation as these distanced processes ignore the passionate discourses around motivation for consumption. By understanding the desires of this rising demographic,

the significance of cultural capital in framing tastes and influencing desire will be assessed.

The paper is divided into three sections. Firstly, it will define and contextualise desire and LCC consumption. Secondly, gaps in the literature will be introduced in the theoretical research and the need for research into the relationship between cultural capital, desire and hope will be discussed. The methods of the research will be established including the delicate task of the sampling process and interview framework, allowing closer comparisons with existing consumer research. Finally, the key findings will be presented followed by calls for research that will contribute further to the understanding of low-income consumers and the nature of desire.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature will first contextualise existing research into the LCC consumer, after which papers on LCC behaviour will be evaluated. This will then be linked to existing work on desire and used to inform the methodology of this research.

LCC Consumers

Weber coined the term “social class” in 1978 to progress from the economic resource model described by Marx. He argues that societies split into reputational groups’ based on economic and noneconomic criteria such as lifestyles, cultures and morals. Limiting research regarding class differences to the economic domain runs the risk of neglecting complex social-psychological relations that may lie at the heart of these differences (Henry 2004). Prior to Weber (1978), work by Warner et al (1949) theorised status based consumption patterns, arguing objects of consumption act as positional markers underpinning status boundaries. Due to this, elites compete in an ongoing game of consumption patterns that lower class consumers endeavor to emulate. Although influential at the time, modern theorists have discredited its value in an era of transnational consumer capitalism (see Holt 1998 for a comprehensive critique). It can also be considered as over deterministic as according to Baudrillard (1981) a defining characteristic of advanced capitalist society is the over production of commodity signs, making the context of consumption too vast and thus class analysis redundant. The theory offers no description of the chosen affinities between specific groups and consumption motivation, which Schaninger (1981) argues has left a breach in the literature and opened the debate in marketing concerning the rationalisation of cultural capital predicting consumption patterns.

Bourdieu (1984) describes how diverse capitals operate in the social fields of consumption. He argues that social life can be conceived as a multidimensional game of status drawing on social capital, economic and cultural resources to compete for overarching cultural capital. Holt (1998) elucidates that cultural capital exists in three principle forms, practical knowledge’s, skills and dispositions. These forms are objectified in cultural objects such as official degrees and diplomas that are prioritised in an over determined manner within social elites. These experiences specific to cultural elites make up a way of feeling, thinking and acting; Bourdieu (1984) described as the “habitus”. Other theorists of modernity agree, stressing how cultural capital is endorsed in elite fields of consumption or manifested preferences such as art, business, clothing, food and hobbies; stating these institutional domains are playing fields in which competition for assignment in social hierarchy takes place. Bourdieu (1984) explains that cultural goods and activities vary in the level of cultural capital required to consume them successfully. Although influential this work fails to understand if those of LCC also desire to compete in the fields of social elite and consumer cultural goods, instead it is

simply noted that in terms of consumption they don't. In addition, it places emphasis on successful consumption, instead of desires that are simply truncated given the lack of resources. Campbell (1987) provides a provocative attack on social class theories in framing consumption, questioning if the imagination too is structured by cultural capital. Furthermore little work has been conducted to establish whether consumers of LCC recognise the same fields of importance established by theorist even though they may not have the means to partake in them. Although Bourdieu (1984) touches on the idea of taste declaring status boundaries are reproduced simply through expressing ones taste, this study will question if the culturally defined habitus of the LCC consumer defines the imagination too. Additionally Bourdieu (1984) can be criticised for using Mondrian paintings and Bach concertos as measures of evaluation and failing to draw on other elements of leisure activities such as fashion, sports and vacations.

Holt (1998) argues that these fields should be central to research and his study compares informants from HCC and LCC using qualitative in depth home interviews. This and subsequent studies focus on the behaviour of LCC consumers. Holt's (1998) participants had, at most, completed high school education and all worked in manual labour or service/clerical work as did their parents before them. By questioning participants on their consumer behaviour he found LCC taste to be functional and practical and their social world to be extensively more closed than that of HCC consumers. For example vacation destinations were significantly less exotic than those of HCC. Holt (1998) failed, however, to question whether the LCCs would desire to travel more or further but simply don't due to economic reasons. This would be useful information for brands offering low cost holidays should, as Holts (1998) research suggest, companies promote local trips as LCCs feel comfortable in their local area or do they desire to see more of the world? Holt (1998) argues that LCCs find comfort in the familiar, prefer mass produced items, have narrow ranges of entertainment consumption and prefer material abundance over experiences. Although influential to this paper these findings fail to question a desire for the dissimilar, authentic cultural objects and new experiences. It instead focuses on behaviour and not desire, which limits our understanding of a key motivational element of consumption.

Campbell's work (1987) contradicts Holts (1998) argument that LCC consumers find comfort in their surroundings. He instead states that consumers are "typically striving to make their consumption conform to the pattern exhibited by one group and deviate from those manifested by another." (p.51). Prior to this, Veblen (1925) argued that when looking at social status that either an individual's demand for goods or services is increased by the fact that others are seen to be consuming them, which can be linked to Douglas and Isherwood (1979) envy theory of needs, or decreased by the fact that others are consuming them. These theories are the basis for many papers on conspicuous consumption which are often criticised for presuming that all consumers have the same ideal and assuming that each class sees the one immediately above it as embodying these values to a higher degree than their own. More recently, Berger and Ward (2010) have taken an empirical approach to see if varying cultural capital affects the subtlety of desired branded products. They argue that one motive for expensive purchases is to seem wealthy, and that price perception is a good measure of whether an item expresses desired characteristics to observers. Unlike Holt (1998) Berger and Wards (2010) findings show that participants desired to appear differentiated from the mainstream. Elliott and Leonard (2004) support this adding those living in poverty consume and display expensive brands to avoid the social stigma attached to their social status. Katja and Roper (2008) agree with their research showing LCC teenagers are less clear in their self-concept and are under more pressure to "keep up" with the lasted

fashion trends of their HCC counterparts. This contradicts the taste for necessity and function (Allen 2002; Holt 1998).

In recent times, Arsel and Bean's study (2013) found taste is only class conditioned to a certain extent. They contend that the marketplace provides consumers with an "endless sources of narrative influence that affect how taste is practiced within class boundaries and used for subtle distinction" (p.912), allocating credit to the media as well as other marketplace mediums in addition to class conditioning. Although this work looked predominantly on privileged individuals and couples living in America it is still interesting in understanding the formation of taste.

Existing research aims to better understand the LCC consumer in depth by looking at their behaviour. Allen's 2002 paper on choice for post secondary education studies both HCC and LCC participants. He argues behavioural decision research has started to focus on choices far less deliberate and extensive than rational choice theory suggests, thus he focuses in depth on choices made but fails to question the desire of his participants. His research highlights a working class taste for necessity with choices thoroughly saturated by a culturally formed habitus. By understanding desires this research will work to question the taste for necessity. This is supported by the work of Allen (1970) who notes that simply because a person behaves in a certain way does not mean that he desires to do so. Holt (2004) again looks at the consumption patterns of LCC consumers in the context of masculinity. The paper draws on the argument that LCC men have the strongest desires for compensatory consumption (Kimmel and Kaufman 1995; Schwalbe 1995). Holt, however, finds that his participants reject many of the symbolic trappings of working class machismo. Although he concludes LCC men still unconsciously inflected their masculine consumption within class-structured understandings. Here, again, we see the ambiguous boundaries of cultural capital influencing desires.

These papers highlight a discrepancy in the desires of LCC consumers. Some argue tastes are functional (Holt 1998, Allen 2002) while others argue they desire overtly branded and conspicuous items (Berger and Ward 2010; Katja and Roper 2008; Elliott and Leonard 2004). Disagreement also exists on the importance of cultural capital and class boundaries in framing taste and desire further adding to the importance of a study focusing singularly on LCC consumer desire.

Desire

Consumer research has expanded in passionate consumption and choice experiences including impulsive consumption (Rook 1987) compulsive consumption, (O'Guinn and Faber 1989) captivating experiences, (Thompson et al 1990) fantasies (Levy 1986, 1999) and hedonic experiences (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). However one of the most influential pieces of research in this field is *The Fire of Desire* conducted by Belk et al (2003), which focuses solely on desire as a motivation behind a large extent of contemporary consumption. Belk et al (2003) argue that desire is "a powerful cyclic emotion that is both discomfoting and pleasurable" (p.326) driven by self-seduction, longing and hopefulness among other things. The paper describes desire as "a hot, passionate emotion quite different from the dispassionate discourse of fulfilling wants and needs" (p.327). They define consumer desire as a passion between consumption and social contexts but fail to look in depth at the social situational context of specific consumer capital.

Social situational context, although not the premise of the paper, is recognised with Belk et al (2003) agreeing with Baudrillard (1981) "desire is a notion directly addressing the social character of motivation" (p.328). This highlights an awareness of

desire being linked to the social world. However not everyone always gives into their desires, Elliott (1992) states that our wish to desire is conflicted by urges between control and freedom. This paper will question the extent of this battle within LCC consumers.

One of the most interesting findings from *The Fire of Desire*, in relation to this study, is the response from the low income older informants from Turkey. These participants presented a pragmatic feeling that they could not entertain the idea of desire due to a lack of hope at ever obtaining it. Belk et al (2003) understands this to mean "passionate desire is available, but not necessarily accessible, to all" (p.335) which contradicts Leach's work (1993) of "democratization" or affordability of desire to everyone in a globalised world. An additional finding is that of otherness, in which the desire is to escape to something far better, surpassing the mundane. This is linked to negative feelings towards a current existence, something many would presume is the case for LCC consumers, but which this paper will question instead of assume. Belk et al (2003) neglect to specify if the desire for otherness is different among those of LCC compared to HCC. This could be linked to the work of Gorn & Goldberg (1977) whose research found that LCC participants generally have lower expectations in comparison to those of HCC. This relates to the initial process of desire, self-seduction, where desire is refined and maintained until the object is acquired or until it becomes obvious that it's beyond hope that it will never be acquired. These low expectations and lack of hope could result in desire becoming a less pleasurable experience for LCC consumers leading to a lack of desire for desire. Counter research, however, has shown that individuals from low-income backgrounds are more likely to focus on materialism and financial success as a result of hopelessness and inadequacy (Chang & Arkin 2002; Elliott & Leonard 2004). The idea of hopeless fantasies was present in Belk's 2001 paper on specialty magazines, which he describes as constantly renewing desires in their readers. This contradicts the work of Campbell (1990) who proposes that individuals are "reluctant to engage in acts which they cannot satisfactorily justify to themselves" (p. 42). These conflicting views justify the call for further research into the relationship between hope and desire.

Although *The Fire of Desire* has contributed towards the research of desire in LCC consumers, these participants were not the focus of the paper. Which leads us to question Belk et al's (2003) argument that those who cannot afford to hope or consume must resolve not to desire. In addition we answer the call for research that suggests that cultural capital work will be important in the understanding of hope and desire (Belk et al 2003). In studying this form of passionate consumption, this paper is not concerned with hedonic or deviant desire specifically nor does it prioritise high involvement consumption over any other form of consumption. Instead, like Belk et al (2003), it considers objects and states of passionate desire. The focus is on lived experiences, emotions, thoughts and opinions evoked by consumers of LCC when asked to reflect upon desire.

METHODS

The study adopts an interpretive approach in order to best understand desire among LCC consumers living in mid size towns and one city; this is consistent with work carried out linking cultural capital to consumption (Holt 1998; Allen 2002). In depth interviewing (Thompson et al 1989) was selected as a method that has been used in similar and relevant research (Belk 2003; Holt 1998). As previously expressed, desire cannot be reduced to quantifiable, objective data. Thus it is necessary to adopt an interpretative research method, focusing on the experience of desire amongst the

participants. Nine Participants were selected on the basis of cultural capital resources following the framework of Holt (1998). All participants were from a working-class background, have no academic qualifications above GCSE level and do manual labour, service or clerical work (see table 1). Alternatively they receive government benefits for the unemployed. During the interview process all members discussed the day-to-day economic struggle they face. An attempt was made to select participants from different areas in the UK in order to avoid regional particularities in their desires, although due to the sampling procedure six of the informants originate from the same town in the East Midlands. The remaining three participants were from Dorset, Reading and Newcastle. Four males and five females were interviewed to avoid gender preferences and the age range of the participants varies from 23 to 53. Thirty three percent of the participants owned their own home, a figure dramatically below the UK national average of 64% (Marsden 2012). Only three of the participants households has access to a car which is below the 2011 UK average of 11 cars per 10 households (Marsden 2012) and five out of the nine participants were parents.

Table 1- Respondent Profiles

Informant/Age	From	Education	Occupation	Relationship staus/ Partners occupation	Fathers Occupation	Mothers Occupation
Jen/45	N'hamp*	GCSEs	Receiving benefits waiting to start new job	Married/ Plasterer	Builder	Hairdresser
Kate/53	N'hamp	GCSEs	Clerical work in bank post room	Single	Textiles	Lot of odd jobs
Alice/26	N'hamp	GCSEs	Mental health service	Partner/ unemployed	Brick layer	Didn't work
Dan/23	Newcastle	GCSEs	Mental health service	Partner/admin	Labourer	Cook in nursing home
Pete/44	N'hamp	GCSEs	Mental health service	Married/Admin	Labourer	House wife
Heather/37	N'hamp	GCSEs	Mental health service	Partner/Business	Odd jobs	Clerical work
Sam/27	N'hamp	GCSEs	Processes cheques	Partner/ unemployed	Factory labourer	Redundant
Jack/27	Dorset	GCSEs	Bar Work	Single	Marine	Clerical work for Marines
Jane/51	Reading	GCSEs	Part time school assistant	Divorced	Carpenter	Cleaner

Purpose sampling (Mills 2001) was used and mutual friends who understood the aim of the research introduced informants to the researcher. From this, several participants were collected via snowball sampling, hence why four of the participants work in the mental health field and six are from the same town. Finally letters were sent from a

school to parents whose children are eligible for free school meals, from this one participant volunteered. The sampling process had to be conducted with tact and careful attention to how the research was presented as the topic of income is considered sensitive (Marquis et al 1986). The researcher made clear the intention was to inform gaps in existing research and framed the research as an opportunity to express desires in a safe environment, an experience many participants expressed as enjoyable. In addition, these methods of sampling ensured that all participants were unknown to the interviewer, this creation of a new relationship offered the opportunity to gain access to their inner personal life (Kvale 2007) as well as increase the confidentiality of the process. All the interviews took place between February and March 2013 and lasted from fifty to ninety minutes.

Interviews were conducted in the home and work place allowing for observations as well as data collection. This is also consistent with the work of Holt (1998) and more recent studies including Denegri-Knott (2010) and Arsel and Bean (2013). This was valuable as participants were more relaxed in familiar surroundings and were also able to draw on their environment as evidence for their response. Many gestured at things they would desire to change in their homes and the researcher was able to see the contrast between their current environment and their desires. Finally several participants presented the researcher with evidence of their desires that they stored in their homes. All interviews began with grand tour questions (McCracken 1988) to enhance the relationship and gain insight into the lifestyle and background of the participant. This is essential for understanding the meaning of desire and to later contextualise desire in the data analysis (Bickman and Rog 1998). Following this, a list of interview points were used to elicit people's experiences and emotions regarding desire. The tone of the interviews were relaxed and participants were encouraged to expand on stories. Topics covered by previous researchers in the field were included such as food (Chung and Myers 1999) clothing (Daly and Leonard 2002) home décor (Arsel and Bean 2013), socialising, holidays and hobbies (Holt 1998). This helps to compare findings to existing literature. Throughout the interviews the researcher continually used member checking (Hogg and Maclaran 2008) to clarify participants' responses and on several occasions asked them to re-word their answer or explained the researchers interpretation of their answer and asked for conformation. This was to avoid any misinterpretation during the analysis. Follow-up questions explored key terms that emerged in these discussions.

Participants were asked to bring along between five and ten images of their desires, a projective technique similar to that used by Belk et al (2003). This worked as a prompt to enable respondent's to speak more freely about their desires and to capture visions of their desire. This technique also created a relaxing start to the interview where participants were able to talk through images they had already thought about. The author conducted all interviews and analyses in order to achieve a holistic understanding of the interviewees' points of view. Following the interview, a short summary was written immediately to capture salient views and tone of the discussion.

The data captured was rich in content and all participants were happy to talk about their desires to the researcher. It was noted, however, that in many of the participants a tone of resignation was present. This is surprising as previous studies reported a sense of pride in LCC consumers regarding their living situation (Holt 1998; Allen 2002). Instead participants at times seemed embarrassed to acknowledge their surrounding. With regards to authenticity it was essential the researcher had no personal bias entering the field (Hogg and Maclaran 2008) coming from neither a particularly strong HCC or LCC background. Although undertaking university education

neither of the researchers parents had previously done so and economically the researcher is from neither a high income nor struggling background. Several of the participants, however, differentiated themselves from the researcher as they had not attended university. Nine and a half hours worth of interviews were collected amounting to 63 pages of single lined transcriptions including 55 images brought along by participants. Full transcriptions were made to allow closer analysis of the data (Kvale 2007) and to identify recurrent themes. Following this, key themes were identified using a hermeneutic analysis (Patterson and Williamson 2002). It is key to note that due to the interpretive approach taken, the findings are specific to the cultures and people studied.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The literature describes the tastes of LCC consumers for the necessary (Allen 2002) and functional (Holt 1998) because of a culturally shaped habitus (Bourdieu 1984). This research, however, argues what is stopping LCC consumers from actualising their desires is economic capital, not cultural capital as previous studies have suggested. LCC consumers did not think HCC consumption to be pretentious. Instead they showed a desire for sophisticated tastes and committed to the act of self-seduction, even when hope of completing consumption was slim to non-existent. Highlighting that class boundaries may not be as clear as previously thought. Finally, desires were influenced by the portrayal of goods and lifestyles in the media more so than the desire to compete with the socially elite, as previous studies have argued.

Sophisticated Tastes

In the stories told one of the most surprising and apparent themes was sophisticated tastes. Participants were knowledgeable on and passionate about desired tastes often deemed exclusive to the educated cultural elite. Holt (1998) associated knowledge of such refined tastes with HCC consumers and described the taste of LCC consumers to be practical and mass produced. Allen (2002) also describes the taste of LCC consumers to be less refined, based more on practical decision-making and necessity. Bourdieu's work (1984) showed a lack of knowledge or interest in fine art by LCC consumers that he accredited to a culturally formed habitus. This, however, was not the case and although participants may not have the means to translate desire to behaviour the awareness of an alternative, more sophisticated life was known and desired.

Jen is a 45-year-old mother of one from the East Midlands. Her husband is a plasterer and she previously worked in banking and in construction. Jen was recently fired from a clerical job; at the time of the interview she was receiving job seekers allowance although on that morning she had been offered a new part time admin role. She describes her life as ordinary and most of her time is spent organising everyday life such as chores and childcare. Her desires, however, show sophisticated elements in contrast to the practical life she describes:

"If I had that money I would have a tailor to make my clothes for me. So everything would fit perfect. At the moment I own more practical casual stuff but I could do with some dresses or posh shoes... I would probably go out more and eat in nice restaurants...a nicer lifestyle.... I would do my food shopping like on these cookery programmes when they go out and they get all the fine ham from the deli and bread from the bakery...I hate ready meals. I would rather have proper meals and get meat from the butchers"

Jens cultural habitus, as described by Bourdeiu (1984), is clear when she describes how she currently shops for “casual” clothes and “ready meals”. Her cultural capital however cannot be manifested by her consumption choices as claimed by past research (Allen 2002; Holt 1998; Bourdeiu 1984). Jens cultural capital has not affected her imagination however, as she recognises and desires a more sophisticated way of life. This highlights that although she reproduces the taste of her current habitus she does not desire to do so. This causes a frustration, as evident when describing where she would like to shop, this was apparent in all the participants. Unlike the argument that taste and consumption choices are informed by habitus and cultural capital as defended in the work of Holt (1998), Allen (2002) and others, these LCC consumers were not content with their lifestyle. Although upon initial questioning nearly all the participants stated they were happy with their lives, further questioning on desire revealed an idealised lifestyle they would dream of living. This frustration between a desired life and real life is depicted below in the case of Kate.

Kate is 53 and also from the East Midlands. She works part time in a bank post room, she lives alone and has no children. She has just purchased her first home with a mortgage, which causes her a lot of worry. She describes people with money as living in “a different world” and herself at the bottom of “the scale of life” with all other working people. Kate daydreams constantly and when asked about her dream house and fashion her sophisticated tastes and frustration is evident:

“It would have wooden floor boards and an open fire, blinds, minimalistic, simple but comfy, squidgy cushions, homely...these things start off with dreams but unless you have the money to do it straight away then it doesn’t happen. In my house nothing matches because of budget, so it’s all a bit random...[in regards to fashion] I think if I had the money to buy something I really like. I like different things, I don’t like what everyone else is wearing always, I like going into boutique shops more than the normal high street shops.”

As well as tailor made clothes and individually decorated homes numerous other sophisticated desires were described by participants; including trips to the ballet, eating at and owning Michelin star restaurants, luxury holidays and chauffeur driven cars. Kate states she has dreams but because of money restraints they cannot be fulfilled, instead her home is “all a bit random” in contrast to her desire of having matching interiors. Here, the tone of disappointment in Kate’s voice was clear as her previous cheery disposition waned. Holt (1998) argues LCC consumers find comfort in the familiar and prefer mass-produced items, which aligns with Allens (2002) work on the narrow, pragmatic choices of LCC consumers. Instead these participants described desires for authentic objects and new experiences, for example Kate says she prefers individual boutiques to “what everyone else is wearing”. This is distinct from the work of Allen (2002), whose research found a working class taste for necessity with choices thoroughly saturated by a cultural capital. In his study the LCC participants possessed a pragmatic logic, which Allen (2002) describes as myopic. He explains this is due to the constant experience of economic hardship, which results in a taste for necessity and value. Therefore, we might have expected participants desires to be more utilitarian and functional to their everyday lives, viewing such sophistication as pretentious and unnecessary; this nevertheless was not the case. Instead surprisingly we see, in terms of desire, a taste for the frivolous such as helicopters and fine dining with no consideration of value for money. The work of Katja and Roper (2008) accredit this to the desire of those living in low income becoming intensified to consume what they are unable to afford.

It is also interesting to note that these sophisticated desires are not overtly branded, as predicted by Elliott and Leonard (2004). Participants, to a large extent, did not desire particular brands or describe a wish to be seen as wealthy. Although not branded, we must consider that many of the desires, for example large houses and expensive trips abroad could be described as conspicuous. Berger and Ward (2010) suggest this is to appear wealthy and belong to aspirational groups. We can also justify this as a desire for otherness, a key factor in the cycle of desire as described by Belk et al (2003). Finally the above accounts demonstrate knowledge of sophisticated products and experiences although they are not consumed. This knowledge is often obtained from active imagining and research that can be described as self-seduction.

Self-seduction

Self-seduction was a key finding for Belk et al (2003) and was also evident in this research to varying extents. Stories illustrated an active involvement in personal desires that the participants allowed themselves to nourish, often through indulgent imaginings or research. This is firstly of interest as the act of self-seduction itself can be deemed a frivolous use of time with little practical benefit. As with sophisticated tastes, previous research suggests the practical LCC consumer would consider it as pretentious and a waste of time, something that was clearly not the case. Supporting the work of Leach (1993) who argued that desire is affordable to all in a globalised world. In addition although self-seduction was strong, hope that the desire would transpire was not. In Belk et al's cycle of desire (2003), self-seduction occurs until it becomes apparent that it's beyond hope that it will never be acquired. Those who cannot afford hope must resolve not to desire, concluding that desire is "not necessarily accessible, to all" (p.335). From this the assumption could have been that our participants who, due to economic restraints, have limited prospects would be lacking in hope. Therefore they would not indulge "desire for desire" and self-seduction habits associated with HCC consumers. Conversely this was not the case as all participants described either imagination, daydreaming or even active research into their desires thus willing participation in "desire for desire" as demonstrated by Sam.

Sam is 27 and has been living with his girlfriend in the Midlands for about a year. He is a Banking Clerk who processes cheques, as was his mother before she was made redundant. His father worked in a paper factory. Sam is very careful with money, checking his account balance daily. He spoke in detail about his love of golf, which he wishes he could afford to pursue more:

"Celtic Manor, have you heard of that, in Birmingham? It is quite a famous golf course, resort and I am a member. But never in a million years would I be able to go and play, but every couple of weeks I check out what their offers are, even though they are thousands of pounds. You don't have to pay to be a member; you just fill out a little thing, so the mailings list"

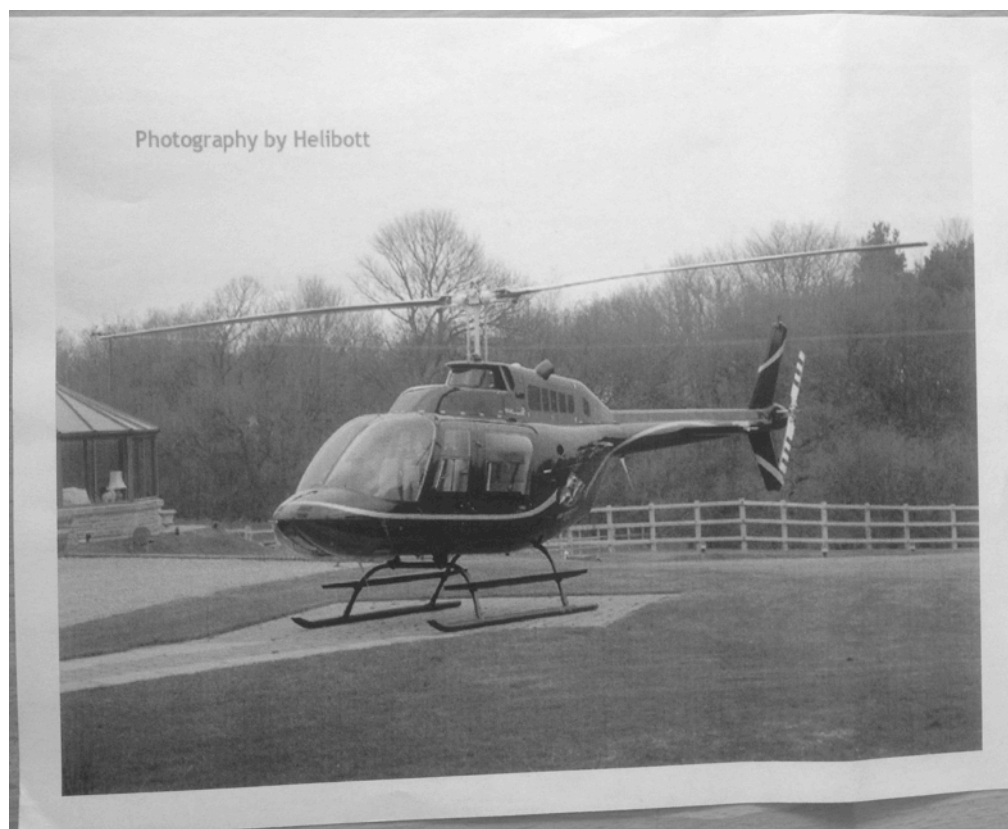
Although Sam believes that "never in a million years" will he play at the course he indulges in checking the offers regularly. This fits with Belk et al's 2003 description of self-seduction but counters their argument that those without hope fail to self seduce. Although it could be argued that it is possible for this desire to come true, unlike a fantasy that is often outside the realms of reality (Campbell 1987), Sam has put forward an argument showing he is resigned to the idea, and he has little to no hope. He is accepting the futility of the desire but still indulges in the seduction of it. A similar account was told by Jack, a 27 year old bar worker who constantly day dreams about owning his own bar. Although he has low income and no savings he has still partaken in extensive research on his dream bar including searching for vacant buildings. According

to some (Chang and Arkin 2002; Elliott and Leonard 2004) this could be interpreted as a focus on materialism and financial success, a coping mechanism due to hopelessness and inadequacy.

Alternatively other participants who self seduced actively avoided confronting their desires with reality. Dan, a 23-year-old Mental Health Worker from Newcastle who lives with his partner and is a drag queen at weekends, demonstrates this. He describes his taste as classical and throughout his interview Dan showed frustrations at not being able to express his sophisticated taste due to a lack of money. His main desire was to own a helicopter, he knows the type and size he would like and brought along an image to the interview (Figure 1). However when questioned on if he knew how much it would cost his lack of hope deters him from researching the reality:

“No because I would get depressed, I think I would love these things but I don’t look into it too much because at the moment, I cant afford to look at a helicopter let alone fly in one. I don’t look into the details of things too much.”

Figure 1- Image of a Helicopter Brought to Interview by Dan



Dan’s story is earmarking reality, by blocking practical implications he is taking a fatalistic attitude. This attitude can be likened to Campbell’s 1990 proposal that individuals are reluctant to partake in acts they cannot justify. Dan however is still partaking in the activity of self-seduction but he is not as willing to face the reality of the price of his desire, as he is aware of increasing his frustrations.

Elliott's 1992 work is also relevant, arguing that our wish to desire is conflicted by urges between control and freedom. This battle and frustration is evident in all our participants and most obviously so in Dan's account, as he is not willing to freely seduce himself and by maintaining some control he is protected from the frustrations of reality. Agreeing with Belk et al's 2003 argument that desire is "both discomforting and pleasurable" (pg 1). The act of self-seduction, however was not only apparent in active research, many participants indulged in TV shows, films, magazines and newspapers all of which inspired desire and provided context for the imagination to feast.

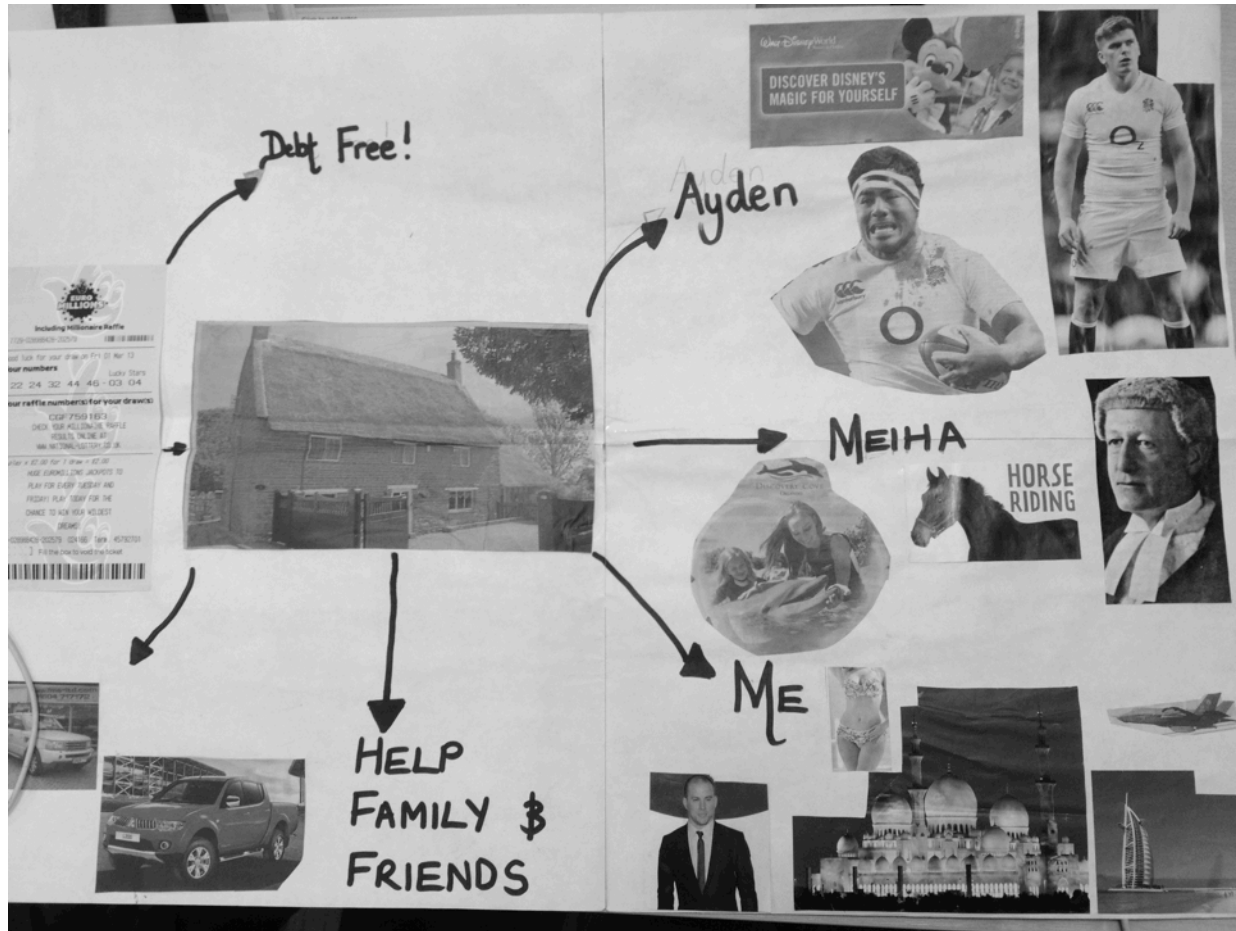
Media influence

A theme throughout the literature was the pressure upon LCC consumers to compete with the tastes of the cultural elite (Veblen 1925). Warner (1949) and Campbell (1987) argued that lower classes endeavor to emulate those culturally above them and Douglas and Isherwood (1979) indicated a similar pattern with their envy theory of needs. The participants in this study however showed little need to compete with others but the media did significantly influence their desires. This concurs with Arsel and Bean (2013) argument that the current marketplace, within which the media is key, provides ammunition for taste and how it is practiced with class boundaries. Although in this case the taste cannot be converted into practice we see strong evidence in Arsel and Beans (2013) case that the marketplace is of influence in addition to class conditioning. This research extends their theory arguing that, in the case of these participants, the media is more influential than cultural capital in shaping desires. Similar findings were found in Belk et al's 2003 paper on desires but were not focused upon in his analysis. Belk's 2001 paper on specialist magazines however captures the affect a single source of media can have on desires but fails to look specifically at differences in cultural capital. As well as specialist magazines participants credited TV programmes, documentaries, films and newspapers as sources of inspiration for desire as highlighted by Alice (see Figure 2).

Alice is a 26-year-old mental health worker with two children. Her first pregnancy was unplanned whilst she was still in school and this has dramatically changed how she intended to live her life. She has been with her partner for nine years and he is currently unemployed. Her dream is to be a social worker and she actively participates in self-seduction and media consumption related to her desires:

"Like on the TV, all them house programmes, homes under the hammer and the Australian one Down Under. Location, location, location and you look and it's like stunning. When we get the free paper, I spend ages looking at the big houses. I do look, and I do dream but its not going to happen"

Figure 2: Image of Alice’s Collage, Showing Clippings of a House from the Free Newspaper



The theme of self-seduction without hope and sophisticated desires is again prevalent within Alice’s account. We can also see that her desires stem from media consumption, which aligns with Arsel and Bean’s (2013) theory. This study takes this theory further adding that not only does it affect practiced taste but also desired taste. This consumption of media is not simply a passive activity to pass time but instead it is providing LCC consumers with the knowledge required to build sophisticated desires. This knowledge is demonstrated by Jack, the bar tender who describes his desire to visit Dubai:

“I have always wanted to go to the Burj Al Arab, that was the first ever 7 star hotel in the world, the one in Dubai which has the sail. I have always wanted to go there because I saw a documentary on it once. This one is out in the water, they built an island for it, and it has a big sail. It has its own water park and it has a helipad on top... It’s like £7000 a night, probably more than that, just for the most bog standard room. It has a really cool thing where you don’t feel like you have vertigo, when you look down from the top floor you can just see the next level”

Here we can see the knowledge Jack has gained from the media that has fuelled his desire. Similar to Girard’s theory of mimetic desire (1977, 1987) where it is our rival’s desire that makes us aware of the desirability of an object, it was instead the media that acts as a socialising agent defining taste. This also challenges the view that consumers only seek out information when planning a purchase or developing tactics to resist temptations in front of them (Hoch and Lowenstein 1991). This is illustrated by Jane, a divorced mother of three who works part time as a Classroom Assistant. Jane collects images from magazines that she buys from the local library when they are out of date, she then sticks them into a scrapbook as shown in Figure 3. Although she cannot afford the items such as designer bags she loves to look through them and views it as a positive act. The significance of media influence on desires of LCC consumers has previously been overlooked with the emphasis on cultural habitus, even though previous research has shown that the imagination is influenced by scripts learned from the media (Jenkins et al 2011) and consumers use the media and new platforms such as Ebay to inflame their desires (Denegri-Knott 2010). The effect of this script is an immediate influence that is as fast moving and volatile as the media itself, in contrast to the culturally formed habitus, which is gradually influenced through upbringing and education.

Figure 3- Images for Jane’s Scrapbooks



CONCLUSION

Past research on LCC consumers was used to help structure the study and guide the methods of this work. Desire in LCC consumers, however, is a field of research that had not been specifically studied before and instead presumed and integrated into research on material expression and mundane spending habits. Therefore this research is unique and has brought to light new material regarding the surprising and conflicting tastes of the LCC consumer. This new information has evoked questions regarding previous studies and presumptions made, it is beneficial delving into the imagination of LCC consumers and aiding our understanding of passionate consumption.

Desire was prevalent amongst all of the participants interviewed and the findings described surprising results given the understanding of previous literature. The sophisticated tastes of the consumers were unexpected given the utilitarian, practical and myopic tastes of LCC consumer found previously (Allen 2002; Holt 1998; Bourdieu 1984). Participants had a taste for otherness, authentic cultural objects and new experiences. Participants showed commitment to their desires thorough active involvement in self-seduction, even though they had little to no hope of achieving their desires. Although Sam, Jack, Dan and other participants all self seduce with little hope of achieving their desires, we can see the different extents self-seduction is taken to. It would be interesting to research if the practicalities of desires were of consideration to HCC consumers, as previous research suggests they may have more hope of achieving goals. In this study all participants want to experience the anticipation of desire but for Dan the frustration of hope stops him looking into the practicalities. Although they had sophisticated tastes and were knowledgeable of their desire they have little to no hope they will convert this knowledge and passion to behaviour. By focusing on the imagination as a means to understanding the link between cultural capital and consumption an understanding can be gained of the knowledge, tastes and passions of this demographic. By only studying material consumption, or actual consumption it is hard to understand the true desires of the consumer as their choices are limited to external influences such as income. This actual consumption is in some cases an indication of frustrated desires framed largely by the media. Therefore this paper has answered the need for research into relationship between hope and desire and it shows a need for further investigation into the subject within other demographics. It would be especially interesting to understand if HCC consumers feel a similar sense of frustration or if increased hope eradicates such aggravation.

The final findings has highlighted the importance of media consumption in framing desire amongst LCC consumers, shifting the argument away from competitiveness between socioeconomic classes and towards the influential, current and fast moving media market place. It highlights the power the media has in establishing what counts as an idealised lifestyle. The inability to recreate this lifestyle could have contributed towards the embarrassment and dissatisfaction participants showed when describing their homes lives, instead of pride. This can be seen as a worrying factor as these LCC consumers are striving towards a lifestyle which economically they may not achieve leaving a dissatisfied section of society.

This paper, however, is not dismissing the significance of cultural capital upon individual desire. Many have argued that the educated elite or HCC consumer work as cultural intermediaries (Nixon and Du Gay 2002). From their position of cultural authority these shapers of taste have the power to select what is broadcast to the LCC consumer. From this we can see how the tastes of the HCC are being re-circulated leading to LCC consumers sophisticated desires and a sense of resignation, which as discussed could be considered harmful to society. This is of increasing importance, as media consumption such as television viewing, remains a relevant cultural discourse with profound influence (Moor 2012). LCC consumers as a subject area are widely un-researched, a concerning situation given the current changes in the economic climate and welfare cuts. There are numerous aspects in which research could reveal interesting and beneficial findings. One particular route would be to explore the significance of desired careers, a topic that occurred continuously throughout this investigation and again caused a similar sense of resignation but was not appropriate for this specific paper.

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