

## Chapter 7

### Young people's search for identity: Finding a way through the cultural maze

Youth mindlessly acts its identity quest in the theatre of the streets, searching not for goals but for roles, striving for an identity that eludes them.

Marshall McLuhan, 1969<sup>1</sup>

The process of identity construction implies a gradual development of a comprehensive self-interpretation which makes it possible for the individual to experience life as a meaningful project.

Leif Gunnar Engedal, 2006<sup>2</sup>

As consumerism reaches increasingly beyond the acquisition of things to the enhancement of the person, the goal of marketing becomes not only to make us dissatisfied with what we have, but also with who we are. As it seeks ever more ways to colonise our consciousness, consumerism both fosters and exploits the restless, insatiable expectation that there has got to be more to life. And in creating this hunger, consumerism offers its own remedy – more consumption.

Richard Eckersley, 2006<sup>3</sup>

As shown in the last chapter, research on identity has been mainly, but not exclusively, psychological. It has given special attention to the *process* of identity development through structural stages, but little to the *moral content* of identity or to *identity health*. These latter two dimensions are important for education. The other crucial educational element is identifying and evaluating the influence of culture.

Young people's self-understanding and self-expression are worked out through complex interactions between their identity needs and the identity resources they find in culture. Their quest for a sense of authentic self is a major developmental task. It is complicated because the culture is saturated with many attractive identity proposals, not all of which turn out to be helpful. At the same time, the traditional family and community identity resources do not appear to have the same cogency and plausibility they seemed to have formerly.

This chapter will discuss some of the identity issues that young people have to negotiate. The better the understanding adults have of the problems young people face while finding their way through the identity maze, the better they will be able to contribute to a critical education in identity for youth – in the home, school and other contexts. Special attention will be given to the cluster of issues related to consumerism, advertising and the media because of the psychological sway these have over the development of youth identity.

The discussion is organised under the following headings:

#### 7.1 General cultural issues

- 7.1.1 The changing place of religion as a basic reference point for youth identity and spirituality
- 7.1.2 Constant change as the baseline reference point for youth identity and spirituality
- 7.2 Youth identity and consumer culture
  - 7.2.1 Externals, consumerism and young people's search for identity
  - 7.2.2 Retail identity and the seduction of individuality
  - 7.2.3 Logos and the clothing of identity
  - 7.2.4 Leaping on the brand-wagon: The retail potential of identity needs
  - 7.2.5 The marketing of 'cool' to youth
  - 7.2.6 The cost of being cool: some examples
  - 7.2.7 Identity-related advertising for glamour: 'Be a princess', 'Because you're worth it'
  - 7.2.8 Lifestyle-indexed identity: External identity validation, the conditioning influence of advertising and prolonged adolescence
  - 7.2.9 Branded: The buying and selling of teenagers
  - 7.2.10 The retail potential of teenagers' dreams for self-improvement
  - 7.2.11 Body image: The marketing strategy of inadequacy and the buying of beauty, sex appeal, and performance
  - 7.2.12 Consumer without a cause: The marketing of rebellion to youth and the domestication of nonconformity
  - 7.2.13 A spiritual dimension to marketing?
  - 7.2.14 From James Dean to Clueless: Teenage angst to teenage makeover
- 7.3 The anatomy and psychological function of 'cool'
  - 7.3.1 Young people's search for a 'cool' identity
  - 7.3.2 Being acknowledged as cool: A psychological defence and coping mechanism
  - 7.3.3 Cool image, relationships and the intensity of experience
  - 7.3.4 Classic cool: Nike's successful recipe for cracking the Chinese market
  - 7.3.5 The quest for cool: The new opiate of the masses?
  - 7.3.6 The relationship between cool and violence
- 7.4 Advertising and identity
- 7.5 Young men and crisis in male identity

[Box not styled]

## 7.1 General cultural issues

### 7.1.1 The changing place of religion as a basic reference point for youth identity and spirituality

As noted in chapter 1, the constructs identity and spirituality are closely interwoven – spirituality is a core expression of identity, and vice versa.<sup>4</sup> For many, but not all, religion enters into their identity and spirituality.

Traditionally, religion has been an important identity resource for people, both personally and culturally. For many this still remains the case. Religious beliefs and practices can have a powerful influence on self-understandings and behaviour – and not only on formally religious behaviour.

However, as considered in later chapters on spirituality, there is an increasing tendency among young people in Western societies not to see religion, including their own particular tradition, as having a prominent place in their personal development. This is not a new phenomenon; the description fits many nominally religious adults. Today's youth, as well as inheriting a tradition of secularisation, are subject to an electronically conditioned, global village culture that colours their view of religion

itself and offers many alternative sources of meaning and values that can be incorporated into identity.

### **7.1.2 Constant change as the baseline reference point for youth identity and spirituality**

Many young people do not start life with a relatively static cultural-religious baseline; for them, the constant as regards lifestyle and entertainment is *change* itself. Change may therefore have become more of a natural ingredient in the formation of their personal identity. They can seek self-understanding and self-expression by keeping in tune with the latest trends in music, film, fashion, leisure, gadgets like mobile phones and mp3 players, and the Internet, with little reference to traditional beliefs and values; even family traditions may have a minimal place in self-definition. Similarly, there can be problems as regards the extent of young people's participation in ethnic and national identities.

In the sort of world they experience, many conventional distinctions between groups of people have tended to lose their meaning and force. They can go beyond conventional boundaries and draw elements of meaning and identity in a trans-religious, trans-ethnic and trans-national way. This could be regarded as valuable for developing a sense of global human community; but there remains an ambivalence about identity that is evident in a tension between wanting to be universal yet distinctive.

While religion and education may be slow to acknowledge these identity issues for youth, this has not been the case for the commercial world. The marketing of consumer products has readily picked up on the identity tension between universalism and individual distinctiveness and it targets young people for purchases that will reinforce both aspects. Music and fashion, especially that generated initially in the United States and the United Kingdom, serve as an international fund of identity resources for youth.

## **7.2 Youth identity and consumer culture**

### **7.2.1 Externals, consumerism and young people's search for identity**

While one might tend to think of identity mainly as a psychological sense of self, something that is primarily internal, it is a mistake to underestimate the importance of *identity externals* – and this is precisely where commerce enters the sphere of youth identity and exploits it. Consumer products have something to say about identity, especially for teenagers. They are not just functional; they make a statement! They are linked with identity because they are felt to be distinctive self-expressions of the individual.

What may appear to another generation as mindless conformity is often a way for adolescents to find security and belonging within a group. They may not have a strong psychological grasp on identity anyway, and group identification may feel like the only identity they have, covering up the uncertainty and puzzlement within. Group identification may not provide a relatively permanent identity solution, but experimentation with self-expression helps them discover and try out different identity formats to discover those with which they feel most comfortable. Because this is linked with identity searching, one of the most basic developmental issues they have to deal with, it is understandable then that young people have strong feelings

about consumer choices and lifestyle. 'Forming groups by adopting a particular way of dressing does not resolve these issues, but it is one way of building a safe, understood environment to which they can retreat from time to time and from which they can launch themselves at life.'<sup>5</sup>

Group identification through dress and stylised social behaviour seems to serve as temporary reference points in young people's search for a satisfying sense of self. While their own sense of identity feels fragile, they can rely on group identity to sustain them. When their identity is better articulated and more self-sustained, group membership can become more individualistic and allow for more diversity of expression and interaction with other groups.

Identity vulnerability underlies much of the psychological experimentation of youth. Needs for group membership will vary from individual to individual; but for most young people it is fundamental to their search for personal identity. Groups provide an 'identity haven', but the cost requires conformity in dress, interests, in-language, music and where to 'hang out'. Youth will look for many options for group membership and for easy and fluid ways of joining and leaving; if a group does not meet needs, it can readily be abandoned. This uncertainty and experimentation are ripe for commercial colonisation. Industries have developed more or less to cater for the identity experimentation of youth; they manufacture not only the clothes, food and CDs for individual self-expression, but, through slick advertising, promote the images and moods that will be most likely to fuel young people's desire to buy their products. As will be explored in more detail later, this sort of marketing actually focuses on selling images and values – and the 'things' to be purchased are the *means* for acquiring the attractive lifestyle. Advertising is directed towards individualism, experimentalism, person-centredness, direct experience, pleasure and escape. This taps into the intangibles of youth identity development: human relationships, feelings, dreams, and hopes.

Youth consumer choices are not just a matter of individual taste; what they buy demonstrates their 'style':

things like listening to a particular piece of music, buying [a CD], buying a particular style of clothing are all means of identification. In such a process young people move closer to others who share those same likes and choices. It is a very free, democratic and easy way of finding common identification with others – even at the level of musical and fashion tastes.<sup>6</sup>

Identification can be as simple as buying a particular cap or wearing the casual 'uniform' of the group; or by identifying with causes like Amnesty International or a protest movement. This is easier than expressing intentional membership in a political party or in organised religion, and it does not call for much responsibility or commitment, or for assent to an ideology or system of theology and morality.<sup>7</sup> Despite the manipulative uniformity that some adolescent groups or gangs can require of members, it is most often a democratic and egalitarian spirit that is evident.

Commerce has long been interested in making a living from marketing products that meet individuals' needs for distinctive self-expression. For many youth, this can have a disproportionate influence in channelling their self-expression. In turn, it helps create the idea of a distinctive youth subculture: its creation depends heavily on the choices they make in what they buy. Being 'creative consumers', their purchases have symbolic meaning as well as functional utility.

To reinforce its power over youth consumerism, commerce needs to sustain the myth of *identity-oriented purchasing*: it purports to be an essential part of identity development. To make the myth even more attractive and potent, it is coloured strongly with images of freedom and individuality, where the operative notion of freedom is choice from a multiplicity of products. Smith and Standish considered that current ambiguity about what constitutes morality is

symptomatic of the running together of our excessive preoccupation with individualism and the identity imposed on us as consumers. We think of ourselves as people who express ourselves through choices. To oppose someone's choice then looks like an unwarranted suppression of their individuality and authenticity, of what is closest and most real to them.<sup>8</sup>

This interpretation helps explain the sharpness in some young people's negative reaction to any move that threatens the scope of their choices. In turn, it illustrates the strength of the hold that consumerism can have on them because it is closely associated with their drive to establish an identity. It is therefore difficult to lead young people to see that marketing for distinctiveness can, from another perspective, be a means of mass homogenisation of identity: individuality through the mass marketing of commercial packages.

Young people in places as diverse as Sydney, Los Angeles, Cairo and Moscow can be seen wearing a style of clothing that had its origins with African American youth. The tension between distinctiveness and universality has been aptly caught by the fashion industry's name for this clothing as 'International urban tribal streetwear'. Somehow for those who wear such clothing the distinctiveness and the universality are harmonised; their dress allows a type of global youth identification, while at the same time making a distinctive statement. When so much clothing like caps and T shirts with brands, names, teams or comments stamped on them is marketed, the specificity of the 'statements' may end up being diluted; an item without some identification would become the exception.

To some extent the patterns in young people's social group membership, especially after they leave school, relate to the current sociopolitical settings. The style of groups in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s has varied according to the prevailing cultural climates. In the social mix are factors like ideas of romantic liberalism, phases of economic depression, economic rationalism and unemployment, together with trends in the globalisation of commerce, worldwide environmental crisis, and expanding communication technologies. Adolescent groups can shield young people from the harsh realities of the world, and they provide scope for personality experimentation. They also serve as starting points for the exploration to find a meaningful and constructive place in life.

### **7.2.2 Retail identity and the seduction of individuality**

The youth consumerism described above leads towards a 'retail identity'. Whatever the community thinks about this issue, there is no doubt that astute marketing psychologists see it as basic to their industry. Product and market development target the identity needs of young people as selling points; their natural insecurity and identity vulnerability make them prone to consumerism that is supposed to facilitate experimentation in personal image and identity.

This advertising strategy promotes a consumer mentality that says particular consumer products will make a difference to your physical appearance, personal desirability and social status – as well as giving you pleasure and comfort. This stresses the externals of identity. It taps into influential social and cultural themes such as freedom, individuality, popularity and pleasure. These themes work like infrastructure that energises consumerism. Advertising endeavours to develop a symbiotic relationship with these themes to improve its effectiveness. The young (as well as the not so young) are encouraged to see shopping as an integral part of identity development; they can stock up with gear and products that seem to exude desirable image and self-definition.

Such marketing strategies engage in a *seduction of individuality*. This they do in two ways. First, their images and messages promote individuality as a seductive theme: it is very desirable, something that all youth need; they want it; they have a right to it; and they are prepared to pay for it. Phrases like ‘be yourself’, ‘do your own thing’, ‘be an individual’, ‘be all you can be’, ‘go for it’ are examples of seductive messages. So, marketing to youth tries to seduce them through an appeal to individuality – they are seduced *with* individuality. Second, through the purchase of products that are supposed to enhance distinctiveness, young people are seduced *away from* their individuality – they buy consumer packages that short-change them as far as their authentic self is concerned. Through promoting, and then profiting by, a view of individuality as a profile of consumer products (or a ready-made identifying package), the commercial world insinuates a marketable, external, and therefore materialistic notion of identity. If young people are influenced by this thinking and imagery to an excessive degree, they can neglect *internal* identity resources, thus compromising the health of their identity.

The many thousands of television advertisements that young people watch each year, as well as those in print media, strongly promote the development and expression of individuality. They suggest what clothes, shoes, toothpaste, acne cream and perfume are needed to express individuality. But while the enhancement of a personal sense of individuality is promoted, at the same time youth are seduced into accepting a pre-packaged *public individuality*, which is in part created by the media and the leisure industries. Television advertising fuels the fires of individuality, but in a subtle way then draws people away from it towards a public conformity to the images and lifestyle it projects.<sup>9</sup> Consumer advertising can tell you what you need to conform to if you want to be ‘cool’, ‘in’, ‘hip’, ‘whatever’.

The collective aura of participation, together with its presence in the private space of people’s homes, make television a powerful instrument for promoting public individuality. The comments of Marshall McLuhan in the 1960s now sound like a prophecy fulfilled: ‘Television seduces us from the literate and private point of view to the complex and inclusive world of the group icon. Instead of presenting a private argument it offers a way of life that is for everybody.’<sup>10</sup>

Youth conformity to advertised images poses a significant dilemma for individuality. Where cloning and clichés sustained by television images are relied on too much for desirable individuality, young people may come to wonder if they have any inner private life or identity at all.

### 7.2.3 Logos and the clothing of identity

Much can be learned about youth identity development from the psychology of advertising and the work of marketers.

In her book *No Logo* (2000), Naomi Klein has written in support of an anti-corporate attitude she sees arising as resistance to the manipulative activity of transnational corporations. She argues that the globalisation of markets and the so-called free trade that facilitate the growth of transnationals are usually not fair and will often marginalise the poor and non-powerful – for example, cheap Third World labour producing consumer goods marketed in Western technological societies. What is pertinent to our discussion here is her view of how webs of ‘logos’ or ‘corporate brands’ came to be more prominent in marketing and retail success than the actual products themselves. Her explanation for this was in the psychological mechanisms of identity development.

#### **7.2.4 Leaping on the brand-wagon: The retail potential of identity needs**

Mass-produced consumer goods are relatively indistinguishable at a technical level; so ‘image-based’ differences were developed to make the brand name more attractive. Given the competition for consumer attention, ‘branding’ seemed to become a necessity for making products stick in consumers’ minds. The success of this branding depended on its psychological appeal; everything was done to promote brand image and brand loyalty. Marketing endeavoured to show how the ‘meaning’ and ‘mystique’ of brands harmonised with people’s lifestyle and aspirations; what they wanted was to forge consumer identification and emotional ties with brands. While many people were attracted to the ‘bargain basement’ tier of consumerism for basic requirements, a second tier of ‘premium brands’ catered for people’s need for status, ‘attitude’ and external indicators of quality lifestyle. Klein reported the claim of the CEO of Starbucks coffee franchise ‘The people who line up for Starbucks, aren’t just there for the coffee. “It is the romance of the coffee experience, the feeling of warmth and community people get in Starbucks stores.”’<sup>11</sup> Starbucks’ vice-president of marketing, who had formerly directed the Nike ‘Just do it!’ campaign, added:

Nike, for example, is leveraging the deep emotional connection that people have with sports and fitness. With Starbucks, we see how coffee has woven itself into the fabric of people’s lives, and that is our opportunity for emotional leverage ... A great brand raises the bar – it adds a greater sense of purpose to the experience, whether it’s the challenge to do your best in sports and fitness or the reaffirmation that the cup of coffee you’re drinking really matters.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, the Diesel Jeans owner said, ‘We don’t sell a product, we sell a style of life. I think we have created a movement ... the Diesel concept is everything. It’s the way to live; it’s the way to wear; it’s the way a to do something.’ And the Body Shop founder explained that ‘her stores aren’t about what they sell, they are the conveyors of a grand idea – a political philosophy about women, the environment and ethical business’.<sup>13</sup> The pursuit of beauty with a conscience!

Klein continued:

[Companies were] looking to replace their cumbersome product production apparatus with transcendent brand names and to infuse their brands with deep, meaningful messages ... No longer simply branding their own products, but branding the outside culture as

well – by sponsoring cultural events, they could go out into the world and claim bits of it as brand-name outposts. For these companies, branding was not just a matter of adding value to a product. It was about thirstily soaking up cultural ideas and iconography that their brands could reflect by projecting these ideas and images back on the culture as ‘extensions’ of their brands. Culture, in other words, would add value to their brands ...

The effect, if not always the original intent, of the advanced branding is to nudge the hosting culture into the background and make the brand the star. It is not to sponsor culture but to *be* the culture. And why shouldn't it be? If brands are not products but ideas, attitudes, values and experiences, why can't they be culture too? This project has been so successful that the lines between corporate sponsors and sponsored culture have entirely disappeared.<sup>14</sup>

Development of the brand mystique operates through a network of marketing, advertising, television, films, the Internet, computer games, magazines, music and film stars, sporting personalities, corporate event and space sponsorship, merchandise licensing, linked food deals, and brand loyalty programs – as well as peer-to-peer marketing.

It is as if these colossal branding networks, which increasingly operate at a global level, seek to imprint branding on people's souls, making it an essential aspect of identity development – constructing your own unique self-expression through your personal pattern of branding; and in turn, giving this mechanism colossal commercial consequences.

### 7.2.5 The marketing of ‘cool’ to youth

While teenagers have long attracted some marketing attention, given their level of discretionary income since the 1950s, the youth market appears to have become a much bigger business since the early 1990s. But this was not an easy market to predict, given the emotional unpredictability of pre-teenagers and teenagers in Western societies; there was also difficulty in working out what young people regarded as ‘cool’, which had a built-in notion of being ever changing. Nevertheless, marketers set out to ‘colonise’ the self-consciousness of children and young adults. Klein noted that:

Peer pressure emerged as a powerful market force [for teenagers], making the keeping-up-with-the-Joneses consumerism of their suburban parents pale by comparison ...

It was not going to be sufficient for companies simply to market their same products to a younger demographic; they needed to fashion brand identities that would resonate with this new [youth] culture. If they were going to turn their lacklustre products into transcendent meaning machines – as the dictates of branding demanded – they would need to remake themselves in the image of nineties cool: its music, styles and politics.

Cool, alternative, young, hip – whatever you want to call it – was the perfect identity for product-driven companies looking to become transcendent image-based brands [for the youth market] ... [Marketing made a] frantic effort to isolate and reproduce in TV



commercials the precise ‘attitude’ [young people] were driven to consume ... Everywhere, ‘Am I cool?’ became the deeply dull and all-consuming question of every moment [both for teenagers as well as marketing executives.] ... The quest for cool is by nature riddled with self-doubt ... except now the harrowing doubts of adolescence are the billion-dollar questions of our age.<sup>15</sup>

Klein drew attention to the market research of so-called ‘cool hunters’ who sought to identify new trends for market exploitation; she considered that, armed with the trendspotting of their

cool hunters, the legal stalkers of youth culture, ... the superbrands became the perennial teenage followers, trailing the scent of cool wherever it led ... With the tentacles of branding reaching into every crevice of youth culture, leaching brand-image content not only out of the street styles like hip-hop but psychological attitudes like ironic detachment, the cool hunt has had to go further afield to find unpilfered space.

The youth culture feeding frenzy ... [tended to make youth] victims of a predatory marketing machine that co-opted identities, [personal] styles and ideas and turned them into brand food.<sup>16</sup>

### 7.2.6 The cost of being cool: some examples

‘Civies day’ has been a fun and/or a fund-raising venture for a number of Australian schools. Students and teachers could dress casually; for students it is one of the few days they did not have to conform to wearing a school uniform. However, a different ‘conformism’ came into play. Some schools abandoned civies day because of the extraordinary competitiveness it triggered among the students to wear status label clothes and footwear. The so-called casual regime instantly registered a social stratification based on who wore the most ‘in’ or ‘cool’ gear. It played on the teenagers’ fears of being social outcasts or physically unappealing; insurance against this threat was taken out in the form of ‘in’ clothing.

The phenomenon of ‘schoolies week’ is an example of a teenage event available for commercial colonisation. The annual migration of large numbers of graduating high school students to beach areas to celebrate the end of their school years is evidently worth fostering commercially. Both subtle and not-so-subtle marketing ploys set out to sustain and enhance the social reality in teenage culture about the importance of this rite of passage. The driving force of the event is teenagers’ thinking that this is the ‘done thing’ – they just have to be there. Chaperons, counsellors and even people signified as ‘chaplains’ were put into place to ease parental anxieties. No doubt many teenagers make a good celebration of the week, even if for some it is time for experimentation in risky behaviours. Whatever its meaning for the participants, it is another commercial opportunity for the promotion of public individuality in teenagers.

‘Why the school formal is the new teen wedding’ was the headline for a recent newspaper article. ‘A walk down the aisle may be a decade away, but Sydney schoolgirls are indulging their bridal fantasies by spending wedding dress prices on their school formal fashions.’<sup>17</sup> This is an example of how teenage imaginations and dreams are being tapped for their commercial potential. School formal fashion shows were held, with thousands of girls and mothers attending. With ‘must-have’ packages

to include dress, hair styling, shoes, accessories, as well as ‘after-parties’ outfits, flowers, cosmetics and limousine hire, and even the ‘right’ lingerie, the cost of keeping up with social expectations could range upwards to \$2000 and beyond. The article suggested that ‘with interest in marriage declining, retailers are cashing in on the one rite of passage guaranteed to the modern schoolgirl’. Ideas like the big night, keeping up with trends, pressure to dress up, spending big, no limits, competition, designer brands, and avoiding copycats, are part of the thinking and language that sustain the enterprise. This is the thinking and imagery that commerce wants to enhance as central to the social reality around the school formal. It is likely that the idea of Year 10 formals will be strengthened as a prelude to the Year 12 formal.

Orchestrating the social reality of teenagers is central to youth marketing; it relies on youth themselves to sustain, through their social interaction, the identity myths that drive their distinctive consumerism. It appeals to not only their need for freedom and individuality, but to derivative themes like popularity and social status. ‘The heavy duty marketing from the cradle onward has warped the social lives of today’s teenagers and exacerbated caste snobbery in the classrooms. The standard “pretty and popular” refrain has changed. Now teens judge one another more for the brands they wear and how much money they or their families had.’<sup>18</sup>

It is not that there is anything wrong with civies days, formals or schoolies week as such. Our concern is with maintaining a balance. When media-hyped consumerism and social status overtake the events, the dominant concerns of teenagers end up miles away from enjoying themselves with friends. Then, the worry, anxiety, planning and expense, not only for themselves but for their families, seriously distort the meaning of the events. This also affects youth leisure time: some have to undertake extensive part-time work to earn enough to keep up with more well-off peers.

Helping youth get matters like this into some perspective a concern not only for education but also for parenting. The idea of social deconstruction is becoming more evident as a ‘critical’ element in school programs like English and Social Science, as well as in religious and moral education. But it is difficult, and therefore somewhat unlikely, for teenagers to look critically at what have become prized events in their social calendar.

### **7.2.7 Identity-related advertising for glamour: ‘Be a princess’, ‘Because you’re worth it’**

In December 2005, the *Daily Telegraph* recorded the sad news in a two-page spread:

Sydney racing’s day of embarrassment. The day only a few hardy souls turned up to watch the worst Randwick meeting since 1962. 53 horses, 22 jockeys, 39 trainers, 6 races, 20 bookies and 150 punters. Sydney racing hit rock bottom yesterday ... Just 6 sorry races in front of empty grandstands and ghost-like betting rings.<sup>19</sup>

But whatever the problems for mid-week racing, Royal Randwick bustled with large crowds at the Easter carnival. In fact, over a few years, attendance had increased by 40 per cent – that is, by more than 50#000 people. There had been a decline in attendance during and after the 1970s. But this was turned around in a most dramatic ‘fashion’.

What brought about this change? The answer: Arguably, the most successful advertising campaign in recent Australian history. At the beginning of 2002, Tony

King, CEO of the Australian Jockey Club, introduced the ‘Princesses campaign’ developed by the firm Ad Partners.

The strategy of specifically targeting women who were believed to be ‘commercially vulnerable’ to the image of glamour was evident in commentary on the Princesses campaigns in the advertising industry journal *B&T* (‘Australia’s highest circulating advertising, marketing and media magazine’). The titles of three articles in recent years were ‘AJC woos younger crowd to “party”’, ‘AJC pampers women to boost racing numbers’ and ‘AJC relies on princess pulling power’.<sup>20</sup>

Excerpts from the articles read:

The Australian Jockey Club is continuing its campaign to position the races as a sexy social event with the launch of its latest campaign ... [It] features provocative images of a beautiful woman preparing herself for a day at the races and features the new tagline ‘Princesses approve’ replacing [the earlier] ‘Princesses welcome’.  
(2004)

The AJC is celebrating the role women play in modern day racing ... The campaign, targeted at females aged 20-30 years, features images of immaculate women and racehorses, set to the ‘Strangers in Paradise’ soundtrack. [The] AJC marketing manager said the campaign highlighted the social nature of the racing event ... ‘[It] is about ladies dressing up and feeling good about themselves. Our research indicates that ladies consider Royal Randwick as one of the only social places where they can dress up, put on a hat, feel safe and have a great day.’ (2003)

[AJC spokeswoman Martin said] ‘In a sign of the potency of the princesses concept, ticket sales for the ‘Springfest’ lawn party were up by 60% on last year, and many corporate hospitality areas had already sold out’ [despite the lateness of the campaign and the cuts to advertising spending]. ‘The princesses campaign was so successful, we are running with it again. The AJC was confident its target market would respond.’ (2005)

At the racetrack, much was done to make the potential princesses feel welcome and suitably entertained. There were extensive ‘lawn parties’ (which might cost \$200 or more), corporate hospitality areas, fashion prizes for the best dressed (over \$250#000), themed villages, DJs and bands, plenty of alcohol, and pampering sessions for the ladies including massages, make-up artists, hair stylists, hot tubs, clairvoyants, and tattooists. There were also some horse races.

The billboards showed women in various poses from the bubble bath through to *haute coutured* perfection, capped with exotic millinery – projecting the imagery of princesses preparing to attend the race carnival. This was complemented with limited radio and television advertising, together with the ‘secondary’ advertising from newspaper articles, for example ‘Just as the horses need to be race track ready, so do the fashionable fillies’.<sup>21</sup>

It worked. A large number of women in the age range 18–35 responded. And where the princesses went, the princes were sure to follow. One of the radio advertisements said:

While the initial increase in attendance (2002–2003) was 19%, numbers of women attending increased by 33%. The commercial implications were significant. In addition to heavy trackside expenditure on drink, food and entertainment, the princesses campaign had significant off-track spinoffs. Princess related dress sales were notable; demand was sufficient for David Jones department store to resurrect its millinery department; also, their suit sales to men increased. As a result, David Jones signed up to sponsor the AJC Easter Saturday Derby for five years. In addition, there was a related upturn in business for day spas and nail, hair, tanning and beauty salons – all concerned with the business of princess preparation.

But, one might ask: ‘What is the problem? Dressing up has always been a part of “going out” – from the country town show to the Melbourne Cup. And if young people are more often than not “dressing down”, then dressing more formally is a welcome change.’ This is true, but it is a question of balance – how lifestyle maintenance enhances or distorts the larger life project, and the extent to which it consumes financial resources. Ultimately the issue here is about the evaluation of lifestyle and the extent to which lifestyle becomes a core element in personal identity. Having a fun outing is a basic part of being human; but if this becomes too strong a preoccupation, perhaps an obsession, it will impact negatively on personality and wellbeing. Also pertinent is the way in which commercially orchestrated imagery can have such an impact on lifestyle and expenditure on entertainment – the Princesses campaigns raised the ‘fashion stakes’ to a new level, and the trend has spread to other cities.

The princess myth has powerful archetypal roots in the psyche – as considered in a newspaper article entitled ‘Princess power: A nation of Princesses; the favourite fantasy of Australian women; From theatre to reality TV, the myth of the princess has never been more popular’.<sup>22</sup> And consumer advertising has been attuned to this mythology; it taps into primal anxieties about not being attractive and accepted. For example, this article noted that:

At the heart of the Princess myth lies the notion of transformation. Inside the female, the myth goes, waits a flawless being, gracious and pure. . . and physically beautiful of course. It just takes someone – a fairy godmother, Prince or reality-television producer – to pare back the soiled layers and scrub off the tarnish, and the true, perfect self is revealed. The delicious moment in so many fairytales, books and films is this rebirth, when the true self emerges shyly.

The key word that wannabe princesses . . . use to describe this transformed being is ‘power’, in various forms – ‘empowered’ and ‘powerful’ . . . This kind of transformation gives women . . . a path to discovering themselves.

In the 1950s, it was unlikely that the AJC princess campaign would have been successful, or even thought of. It was not that young women at the time were unaffected by a princess mythology; but for most, the chance that the myth would become a reality was presumed to be the lot of royalty and the rich. They seemed content that such a magical change would never happen to anyone in their accepted station in life. But today things have changed. A consumer-oriented lifestyle is now more widely accepted and practised, even by those who cannot afford it. ‘What once might have been a mythological process, a fairy tale or a story that was a metaphor for

something has become something that people see as quite real and potentially doable.<sup>23</sup> The expectation is there; and all can participate in it to some extent by wearing the right ‘uniform’, being in the right place and behaving in the ‘proper’ fashion. And smart industries can capitalise on this expectation.

The popularity of the AJC campaign was partly because of its explicit use of the word ‘princess’. It was like a badge, ticket or brand for the young women seeking psychological cachet by participating in the process. The word was an instant reminder of their identity aspiration. In a world where appearance was everything, assigning yourself a ‘princess label’ was at least a good start, and it might be the turning point for a successful future. But even better than that, you are ‘told’ you are a princess by someone else; you are validated by a recognised external source.

In 2005, when the television reality program *Australian Princess* was in production, the call went out for fourteen young women contestants. More than four thousand applied. The executive producer responsible for recruitment talked about the candidates: ‘They genuinely felt that they wanted to change. They felt it might give them a platform to make a difference.’ One of the candidates who made it through to the final rounds said: ‘I think every woman’s desire is to be the beauty of the story. I guess I believe in myself as a princess in a way. Not royalty and blood, but I know the woman inside of me and I desired the opportunity to shine.’ Moses, the author of the abovementioned article, summed it up as follows: ‘It’s clear the appeal of the Princess goes far deeper than the desire to walk nicely and wear the ball gown. The aspiration is as much about transforming the personality as it is about polishing the exterior.’<sup>24</sup>

No doubt the transformation of Tasmanian girl Mary Donaldson into the Crown Princess of Denmark, with its ongoing TV and magazine coverage, has helped fuel the princess mythology.

The princess imagery is now prominent in advertising for racing around the country, even if the word is not used explicitly. Being treated like a princess also features in other advertisements (for example for the Crown Casino). The power of the princess myth has even resonated in religious circles. The ‘Hillsong [Pentecostal] church [in Sydney] frames segments of its women’s ministry in the language of royalty – instead of being Christ’s brides, women are now his princesses’.<sup>25</sup> Michael Carr-Gregg, a prominent Australian child psychologist, has a different take on the princess myth. He was concerned about the level of behavioural problems in adolescent girls; his guide for helping them is published under the title *The princess bitchface syndrome*.<sup>26</sup>

While there may not be many schoolgirls at the racetrack, the glamour princess mythology is alive and well in girls of school age. It may well be that its expression in 18–35-year-olds is more a prolongation of unresolved teenage identity needs than an agenda that schoolgirls face for the first time when they leave school.

At this point, we will return to the central question raised earlier about the evaluation of lifestyle and its relationship with identity dynamics.

### **7.2.8 Lifestyle-indexed identity: External identity validation, the conditioning influence of advertising and prolonged adolescence**

A newspaper article by Delaney entitled ‘Absolutely fabulous: Spend, glam up and party, but is self-indulgence all it takes to make a young woman happy?’ suggests that princesses at the racetrack is but one of a number of similar phenomena in the

contemporary lifestyle of young women.<sup>27</sup> For many, a costly night (or day) out is planned about twice a month; for others, partying is standard practice every weekend; for some, alcohol is taken both before and during the outing, while they move on to cocaine and ‘ice’ (crystal methamphetamine) to keep them going when they tire. Young men participate just as readily in this social scene; their ‘take’ on glamour mythology is different, but nonetheless potent. But for both young men and women, their participation in such a social life to various extents provides psychological self-validation. This is often a big component of their lifestyle; and it has psychological roots into their identity because it provides the ‘psychological buzz’ or ‘instant feel-good’ on which they have become dependent for a sense of personal validation.

The proposed model for identity health in Chapter 6 calls especially for the development of internal identity resources to complement the external. But in a culture where for many lifestyle assumes greater importance than values or commitments, the internalisation of identity resources is inhibited by a growing dependence on external validations – especially in a combination of experience and consumer goods. The ‘buzz’ or ‘feel-good’ therefore becomes a type of identity holy grail. If life is primarily about ‘feeling good’, then young people will constantly search for experiences that will deliver instant feel-good. Problems occur when buzzes with increasingly higher ‘voltage’ are required for satisfaction; and where more and more money is paid for maintaining the buzz. By contrast, the attraction in long-term goals is often not strong enough to have much more than a vague influence – goals and ambitions may be OK as long as they do not compromise current lifestyle too much.

If you are young and cashed up ... *glamour* rules. It's the dominant aesthetic, but it's also an attitude and way of life, one with its own rules and role models. More than that, however, the lust for *glamour* is deeply emblematic of our age. We are fixated with celebrities, image and style. Prosperity has given us the cash to spend, and a consumer culture that rewards self-absorption encourages us to spend it on ourselves ...

[Those strongly influenced by the myth of glamour] are also the ultimate products of consumer culture. Rather than rebelling against it, they have turned up the volume and embraced it with a look that is maxi consumer.<sup>28</sup>

What she says is no doubt true for some, and is more pertinent to women than men; for men, glamour includes more of the following in the mix: ego, competitiveness, physical prowess, ‘toys’ like cars, and success in work – rather than glamorous appearance as such. But if the words *self-validation through lifestyle* – that is, activities that make one feel valuable, accepted, important and attractive – were substituted in place of *glamour*, this paragraph would become much more insightful into young people’s identity dynamics, both men and women.

People’s identity or sense of self needs to be affirmed not just once but continually; some regular recognition and acceptance from outside the self are needed to nourish the identity and keep it alive. Lifestyle activities, probably even more than possessions, have become the principal source of this external validation; and this taps into basic meaning and purpose, perhaps with more influence than one might expect in a healthy identity. Externals, especially consumer items, help give a ‘concrete’ sense of identity. In a sense people can feel that they do not have to wait until after death to go to heaven; they can have ‘consumer paradise’ right here and now. Access

to a particular lifestyle and reference groups supplies people with an instantaneous feeling of identification; the kudos readily rubs off on them; it can underscore what they think they need for the rest of their life. But if the external validation they depend on breaks down (for example when a strongly career-oriented person is retrenched or retires) an identity crisis may result. In addition, lifestyle can even tap into people's natural concern that their passage through life should leave some mark; if they do not see themselves making a mark through family, work achievements and their own personal integrity, there is the temptation to make a statement through lifestyle.

If people do not have a strong sense of doing something meaningful and satisfying that is not so strongly indexed to lifestyle, they are more likely to look continually for self-validation in lifestyle activity. In other words, if there are not influential internal goals and values, people will be more inclined to pursue the immediate feel-good or buzz to fill the void. Periodic doses of external self-validation can keep them going; the princess and night-out activities referred to earlier can top up their needs. The more self-validation from lifestyle, the more they feel that it also gives them meaning and purpose. Identity health is compromised if the psychological and financial cost of continual feel-good validation becomes excessive. On the other hand, a healthy lifestyle (in the broadest sense) enhances identity.

Another factor also enters the equation: where self-validation is primarily external, it is open to commercial colonisation.

### **The conditioning influence of lifestyle advertising**

Advertising not only markets specific items for self-validation, but promotes and sustains the rationale for an *external* self-validation. It keeps the myth of consumer or lifestyle identity on low simmer.

People sense that they *belong* to a particular lifestyle; it identifies them. And every sign of lifestyle advertising is like a banner affirming who they are – hence television and glossy magazine advertising provide an identity infrastructure that reminds them ‘this is where you belong’; this may operate at a relatively unconscious level through an iconography of consumerism. The identity imagery in advertising is atmospheric; it assures people that they are on track as far as lifestyle – and meaning in life – are concerned; you have identified with the right group and the right brands. Some examples: ‘Absolutely everything you desire’ (Lancôme Paris); ‘Limited time Unlimited luxury’ (Target USA); ‘Because you’re worth it’ (L’oréal Paris); The full-page advertisement for Bluefly USA, online retailers, lists an extensive range of consumer feelings, in which the word NEED was highlighted – ‘Joy rage envy desire passion jealousy hurt elation success thirst victory boredom fury NEED want lust sex crave rapture hunger triumph stress thrill pleasure ache rush conquest revenge *That’s why I NEED Bluefly.*’<sup>29</sup>

### **Money and maintenance of lifestyle-indexed identity**

Young people need money to pursue the common consumer- and entertainment-related forms of self-validation, even if it eats up more than a healthy proportion of their total earnings. For those who are supported financially to some extent by their family, lifestyle maintenance is even easier; they can live more extravagantly, or they can spend less time working to reach the desired level of disposable income, leaving more time for lifestyle options.

Advertising psychology is well aware of these dynamics; it is in the best commercial interest to keep this mythology alive and well. Most advertising in television and magazines therefore has a dual function: it promotes the targeted item while at the same time sustaining the myth of consumer-related identity development. This mythology in turn fuels consumerism. As discussed in Frank's book *Luxury fever*, 'luxury purchases, if adopted by enough people, become the status quo. In order to fit in or just to keep up, we have to spend more money, as in some sort of consumer arms race'.<sup>30</sup>

### **'Gawk'-related identity**

In Tokyo, distinctively dressed groups of teenagers congregate in the Harajuku shopping area to be 'gawked' at by shoppers – for example the Gothiloli (Gothic Lolitas); they have become a tourist attraction, like the pink-haired punks who used to hang out around the Tower of London. Here, self-validation is achieved by being noticed or stared at for looking different. For some, it may be rebelliousness expressed in a conformist sort of way; but getting attention provides a self-validation.

Gawk-related identity usually requires wearing a recognised 'uniform' that demarcates the tribe. There have been a succession of types since the bodgies and widgeys of the 1950s. One of the most recently documented is the Emos (designating a special relationship with emotional punk music), with preferred music, dress, hangouts and heroes/heroines.<sup>31</sup>

There is much more to identity dynamics within groups than being noticed (7.2.1), but in some instances it exercises a powerful influence on behaviour as young people experiment with self-expression.

### **The evaluation of lifestyle as part of identity development**

Lifestyle is a natural part of being human; we all display one. The importance of people's planning and implementing a particular lifestyle is not in question. What is proposed here is the need for reflection about the meaning of lifestyle and about factors that have a conditioning influence on it. This can help with an evaluation of one's lifestyle, to check whether it is consistent with core values. Also, the value stance taken here presumes that the life project needs to be 'larger' than lifestyle; otherwise, excesses in lifestyle can eventually be damaging for the individual's wellbeing and that of others. Problems can arise with respect to the sources, scope and spread of identity affirmation.

Hence the purpose of analyses like the above is to inform self-evaluation in the light of what it means to have a healthy identity. It seeks to promote substantial rather than ephemeral resources for identity development. And it seeks personal truth in self-understanding rather than an identity that includes pretence and illusion; in other words, it tries to identify and name what is illusory. The warning in Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Mother night* is pertinent: 'We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful what we pretend to be.'<sup>32</sup>

### **Resourcing young people's identity self-evaluation**

Consideration of links between lifestyle and identity is always difficult because it is close to the bone. It is ultimately about individuals' reviewing how their life structure shapes up against their ideal self. And this is a very personal activity. The bulk of this chapter provides raw material that can assist in the self-evaluative process, which



usually begins with analysis of what is happening out there in the culture before personal implications can be teased out. One of the difficult tasks of an education in identity is to resource young people's capacity for self-evaluation by helping them access the pertinent issues and ideas. Precisely because of their identity vulnerability, they are not always receptive to critiques of lifestyle or culture, particularly if they feel that this threatens their options. So it is realistic not to expect evidence of too much progress; even pointing young people in the right direction may be the first helpful step towards a mature identity.

Ambiguity abounds in the personal self-evaluation process. We have met young people who are able to discuss many of the above-mentioned issues in an intelligent and responsible way; but we are also aware that the profile of their own lifestyle (how they spend their time and money) is evidence of these very problems. A critical awareness of problems in identity-related consumerism does not seem to be inconsistent with being avid consumers who need the identity cachet of their purchases and leisure activities.

Trying to resource young people's evaluation of self and lifestyle means taking a value stance with respect to materialism and consumerism; and this is not the most attractive stance to commend to today's youth. But at least those involved in education and care of youth can acquaint them with such views, together with the concerns for human wellbeing that motivate them. For example:

We're in the inevitable progression of individualistic culture where what's important is very much what relates to the individual person and his or her attributes. If we take materialism – glamour and good looks are part of that – the evidence suggests that, far from making us happier, materialism is linked to lower wellbeing, alienation and lower happiness levels.

One of the problems with consumer culture is that it tends towards the excess – because ultimately what you get out of it is not deeply fulfilling. You quickly adapt to that level of achievement – you quickly adapt and want the next hit. That's what happens when too much of your life focuses on the personal and individual.<sup>33</sup>

Another key issue to consider is the time, energy and cost (both psychological and financial) that go into self-validation. A healthy identity should not need too much attention; it is not narcissistic. If too much has to be done to 'prove' an identity, especially to outsiders, this is an indicator of identity sickness. Rather, a healthy identity should be able to channel energy into worthy projects outside the self; it should be altruistic and even self-forgetful. In this sense, one's life needs to be larger than one's identity.

A preoccupation with external self-validation may be part of a more enveloping self-centredness. For young people who by nature and/or nurture are highly self-centred, their lives tend to revolve exclusively around self-satisfying activities. But a life spent in pursuit of just what pleases the self can end up feeling empty, because it does not have the emotional space to engage meaningfully with others. Some young people suffering from this problem may seek psychological help, asking 'What do I need so that I don't feel so empty?' But a helpful solution cannot be found within this limited frame of reference; it requires questioning the value of 'meeting needs' as the ultimate criterion for fulfilment. Just as identity should be more than lifestyle, so fulfilment should be more than self-satisfaction.

Also in need of evaluation is the way that focus-on-self is a mantra for lifestyle advertising. This consumer orientation can so occupy young people's attention that it inhibits the development of an identity based more on internal resources, extending the identity resolution tasks that are usually judged to be a part of adolescence.

### **The prolongation of adolescence**

Many of the lifestyle and identity issues discussed here have been referenced to the 18–35 age group, even though they are often evident in older people as well as in young people of school age. One could expect that sorting out a balance between internal and external identity resources is a project that gets under way in adolescence, and that substantial progress would be made by the early twenties. But ambivalence about links between lifestyle and identity remains an ongoing problem for young adults. It is as if the developmental tasks of adolescence are being prolonged.

A cluster of cultural factors is extending the time between leaving school and becoming financially and domestically independent: More time is spent studying at university and technical colleges; the high cost of independent living inclines post-school youth to stay at home; finding secure employment with a clear career pathway is more difficult, as is taking time out for travel. The drive to have a satisfying lifestyle and the associated financial and social costs interrelates with these factors and the resultant mix has a significant effect on personal relationships. The most obvious statistic is the increasing average age at marriage; the idea of marrying, 'settling down' and raising a family is being postponed or perhaps even taken off the agenda.

In addition, consumer-lifestyle self-validation affects relationships because the tendency to seek existential 'feel-good/buzz' experiences makes instant satisfaction and enjoyment the focal point; and this may not be a good recipe for successful, enduring friendship. If people carry a mainly self-centred interest into their relationships, it is understandable that this will naturally make the association more ephemeral; if the survival of a relationship depends only on the level of self-affirmation each partner derives from it, then it is less likely that the couple will be able to make a long-term, meaningful project together with shared goals, values and commitments. Such an association could readily stall once the couple passed the initial stage of being 'in love' when feelings of infatuation provided copious self-validation; this occurs when, for various reasons, they are unable to progress to an ongoing loving relationship that is sustained by commitment and not just emotion (even though emotional compatibility will always remain important).

### **7.2.9 Branded: The buying and selling of teenagers**

Market research has understood the psychology of identity development well enough to plan successful links between branded consumer products and the perceived needs of young people. Advertising imagery orchestrates their imaginations in non-verbal as well as verbal ways, to make them more receptive to brand messages. This process is encapsulated in the title of Alissa Quart's book *Branded: The buying and selling of teenagers* (2003). She followed up Klein's interpretation of marketing as preying on young people's identity vulnerabilities. In addition, she showed how marketing had pushed further into childhood to tap the new retail potential of pre-teenagers – the 11–13-year-olds. The comment on the back cover summarised her intentions as follows:

[The book shows] how teenagers succumb to constant commercial battering designed to reduce their individuality and creativity, the effects of targeted messages on emerging teen identities and how they are subtly taught to market to each other ... also the bravery of isolated young people who fight back, turning the tables on the cocksure mega-corporations striving to crack the codes of teen[age] cool. These kids prove it isn't necessary to give in to branding, but it's a drop in the ocean when an entire generation is being raised to consume.

In addition to the move by brand names to market products for ever younger children, there is even a luxury product range for babies. A newspaper reported the trend as follows:

Why babies need luxury gear. Fussy cashed-up parents are digging deep for the right look.

Baby gear (clothing, cots, prams, nappy bags, feeding chairs and the rest) has gone from the stuff of necessity to that of status – for the parents anyway ... But the strange thing about the current obsession for the best, coolest and latest for our babies is that it has nothing to do with our babies at all.

In the United States, annual sales of specialty baby toiletries . . . have tripled since 2001 to USD\$75 million. First time parents are getting older (one in ten first time mothers in Australia is aged over 35). They have more money, know what they want, have lived and breathed the dominating culture of consumption and, at the end of a long day, the shopping is guilt-free when it is for someone who can't say 'No'.<sup>34</sup>

Older children and teenagers, both rich and poor alike, seem to be prone to seeking status and desirability through the brands of the consumer goods they purchase – the brand label apparently carrying more identity weight than the actual products themselves.

Today's teens are victims of the contemporary luxury economy. Raised by a commodity culture from the cradle, teens' dependably fragile self-images and their need to belong to groups are perfect qualities for advertisers to exploit ... They look at every place of children's vulnerability, searching for selling opportunities ... Kids are forced to embrace the instrumental logic of consumerism at an earlier than ever age ... finding self definition in logos and products.

[Marketing themes for youth often are] about 'melodrama', about mastering rules, about the search for identity and a theme called 'hanging out'.<sup>35</sup>

From their ubiquity, logos derive psychological power that affects teenagers' hopes and dreams. Once, brands could be thought of as being externals that might be used to identify individuals with a group or differentiate them from a group. But now, 'brands have infiltrated pre-teens and adolescents' inner lives'.<sup>36</sup> As well as appealing to teenagers' felt needs, branding also tapped into their idealism: their wish to have an ideal world to live in could be subtly played upon so they might accept a 'branded' one instead.

The branding process is not only pervasive, it is often perceived as natural, taken for granted and not questioned – just the way things are. There is a danger here that a

culturally constructed and commercially motivated process can begin to distort, and perhaps even substitute for, the process of identity development. Young people may come to feel that they themselves are just a brand – a distinctive combination of commercial brandings that expresses who they are.

In a sense, [branding] provides kids with a sense of self-hood before many of them have even recognised that they have a self ... consider[ing] their own characters and personae brands unto themselves.

[Teenagers] suffer more than any other sector of society from wall to wall selling. They are at least as anxious as their parents about having enough money and maintaining their social class, a fear that they have been taught is best allayed by *more* branded gear. And they have taken to branding themselves, believing that the only way to participate in the world is to turn oneself into a corporate product.

Many of the [teenagers] ... who are drenched in name-brand merchandise are slightly awkward or overweight or not conventionally pretty. While many teenagers are branded, the ones most obsessed with brand names feel they have a lack that only super-branding will cover and insure against social ruin.<sup>37</sup>

As noted earlier, research studies have shown that both rich as well as poor teenagers and children are affected by this branding mentality; and both rich and poor are targeted for what they can spend to achieve it. This amounts to corporate manipulation of youth; one Australian columnist referred to it as ‘corporate paedophilia’.<sup>38</sup>

Whether at school or in other contexts, efforts to help youth become less naive about the implications of participating in consumerist branding need to introduce them to an ‘unbranding’ or ‘decolonising’ agenda – that is, identifying seduction, and deconstructing chic images and brand mystique.

Advertising that increasingly aims at younger children tries to ‘hook’ them at an early age, and retain them as loyally branded for life. Magazines like *Teen people*, *Elle girl*, *Cosmo girl*, and *Teen Vogue* prepare pre-teenage girls for the more adult versions to which they will graduate as they get older. These, and many consumer products, especially in cosmetics and body-building, appeal to young people’s anxiety about body image and their hopes for improvement. The stylised professional wrestling programs on television (in the USA) are said to appeal particularly to the young men who are interested in muscular body image.

### **7.2.10 The retail potential of teenagers’ dreams for self-improvement**

The desire for self-improvement, especially in the domain of body image and perceived attractiveness, is a key part of what is called ‘teenage angst’. Pertinent to earlier comments about the cost of conformity, Quart claimed that glossy magazines exploit the teenage angst theme:

[Magazines for teenagers] construct an unaffordable but palpable world of yearning for girls. We are all too familiar with the negative effects of the model body on girls’ self images, but these magazines do something new: they help to solidify feelings of economic and taste inadequacy in girls. By introducing very young teens to female

celebrity and the dressmakers who helped create it, these magazines underline that girls are not complete or competitive if they don't wear label dresses at their junior high school dances.<sup>39</sup>

Teenagers can be overwhelmed by the constant reminders across media and advertising that they have to measure their attractiveness against the mostly impossible standards set by fashion models. The permanent gap between the ideal and their own appearance is a constant source of depressive feelings. This goes hand in hand with frustration from the gap between the social reality of the media – ‘you can be what you want’ – and their own experience that this does not happen no matter how hard they try. There are apparently limitless opportunities advertised, but the high hopes they raise are followed by a sense of failure and impotence, and a feeling of not knowing where to go (see the discussion of youth angst and anomie later in this chapter and in Chapter 9). Klein called the resultant feeling ‘globo-claustrophobia’.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, these negative feelings can fuel hope that a combination of labelled clothes and footwear, cosmetics, the right mobile phone and mp3 player, and the right likes and dislikes in music, film and television will give them a successful identity ‘makeover’. This teenage angst is fertile for marketing consumer salves. Klein reported that in 2000, teenagers (in the United States) spent about AUD230 billion in clothing, CDs and makeup.

Marketing and advertising finely tune the perceived social reality that supports branding and consumerism for teenagers. They try to show that this is what *normal* teenagers do – that teenagers all round the world do it. Specific magazine articles as well as the imagery on television promote this global view. For example: ‘Cool hunting articles in teen magazines convince American teens that all the world is a mall promoting a global youth materialism and homogeneity; these international fashion round-ups also reflect a worldwide teen consumerism and an erasure of the national youth identity.’<sup>41</sup>

### **7.2.11 Body image: The marketing strategy of inadequacy and the buying of beauty, sex appeal, and performance**

Youth marketing, like marketing in general, gives special attention to body image and sex appeal, promoting a heightened body-consciousness to drive consumerism. For young women, clothing and cosmetic products can enhance their sexual desirability. The right body shape and the right ‘boys toys’ can strengthen young men’s sexual magnetism. For adolescents, who are like ‘hormones on feet’, but not fully aware of it, the advertising and media imagery can make their negotiation of sexuality and relationships even more fraught than it need be.

Quart expressed concern about the invasive nature of this marketing:

All this intrusive marketing would be fine ... if it didn't deeply affect teens themselves. The personae, self-images, ambitions, and values of young people in the United States have been seriously distorted by the commercial frenzy surrounding them. What do the advertising images of teens, breasts augmented and abs bared do to teenagers? These images take their toll on a teen's sense of self and his or her community.

‘You have to be thin to be popular,’ one girl told me, and the array of flat, bare stomachs at her summer camp certainly backs this up. Other girls told me about their eating disorders and their

friends' body-image problems. Their self understanding doesn't change their behaviour, though. They are like birds that know every bar of their gilded cage by heart. 'Can you believe this ad? No one's body looks like that!' one fourteen-year-old told me, pointing to an ad in *Vogue*. 'A bunch of old men are telling me how to look!' Thirteen-year-old girls expressed pained astonishment at '11-year-olds who get their eyebrows waxed' – but the 13-year-olds shaved their legs everyday.<sup>42</sup>

No matter what they purchase and no matter what beauty formulae they try, the problem does not go away. But it has much value in marketing terms: teenage angst is like an unslakeable identity thirst, fuelling a secure market. At considerable psychic and monetary cost, many teenagers will do whatever they can to become more beautiful and acceptable, and to be part of a desired lifestyle or atmosphere. Being insecure about their identity is one thing, but to be an outcast from groups is worse – to have no identity at all!

Another problem with the sexual imagery in this marketing is its potential to affect young people's attitudes to sex and personal relationships. If they do not have any other significant values input to their thinking, it is understandable that some youth will see sex as just one of a number of pleasures there for them to enjoy; and to be free to use or exploit it is desirable. The overwhelming sexual imagery in the media, and the taken-for-granted place of 'easy' sex that comes across as 'normal' in much film and television programming can insinuate a naive view of sex among the young. It is readily associated with fun and pleasure, with little room for the emotional and commitment dimensions.

Many teenagers would not have to look far beyond their parents to learn that feelings of inadequacy (physical and personal) can be relieved by consumer products. Belief in beautification through consumption and acquisition is like a religious faith transmitted from parents to their children. And now, as suggested in the reality television series *Ultimate makeover*, it is not just hairstyle, cosmetics and clothing but cosmetic *surgery* that can enhance your prospects. It is of concern that youth are vulnerable to the 'manufacturing of [body image] inadequacy [as] a sales strategy'. In the United States, 'Among teenagers 18 and under in 1994, only 392 had breast augmentations and 511 liposuction; in 2001 there were 2596 augmentations and 2755 liposuctions among the group, a 562 percent increase.'<sup>43</sup>

Young people are particularly vulnerable as far as body image is concerned because:

the idea of permanent change to the body – made practically overnight – appeals to adolescents, people who are by definition shifting identity daily ... Many teenage cosmetic surgeries emanate from self-aversion, camouflaged as an emblem of self-esteem and normalcy. The girl who chooses cosmetic surgery chooses obsession with the body and mastery over it rather than an attempt at the transcendence that means forgetting the body ... the line between self-betterment and a morphic pathology is a blurry one.<sup>44</sup>

Body consciousness and making it look as attractive as possible is not a new idea. But the cosmetic surgery era has taken it into new and much more expensive territory. The 1998 book by Gilman, *Creating beauty to cure the soul: Race and psychology in the shaping of aesthetic surgery*, suggested that cosmetic surgery was part of a larger movement, the 'medicalisation of psychological pain':<sup>45</sup> anti-depressants for the

depressed, tranquillisers for the stressed, and cosmetic surgery for those who fear the physical effects of ageing. In this sense, it is just another variation on drinking alcohol to feel relaxed and euphoric. In more general terms it is like, 'Buy this and it will ease the pain', where *this* can range from headache tablet to new clothes or an overseas trip.

But there are a number of issues here that need further analysis related to fundamental questions about what constitutes health, beauty and happiness. In both surgery and medication, there is great potential to enhance human life; and there are problems where people have not made use of such help when really needed, for example the need for anti-depressants for someone who was clinically depressed; or cosmetic surgery that could correct deformities and disfigurement. Again, it is a matter of balance. The point being made is about the problem of excess where medication or surgery is marketed as an immediate feel-good solution, but a solution that can often exacerbate rather than heal psychological pains. This view of medication and surgery, along with other views considered above, can insinuate an identity that is skewed by consumerism, particularly as regards what constitutes health, beauty and happiness.

A preoccupation with improving body image also seems to have a social class or social mobility dimension. An obsession with body image consumer products (including surgery) might be expected to be a characteristic of the more well off – the so-called middle and upper classes, who have more discretionary income for such purposes. However, even the working class and poor can respond to advertising that proposes the body beautiful as an image for all. Perhaps this encourages those less well off economically to believe that they are really part of a more expensive social group, and they readily subscribe to the level of commercial activity expected of such status. '[T]his has speeded teens' mass internalisation of the middle class ideology that worships the perfect body.' But there is little critical awareness of the commercial drive behind such worship. As Quart went on to note:

[this is] symptomatic of a new sort of adolescence in which kids ratify their family's social status through looking the part. Marketers have convinced these kids that they need a specific set of physical attributes ... For the large subcultures of teens who self-brand into lookalikes with tiny waistlines, bulging biceps, deracinated noses, and copious breasts, the supposed freedom of self-creation is not a freedom at all. What they have is consumer choice, no substitute for free will.<sup>46</sup>

Another problem related to identity and media-image is the increase in anorexia among teenagers. The unattainable but persistent image of perfect thinness noted earlier can drive young girls (and some young men) to damage their health. Quart reported the websites of 'Pro-anas' – pro-anorexic young women who shared their identity and lifestyle over the Internet, giving the group some identity by association.<sup>47</sup>

Constructing a more appealing body image is not just a project for adolescent girls. For boys, body image problems are more likely to show as excessive efforts to acquire a more muscular shape. Weightlifting, high-protein diets and even the use of steroids have been part of the regime.

The use of performance-enhancing drugs in sport is another item that fits this stable of problems, all of which have identity-related dimensions.

### 7.2.12 Consumer without a cause: The marketing of rebellion to youth and the domestication of nonconformity

Rebellion has long been a supposed central theme for the personal development of youth: ‘cutting the teenage umbilical cord’, ‘becoming an individual’, ‘autonomy from parents’ and so on. In the 1950s iconic teenage film *The Wild One*, Marlon Brando was asked: ‘What are you rebelling against?’ His reply was ‘What have you got?’ It was as if traditional values, beliefs and behaviour were the natural things to rebel against to achieve independence and individuality.

The James Dean *Rebel without a cause* image was played up as if rebellion was *de rigueur* for teenagers. From that time, teenage rebellion had recognised marketing potential; distinctive branded products could help express rebelliousness. Non-conformism, anti-authority and questioning have been promoted as perennial themes underlying the youth search for ‘individuality’ and ‘freedom’. Perhaps the most influential sustainer of these myths has been the popular music industry – it keeps these emotional themes on low simmer.

In his book *Subculture: The meaning of style*, Hebdige considered that:

nonconformist fashions were not just ‘irreverent posturing’. Alternative style was part of a youth resistance to, and defence against, consumer capitalism. Then the marketers found that they could make use of nonconformism as a marketing ploy. That is no longer a creative resistant force but just another quirky fashion need to meet.<sup>48</sup>

He suggested that marketing has become so subtle as to take into account people’s resistance to advertising, and their concerns that extensive consumerism might erode individuality. Even the desire to protest particular causes and to resist conformity to prevailing ideologies can be taken into account commercially. It is as if ‘you show me a need and I’ll find you a product’. You can buy the soft drink *Che*, made by the Revolution Company in honour of Che Guevara.

For some teenagers, the quest for attractive body image and social acceptability seems to become distorted when they display body and clothing styles that for average people are repulsive. Dressing in bizarre outfits, black or multicoloured, as well as extensive body piercing that looks more like self-mutilation, seem at first sight to be different from the trends noted above. However, it may represent the same underlying psychological process, where these teenagers are trying to express rebelliousness against ‘whatever’ precisely through what others will identify as distasteful. It is a matter of a different, and perhaps more ‘off-beat’ reference group to which they are conforming – but an identity reference group nevertheless. Also, what is often important for such young people is the need to be noticed, no matter what, even if repulsiveness is the mechanism for attracting attention (7.2.8). The interesting question is to see for how long this style of self-expression persists. Will it be just a ‘teenage thing’ or will it continue into adult life? It is noteworthy on this question that some adults retain a strong association with motorcycling culture throughout their lives; for them it was not just the ‘easy rider’ image from their youth.

If something can be sold to be part of a cause, then a market will develop. This is evident in the way that ‘identity politics’ became incorporated into marketing in the 1980s and 1990s. Identity politics had to do with the recognition and ‘visibility’ of minority and marginalised groups in society; it included protests and movements to



draw public attention to the issues. The gradual appearance of different groups in films and television dramas and sitcoms (and in advertising), which contrasted with the traditional ‘white, anglo-saxon two-parent family’, appeared to be part of the changing perception of what was regarded as ‘normal’, ‘average’ or even ‘PC’ (politically correct). Afro-Americans, single parents, divorcees and gays became a much more prominent part of television fare than was the case in the 1950s and 1960s. Whether it was simply mirroring ordinary life or whether it actually affected people’s attitudes, it gave some level of public acknowledgment and acceptability to such groups, and at the same time provided an advertising basis for niche marketing.

Marketers and the film and television industries were quick to accommodate identity politics. The thematic advertising appeal was to diversity. As one consumer research report noted:

As we look towards the next twenty-five years, it is clear that acceptance of alternative lifestyles will become even stronger and more widespread as [Generation X] grows up and takes over the reins of power, and becomes the dominant buying group in the consumer marketplace ... *Diversity is the key fact of life for Xers, the core of the perspective they bring to the marketplace.* Diversity in all its forms – cultural, political, sexual, racial, social – is a hallmark of this generation.<sup>49</sup>

Diversity, plurality and multiculturalism made up the broader thematic within which protest could be commercially harnessed. It is not that protests against injustice, inequalities and environmental questions are inappropriate – they are desirable. But there is a need to be suspicious about the extent to which marketing potential can readily tap into social causes. For example, if protests or being politically correct can be easily signified by displaying what you have bought or what you wear, then there is some danger that the valuable human impulse to bring about worthwhile change can be domesticated and trivialised, and in the long run this might inhibit social change. As is usually the case for many of these identity-related issues, it is a matter of balance.

There is no doubt that advertising has contributed to positive change in public awareness of health and environmental issues, and this needs to be acknowledged. But because of the overwhelming presence of advertising and marketing, there remains a persistent need to look beneath the surface of what is being promoted, and to try to keep some perspective. The best of causes are open to colonisation by marketing, branding and consuming. Even ethical business practice has now been advertised as a desirable and marketable quality for companies.

### **7.2.13 A spiritual dimension to marketing?**

The sort of marketing described under the labels ‘utopian’ and ‘cause-based’ shows an identifiable spiritual dimension. It responds to people’s idealism and links brands to causes like ecological sustainability, care for the environment, and being ethical. Bringing concern for such issues into consumer choices is not a bad thing in itself. Such a development goes with the greater community awareness of environmental and health issues over the past thirty years or so. At least this approach appeals to images and ideas that are different from an unspecified materialistic consumerism. It also fits with increasing consumer discrimination.

However, this spiritual emphasis is minimal when viewed against the images and ideas about spirituality that emerge across the full spectrum of entertainment film and television. On this broader canvas, anything substantial about (youth) spirituality and religiosity is completely absent – that is, if you do not count formal religious television.

There is a stable of television series like *Buffy the vampire slayer*, *Angel*, *Dark Angel*, *Charmed*, and *Sabrina the teenage witch*, as well as films that deal with spirits and the occult. They attract a good market share of entertainment. But in terms of the evaluative approach to spirituality taken up in later chapters, these would hardly be considered to be making substantial statements about a spiritual dimension to life for young people.

#### **7.2.14 From James Dean to *Clueless*: Teenage angst to teenage makeover**

Teenage angst and rebellion figured in a number of films targeting young people since the 1950s. ‘Cinema of loneliness’ was one term used to describe the genre that tapped into youth’s uncertainty about identity and future. However, these were gradually superseded by films with the subtle, underlying theme of ‘youth makeover’ – material success through consumption; the heroes and heroines became more ‘cool’. Quart comments: ‘The characters in contemporary teen films are empty vessels, slathered with beauty products.’<sup>50</sup>

It is beyond our scope to analyse the developments in film and television that affect teenagers’ social reality as far as consumerism is concerned. However, it is an area in need of further research (see Chapter 15). Technological developments have added considerably to the mix. Product placement in computer games has a potential influence, given the extensive time that children and teenagers spend entertaining themselves in this fashion. Also, television watching now has to compete with the Internet and video/DVD players for young people’s entertainment time. Advertising has not neglected the possibilities in mobile phone texting, picture/video sharing, podcasting and the like – new technological territories on which the consumer brands can plant their flags.

Marketing, and particularly branding, seek to keep name brands imprinted on youth consciousness as essential elements in their cultural environment, and a staple diet for self-expression. Maintaining a cool brand image is the ongoing project of youth market research – ever trying to create an enduring positive association between consumer and brand. The group Teenage Research Unlimited publishes a magazine called *Omnibuzz* that regularly reports surveys of the views of young people aged from about 12 to 18 years; it is like a teenage opinion poll, not the newspoll on preferred political party or prime minister, but on consumer tastes. One of its retail barometers is the ‘Coolest Brand Meter’ – in 2003, ‘Sony, Nike, Abercrombie and Fitch, and Old Navy were the top performers’.<sup>51</sup>

### **7.3 The anatomy and psychological function of ‘cool’**

#### **7.3.1 Young people’s search for a ‘cool’ identity**

At one level, youngsters frequently use the word ‘cool’ to mean simply ‘yes’ or ‘OK’. But at another level, the desire to look cool has a big influence on hopes, imagination and behaviour. To be ‘uncool’ is dreaded as the ultimate social condemnation. It is at

this deeper level that the meaning of cool has significance for young people's search for identity.

Precisely because the notion of cool figures prominently in both 'projective' and 'defensive' identity functions, its psychological and sociological dynamics warrant detailed analysis. It has been subtly etched into the imaginations of young people (and many of the not so young) such that it strongly colours their behaviour. If cool identification has become one of the dominant motivating forces for young people, then understanding it is not only important for educators but for health agencies and all concerned with their upbringing.

Cool is a very tangible influence on adolescent thinking and behaviour, while at the same time difficult to pin down and analyse. However, acknowledging that it is socially constructed, communicated and marketed brings it out from the psychological shadows into the open where it can be identified and evaluated. Questions about the anatomy and function of cool, its history and commercial implications are pertinent to the spiritual and moral education of the young.

### **The Projective identity function of cool and its relation to targeted consumerism**

Already we have considered how being cool was a desirable image for young people to project (7.2.5). And we referred to 'cool hunting' (7.2.10) where adults, or young people themselves, are recruited to a 'youth intelligence service'. These 'youth consultants' search the local area for potentially new styles or trends in clothing, music and lifestyle. This information is then quickly relayed to market research headquarters for commercial appraisal and possible action for youth commerce. The idea is to be first with something cool and exploit it before it loses its gloss and becomes 'old hat'.

The image of cool applies to those who are perceived by peers as trendy and individualistic, while being laid back, somewhat emotionally detached and unflappable – a kind of undemonstrative distinctiveness. On the face of it, this seems like a tricky posture to pull off – likely, therefore, to be a difficult code for the marketers and advertisers to crack. However, their efforts to do this have been evidently successful. This is instructive, because it gives insights into the way in which the social construction and marketing of cool enters into the identity dynamics of young people.

Those who decide what is to be the latest in cool, and how this is to be advertised, need to do two things: they have to promote the mystique of being cool while targeting the identity needs of young people. This gives commercial access to the considerable money the young are prepared to invest to maintain their coolness. For example, the cool trend some years back for girls to wear crop-tops with hipline skirts or jeans with bare midriff has now become a well-established and profitable fashion – along with baggy clothing for young men – whether or not these styles are actually comfortable. What teenager would dare to ignore this dominant fashion and run the risk of being labelled as a dork or uncool? But, almost inexorably, this fashion will change and eventually be eclipsed by something different.

Young people know when they are cool because this is expressed in peer-credentialled cool behaviour, fashion and musical tastes; their coolness is verified by being reflected back to them by others who affirm their lifestyle choices. Also, their coolness is measured by congruence with the media images that are constructed specifically to promote and maintain cool within the social reality of teenage culture.

### The social origins and history of cool

Some scholars have suggested that cool has a history with origins in the coping mechanisms of oppressed groups, and that it has developed into a widespread, culturally desirable attitude in personal identity that has become highly commercialised.

In 1992, Majors and Billson, in their book *Cool pose: The dilemmas of black manhood in America*,<sup>52</sup> looked at cool as a quintessential characteristic of the masculine identity of African American men. Others considered that the notion of cool had gone beyond the African American community and had become more broadly based in popular culture in Westernised countries, in the 20th century (for example in Stearns, *American cool: Constructing a twentieth century emotional style*, 1994).<sup>53</sup> Still others looked into cool as a key behavioural characteristic of teenagers (Danesi, *Cool: The signs and meanings of adolescence*, 1994).<sup>54</sup> Finally, the commercial implications of cultivating and marketing cool were considered, particularly with respect to youth consumerism (Frank, *The conquest of cool: Business culture, counterculture and the rise of hip consumerism*, 1997. He analysed the significance of cool in the rise of youth-targeted consumerism since the 1960s.<sup>55</sup>)

The analysis we found most informative, even if not all of their ideas were equally compelling, was Pountain and Robins' book *Cool Rules: The anatomy of an attitude* (2000).<sup>56</sup> They interpreted cool as an influential cultural phenomenon that had a history dating back into the roots of African American identity in West Africa, as well as having comparable manifestations in different cultures over the centuries. They traced the development of contemporary cool in art, music, fashion, cinema and lifestyle, showing how it has exerted a great influence on identity development and behaviour. Through this psychological mechanism, cool became a powerful theme in the shaping of cultivated images and marketing strategies by businesses that thrived on lifestyle-related consumerism. Pountain and Robins analysed cool as a socially constructed lifestyle attitude that strongly reflected contemporary ideas about individualism. As regards young people's interest in cool, they considered that:

Cool has been a vital component of all youth subcultures from the '50s to the present day, although it has sometimes had to change its name (and even more frequently its costume) to confuse its parents. But ... this attitude, which originally expressed resistance to subjugation and humiliation, has been expropriated by the mass media and the advertising industry during the '80s and '90s, and used as the way into the hearts and wallets of young consumers.<sup>57</sup>

### The projective characteristics of cool

Pountain and Robbins considered that cool was 'in the process of taking over the whole of popular culture',<sup>58</sup> and that it had a popularity and global appeal that competed with various religions, ideologies, nationalisms and fundamentalisms for the 'modern heart and mind'. They listed the following as characteristics of cool:<sup>59</sup>

- 'A new mode of individualism' adapted to life in post-industrial consumer democracies; like a new virtue – being 'cool' is more important than being 'good'; its three main traits are 'narcissism, ironic detachment and hedonism'.
- It is 'self-invention coupled to a hyper-acute awareness of such self-invention by other people'.

- A posture that is anti-authority; ‘smart’ in its expression of defiance – ‘concealed behind a mask of ironic impassivity’; for young people, this includes being cynical and distrustful of organisations and authorities, as well as suspicious of adults in general and parents in particular. In turn this fosters a sense of independence from social responsibility.
- Cool is self-centred and socially detached; ‘Many modern egos are held together by the powerful spiritual adhesive that is cool. A carefully cultivated cool pose can keep the lid on the most intense feelings and violent emotions’; being ‘unflappable’, uninvolved and relatively uncommitted to anything except one’s own wellbeing. It presents a ‘calm psychic mask’ to hide inner feelings.
- The opposite to being ‘square’, ‘daggy’, or ‘nerdish’. It is a carefully cultivated posture of self-satisfaction, occasionally with a touch of feeling superior to others, especially with respect to the ‘uncool’.
- ‘Cool is still in love with cigarettes, booze and drugs.’
- While once more of a male preoccupation, cool is now just as pertinent to women.
- Cool is more attracted to violence than formerly.
- Cool loves sharp clothes, the night life and a preference for ‘winners’ over ‘losers’; Feeling ‘modern’, ‘with it’, ‘up to date’, ‘trendy’, ‘chic’, ‘hip’, ‘flamboyant’ – in tune with the latest developments in lifestyle fashions.
- Cool ‘flirts with living on the edge’. It is inclined towards risky behaviour.
- Being cool involves continual tension between being ‘individualistic’ and being an accepted part of ‘the group’. Cool can help express group identity through its personal style.

While some of the claims of commentators about cool seem extravagant, what they demonstrate well is that the phenomenon can be investigated and its influences appraised.

### **7.3.2 Being acknowledged as cool: A psychological defence and coping mechanism**

Pountain and Robbins’ interpretation of the historical development of cool highlighted not only its projective identity function – creative, expressive styling for individuals – but also its role in psychological defence and coping.

It is not difficult to understand how the stylish cool posturing originally ascribed to Afro-American men helped insulate them from psychological damage at the hands of the dominant white culture. If you ridiculed the dominant culture and the power elites, you distanced yourself from the prevailing values and economic structures, and the mentality of superiority that went with them. You made yourself less vulnerable, and in your own mind you felt ‘superior’ because you were cool and they were not. While the ‘stylish’ notion of cool does not always apply to oppressed groups, a comparable system of psychological defence is often evident. In war and in countries with harsh, repressive regimes, a strong sense of group and individual identity was central not only to resistance but to psychological and physical survival.

From the 1950s onwards, it was evident how a cool posture, particularly its ‘ironic detachment’, and lack of emotion was easily incorporated into the rebelliousness that was ascribed to youth culture. We have already considered how the clothing, music,

and related leisure industries capitalised on this trend as a selling point to youth (7.2.12).

Section 9.2.3 considers the phenomenon we called the ‘trauma of living in the 21st century’. We think that this same phenomenon has a driving influence on the widespread use of cool as a coping and defence mechanism by youth.

### **Cool as a defence mechanism: Coping with the trauma of living in the 21st century**

Traumatic events will always test people’s meaning and identity as the internal resources they draw on to cope and make sense of what is happening to them. But life in contemporary Westernised countries now carries with it a continuous experience of low-level trauma. Hence there is continuous pressure on the meaning and identity systems just to manage, let alone propose a successful plan for life. The trauma is not just in wars, terrorism and periodic natural calamities, but increasingly it runs through the social fabric affecting a significant proportion of the population: in environment, economic uncertainties, temporary employment and job insecurity, competitiveness, poverty, cost of living, debt, costs of opportunities for advancement and education, racism, social violence, and so on.

In addition, some persistent trauma is associated with changes that have occurred in the basic systems for the communication of meaning and identity. The sociologist Anthony Giddens described this as follows: ‘My relationship to modern society – my social identity – has become unglued from the contexts, communities and expectations that once circumscribed my (and your) knowledge of who I am and how I live. Today I am responsible and liable for my own identity.’<sup>60</sup> This personal responsibility is attractive from the point of view of freedom and individuality. But having to take on a more demanding and comprehensive role in constructing personal meaning – by contrast with more reliance on packages of institutional meanings – makes the quest for meaning and identity a more stressful burden than perhaps it was formerly.

Even though in Western countries there appears to be increasing affluence and less poverty, there is a continual increase in levels of public stress, anxiety and depression. Significant changes have appeared in the socialisation processes that stem from the so-called ‘better life’ that people seem to associate automatically with economic and technological progress. They can assume that quality of life must improve with these advances. But what improves may be ‘lifestyle opportunities’ (that may be out of their reach), not necessarily ‘quality of life’. The drive for more individualism and personal autonomy is often at the expense of supportive family and community relationships. Significant but not always constructive changes have appeared in family structures and child-rearing practices.

Some level of continuous trauma is often associated with young people’s consumer activity. This is more than the stress of a huge range of products confronting the young customer in the supermarket. The barometer of their self-image and self-esteem is affected by comparisons with those perceived to be better off than themselves, and with people who are worse off. For those who engage in such comparisons excessively, focusing on people who have more, they will always feel relatively ‘deprived’. This is fuelled by a competitiveness both between and inside peer groups. In addition, the film, music and television industries provide highly stylised models for comparison in the cult of celebrities. For young people who are attuned to this social reality, every time they turn on the television, they reactivate their low-level

discontent. Their simmering identity trauma is maintained through constantly being confronted by

images of the richest, most beautiful and most fulfilled people on the planet and compared to them, everyone feels like a loser ... Celebrities invent an unattainably attractive cool personality, an image which makes insecure teenage fans feel so inadequate that adopting the cool pose is in turn *their* only way of coping with their enhanced anxiety.<sup>61</sup>

### **The painful personal cost of being cool**

The irony of this situation is that trying to be cool is basically a coping and defence mechanism, giving you a relatively secure group identity that defines who you are and sets your individuality apart; but if this is taken to excess, the psychological cost of trying to be cool can end up being just as stressful and anxiety-ridden, and perhaps more so, than just being plain uncool. Then the cost of the coping mechanism itself can become too difficult to cope with; and the hoped for defence mechanism exposes more painful vulnerabilities. 'Cool operates as a defence mechanism against the depression and anxiety induced by a highly competitive society ... [We also admit] that it is a very imperfect defence and that furthermore, maintaining cool actually imposes its own different kind of psychic strain.'<sup>62</sup> In addition, the financial cost of maintaining a cool image can exacerbate the psychological cost.

### **Cool as identity defence against the perils of adolescence**

The problematic behaviour of young people can often be explained by this mechanism. In response to perceived difficulties, they may think they are following a path towards coping with, or rising above, the problems. But it may end up making their situation even more onerous. For example:

[S]chool students [especially boys] who feel that they are failing in the classroom, or who do not fit in socially, adopt a strategy of disengagement from school activities, and develop anti-academic cliques, or subcultures, that provide an alternative route to self-esteem. By acting cool you declare yourself to be a non participant in the bigger race, for if you don't share straight society's values then you can stop comparing yourself to them. Cool cannot abolish social comparisons entirely, but it can restrict their scope to your immediate peer group ...

For several successive generations of marginalised and disaffected young people ... subcultures [and peer groups], with their own rules, rituals and obligations, had provided a magical alternative to being written off as a hopeless loser in the rat race. In the language of youth subcultures, 'I'm cool' equates to 'I'm in control'.

Studies continue to show that the academic performance of many boys deteriorates rapidly between 13 and 19 as they come to see learning and academic success as 'girlish' and 'uncool', and this disabling tendency among boys is being accompanied by increases in the rate of suicide and attempted suicide (as well as in other indicators like depression, abuse of alcohol etc.).<sup>63</sup>

For young people, the identity defence and coping function of wanting to be cool seems to work through

a kind of mental empowerment that their circumstances otherwise fail to supply. In this sense, cool is a sub-cultural alternative to the old notion of personal dignity, since dignity is a quality that is validated by the established institutions of Church, state and work. Cool, on the other hand, is a form of self-worth that is validated primarily by the way your personality, appearance and attitude are adjudged by your own peers.<sup>64</sup>

The expressive styling in the projective identity function of cool comes together with its defensive function. But to get any defence and coping services from your cool image, you first of all have to construct and maintain such an image. And to do this requires conformity to a peer-validated and certified style – across fashion, leisure pursuits, entertainment preferences, slang, attitudes to parents and school. And it is precisely through this quest for image conformity that the door is opened to youth-targeted consumerism and marketing.

Hence, while the quest for a cool identity may offer young people a way of coping with life and negotiating the psychological pains of adolescence, it may well end up being the cause of much of their unease, frustration, stress and depression. And for some youth, this can reach pathological proportions.

### **7.3.3 Cool image, relationships and the intensity of experience**

The posturing and attitudes that go into the maintenance of a cool identity inevitably affect personal relationships. While they may give the cool person a sense of individuality, peer group identity security and a workable ‘psychic shield’, they may not be so serviceable when it comes to personal relationships. Stylised posturing, self-centredness and competitiveness may erode the honesty and openness that go with healthy, relaxed personal relationships. Also, cool and commitment may not sit too comfortably together; the cool emphasis on hedonism can readily separate out sexual pleasure for individual enjoyment (and possible exploitation) rather than as one component of a relationship that matters.

It has long been evident that young men are interested in wanting sex very early in a relationship, and even without any relationship. It is also evident that the notion of cool was initially more of a male identity phenomenon. But it has come to apply just as much to women. There is cultural imagery that appeals to the idea that to be equally sophisticated and cool, women should be as sexually permissive as men. While this may give some (questionable) sense of equality for young women, it is certainly a ploy that suits men, making their sexual adventures likely to be easier – with less resistance.

Yet another dimension of cool in personal relationships is evident in the ‘personal development industry’. This is not only concerned with body image, but with psychological self-improvement. It is usually more of a concern in the post-teenage years where people seek not only commercial success but success in personality and personal relationships, and they are prepared to pay for psychological help. It is not that this is an unimportant issue for adolescents; it is a crucial one, and their feelings of relative adequacy and success in relationships can dominate their emotional lives. But teenagers are more into other commercial attempts to better their image than they are into counselling, therapy or courses in psychological self-improvement. Nevertheless, they pick up on key premises from the self-development culture: a readiness to express feelings freely, and acknowledgment that current personal



problems result mainly from emotional dramas at an earlier stage of life.<sup>65</sup> And they may use their immediate peer reference group and/or close friends as a sounding board for discussing problems, particularly with respect to relationships and lifestyle. Girls tend to engage in this activity more extensively than boys.

One of the ironies of the cool attitude is that while disdainful of traditional values and cultural norms, it pays exorbitant and anxious attention to peer standards for image and individuality. Thus young people aspiring to be cool will be comfortable with the postmodern notion that truth is relative and subjective, believing that what they themselves feel is the touchstone for authenticity and reality. ‘If I feel OK about it, then it is right’ puts emotions and personal experience as the prime determinants of what is valuable and important in their lives. There is also an added advantage for individualism in that only the people themselves know what they *really* feel. Further, this leads to interest in the *intensity* of experience, and to the seeking of intense experiences as part of a cool lifestyle. Young people can build up a checklist of the intense experiences they wish to collect and repeat. This can include a wide range of items, all of which contribute to their unique self-expression: travel, sex, school formal, sporting success, sky diving – and especially branded consumer products. It is not that ambition for intense experience and achievement is a bad thing; there are striking examples of teenagers who have put years of hard work into projects like becoming an Olympic athlete. As is usually the case, it is a matter of balance.

Some cool interests are more attractive to post-teenagers and young adults. For example, it is becoming evident on television that a burgeoning interest is being taken in cooking and home improvement, as well as the more longstanding interest in travel. These are like barometers for quality of life, where people are seeking intense lifestyle experiences. Marketing is quick to identify the changing cool interests of the different age cohorts, and different economic strata in the community.

#### **7.3.4 Classic cool: Nike’s successful recipe for cracking the Chinese market**

As noted before, China is like the last frontier on the planet for consumerism to conquer. Nike’s successful Chinese campaign is a classic example of how the notion of cool has figured prominently in successful marketing.<sup>66</sup>

Phil Knight, Nike’s founder, who has been interested in the China market since 1980, is reported to have said to company executives: ‘There are 2 billion feet out there. Go get them!’

Nike did not manufacture its own products; they were made by Chinese contractors – like all of the other apparel and footwear in the country. What Nike sold was ‘status’. Hence the basic aim of their Chinese marketing campaign was to convince the new middle class that status was desirable, and that Nike could provide it – at a cost. This required a prerequisite conditioning of Chinese culture to become more interested in individualism and its expression through the purchase of consumer products. Also required was getting Nike, and its trademark ‘Swoosh’, recognised and implanted in the public psyche.

To get Nike identified in China, the company chose to sponsor sport, and basketball in particular. It outfitted prominent Chinese athletes and sponsored all teams in their national basketball league in 1995. In addition, the Nike Basketball League was set up for high schools; in 2004 it ran in seventeen cities. The Nike director of sports marketing in China claimed, ‘Our goal was to hook kids into Nike early and hold

them for life.’ Michael Jordan, the best-known athlete on the planet, and other American NBA basketballers, were brought to China as visiting Nike icons.

Nike television commercials and public events were concerned with much more than advertising particular Nike products. They were about massaging public feelings into becoming receptive to a new style of culture that was more individualistic; in short, images of American/Western consumer culture were promoted in a Chinese format. For example, a television commercial highlighted a more American individualistic style of basketball play – contrasting with the more traditional Chinese team-oriented approach – and asked the viewers: ‘Is this you?’ Nike theme songs were developed for high school basketball games that blended traditional Chinese music with American hip-hop. The rap message ‘connects the disparate elements of [American] black cool culture and associates it with Nike’, a Hong Kong marketing director reported. Nike promotions influenced the rapid rise in popularity of hip-hop culture among young Chinese. A new Chinese name for the music emerged: ‘Hip Hoop’. Other new usages were like markers of cultural change. Many young Chinese used ‘Nai-ke’ for sneakers. Perhaps more importantly, there was a new word for cool: ‘Ku’. Inevitably, market research would test the retail potency of the theme ku. A sample of the results are given in Table 7.1. They show consistency with the characteristics of cool discussed earlier. Not a single Chinese company figured in the list of what were perceived as the ‘world’s coolest brands’.

**Table 7.1 What do young people in China regard as ‘cool’?**  
Results from a survey of 1200 Chinese university students in Beijing and Shanghai by Hill and Knowlton Public Relations in 2004 (As reported in Forney 2004).

| <b>What is ‘cool’?</b>                                 |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| <b>Responses from Chinese university students</b>      |                          |
| <i>Personality traits that define a person as cool</i> | <i>% responses</i>       |
| Individualistic and innovative                         | ■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■ 47% |
| Stylish  | ■■■■■ 13.5%              |
| Dynamic and Capable                                    | ■■■■ 9.5%                |
| Easygoing and Relaxed                                  | ■■■ 7.5%                 |
| Other  | ■■■■■ 22.5%              |
|  |                          |
|  |                          |

| <b>What are the world’s ‘coolest’ brands?</b>     |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Responses from Chinese university students</b> |  |
| <i>Top ranking brands</i>                         | <i>% responses</i>                     |
| Nike  | ■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■ 30.8% |
| Sony  | ■■■■■■■ 15.9%                          |
| Adidas  | ■■■■■■■ 15.1%                          |
| BMW   | ■■■■■ 10.1%                            |
| Microsoft   | ■■■■■ 9%                               |
| Coca-Cola   | ■■■■ 8.9%                              |
| IBM   | ■■■■ 8.2%                              |

And so, despite some setbacks, the strategy worked. Nike shoes cost twice that of competitors, but enough Chinese considered the value-added name to be worth it. In 2003, Nike sales in China were estimated as above USD300 million and growing. In 2004 there were new stores opening at the average rate of 1.5 a day. No doubt the company is gearing up for the 2008 Olympics when there is likely to be an all-time high in Chinese interest in sports.

Much of Nike’s success in China, as elsewhere in the world, is related to the way it orchestrates imagery that affects people’s emotions: it helps maintain an identification between Nike and the quest for sports achievement and glory. Within days after Liu Xiang became the country’s first Olympic gold medallist in a short-distance track event (110 metres hurdles on 28 August 2004), Nike aired a television commercial

based on the successful run. Taunting questions such as ‘Asians lack muscle?’ and ‘Asians lack the will to win?’ were superimposed over the event, ‘designed [as Forney’s article said] to set nationalistic teeth on edge’. Then as the hero raised his arms highlighting the Nike trademark swoosh on his shoulder, came the punchline of the commercial: ‘Stereotypes were made to be broken!’

Much the same formula for selling cool in Western countries has proved successful in China. A phrase from Forney’s article summed it up. “The story of how Nike cracked the China code has as much to do with the rise of China’s new middle class, which is [as] hungry for Western gear and individualism, as Nike’s ability to tap into that hunger.”

### **7.3.5 The quest for cool: The new opiate of the masses?**

#### **The cool attitude and decline in social responsibility**

The spread of a cool attitude through youth and young adults has no doubt contributed to decreased respect for authority figures and for established cultural traditions, and to the greater store set on freedom, individuality and autonomy. This goes hand in hand with a decrease in a sense of social responsibility. What cool tends to increase is hedonism and existentialism – and consumerism is strongly tied to both.

Where young people are apparently dominated by a cool mentality, they can distract themselves (and thus protect themselves) from pressing social and environmental issues by distancing themselves from these concerns and concentrating on what is more immediate, their own lifestyle. This can also serve as one of their coping mechanisms for the ‘trauma of living in the 21st century’. ‘Cool enables [young] people to live with uncertainty and lowered expectations by concentrating on present pleasures. In short, when the going gets tough, the cool go shopping.’<sup>67</sup>

Thus while there is a growing youth awareness of environmental and social problems, and while this causes anxiety, the responses are many and varied: some respond positively, others remain indifferent. There is concern that where the notion of cool is well established in young people it can dampen their readiness to become critical interpreters of culture, and it can dull the idealism that motivates social action. Cool can therefore encourage young people to put up with some of the problematic aspects of contemporary social life (like globalised capitalism, the casualisation of employment and questionable business ethics) as long as their lifestyle is not impaired. They may tend to grudgingly accept work during the week as the irksome cost of being able to ‘live it up over the weekend’. Ideas like career path, settling down, raising a family, and even the notion of ambitions or goals in life may not be serious items on their agenda – so different from what was the case for older generations. Previously, when people followed goals and ambitions, their level of lifestyle followed consequentially, changing according to financial circumstances. Now, lifestyle may have first priority on the agenda, with work and career having to accommodate to lifestyle. Many in the older generations find it hard to understand how the young appear to put travel and enjoying the world above what they valued so much – a secure job, settling down and raising a family.

#### **The mentality of cool: Contrary to traditional value stances**

The cool lifestyle is antagonistic to the traditional Protestant work ethic. Its hedonism and self-centredness are inconsistent with the virtuous life as proposed by Christianity (and other world religions).

But it is not useful – for parents, educators or community agencies – simply to dismiss cool because it is contrary to these values. Just telling youth that cool is bad for them would be more likely to increase its appeal. Rather, what is needed is engaging them in critical deconstruction and appraisal in the light of specified values; and this includes understanding the history and psychological dynamics of cool.

At the extreme opposite end of the social spectrum to cool are the various religious fundamentalisms that offer certainty and authority as their ‘psychic shields’ against the trauma of living in the 21st century. These too need critical evaluation as different, but also flawed, ways of coping.

### **Cool as identifying with minority groups**

For some people, identifying with a socially oppressed minority can be part of their way of finding a cool identity. It can motivate social action; but generally speaking, the consumerist and hedonist emphases in cool tend to soften the idealism.

It appears that the mentality of cool is more supportive of the consumer and marketing industries than it ever will be of social activism. It remains to be seen if the young people who are more motivated by the quest for cool are less interested in politics, social concerns and community action. If this is the case, then the notion of cool can function like a new ‘opiate of the masses’, keeping them happy with image-oriented consumerism, while distracting their attention from social issues and politics. In the workplace, this could mean, for example in the information technology sector, that a company is perceived by its employers as a hip and cool place to be; while at the same time, the competitive casual basis to their employment leaves them with demanding performance standards and no job security. Pountain and Robins considered that the mentality of cool had infiltrated some businesses, making them more trendy, while at the same time making it easier for them to use employees manipulatively – as long as the workers focused on their own pleasures, they could accept lower expectations and job uncertainty:

Far from being a mere matter of fashionable slang, sartorial style, or some passing behavioural fad, cool provides that psychological structure through which the longest standing contradiction in Western societies – that between the necessity for work and the desirability of play – is apparently being resolved. In short, cool appears to be usurping the work ethic itself, to become installed as the dominant mindset of advanced consumer capitalism ...

Advanced capitalism no longer depends on sober and puritanical notions of virtue to maintain its labour discipline. Cool is a new mode of individualism, flexible enough to cope with the pace of transformation of work in the deregulated global economy. It is far better adapted to a life of service and consumption than one of toil and sacrifice.<sup>68</sup>

They continued, endorsing the view of the sociologist Giddens that

this new democratised, flexible form of capitalism creates uncertainty, and that the public welfare services must be reconstructed to act as a buffer if widespread discontent is to be

avoided. However, it is by no means certain that employers, who love the flexibility element, are so keen on this side of the equation. Flexibility can mean insecurity and de-skilling, accelerated by the abandonment of unions and collective bargaining as the means to promote the interests of employees.<sup>69</sup>

### 7.3.6 The relationship between cool and violence

Being competitive is one of the strong characteristics of being cool; and being competitive without much apparent effort or anxiety is even more cool. Perhaps it is through this competitiveness that a relationship develops between cool and violence (5.3).

Looking physically tough may go with the image of coolness. But now, with an array of weaponry available to youth, this image can be more dangerous. For more extreme groups of young people, having a hand gun or knife is part of the cool image. But the weaponry can be more psychological than actual where strong peer group influence and image competitiveness hold sway over adolescents. Even bullying through SMS messages has been identified as a school problem.

While violence and death have always figured in both classical and popular literature, contemporary film and television have taken this to a new level where everything possible is done to portray blood and gore as realistically as possible. From *Bonnie and Clyde* to *Pulp Fiction*, violence has become an acceptable and profitable part of daily entertainment. And in many instances, the violent characters in film and television are portrayed as cool – there is something in them to be admired. This emphasis has also been evident in popular music; while not achieving overwhelming popularity, ‘gansta rap’ (and to a lesser extent other music forms) profiled a cool image for the violent. The mentality that goes with this culture may well have a psychological influence on the attitudes of some youth to violence as a cool aspect of personality. It may harmonise with other elements of culture that also play up the theme of violence; for example, the prominence of the theme of ‘competitive humiliation’ in many so-called contemporary ‘reality’ television programs – viewers are entertained by the humiliation of others (15.7.5).

Video and computer games combine graphic violence, competitiveness and simulated killing in packages that have great appeal for many youth, especially boys; considerable time is often spent playing these games (9.2.7). Just how much of a negative influence flows directly from such games is open to speculation. In any case, it is part of the cultural complex that gives violence a prominent place in consumer entertainment. And at some level of consciousness it may help to keep alive the attractiveness of violence – even a stylised make-believe version – as a prominent part of the cool image.

In the extreme, it may be that something similar to these dynamics operates in situations where adolescents see their image of being cool and a ‘man’ affirmed when they acquire their first Kalashnikov rifle. It does not take too much progression from here to where killing and even suicide bombing become the ultimate cool. This interpretation may, for some, appear to be stretching the metaphor. Nevertheless, it draws attention to the bleak truth that peer-reinforced meanings can take a strong enough hold of young people’s thinking, imagination and idealism to be able to successfully invite them to take the lives of others, and to sacrifice their own.

## 7.4 Advertising and identity

To sum up: the way in which consumer advertising affects young people's meaning and identity is 'atmospheric': the cultural combination of consumerism, lifestyle advertising, marketing and the media create an atmosphere, a perceived social reality, that diffuses through people's thinking and behaviour; and it implies that product consumption is an integral part of identity development. Products, acquisitions and lifestyle activities all naturally contribute to self-understanding and self-expression.

A healthy awareness of these dynamics would be desirable to encourage in youth. As regards their identity development, it is a matter of balance. It is also a matter of not being manipulated, even unconsciously, by interests that seek to exploit their identity development for financial payoffs. Advertising psychologists have perceptive insights into young people's identity development – albeit with profitable intentions. (An example of advertising research – an extensive marketing research project on community values – is noted in Chapter 15.) Those engaged in the education and care of youth need equally perceptive insights – but for the more noble purpose of enhancing young people's spiritual and moral development.

## 7.5 Young men and crisis in male identity

About thirty years ago, Australian education authorities were funding programs for girls that aimed at increasing access and equity in educational opportunity for young women. Programs such as these tried to address some of the effects of the ingrained bias against opportunities and status for women in the community. As far as school is concerned (for example in New South Wales), girls now significantly outperform boys in more than 75 per cent of study subjects in the final year of schooling. The issue is not just a difference in academic performance.

There is increasing evidence in Australia especially, and in other industrialised countries, that boys have disturbingly high rates of personal and social problems. A peak indicator is the high suicide rate. This is also a problem for young women, but for young men the rate is significantly higher. Other high-risk problems include dropping out of school, alcohol abuse, taking drugs, being involved in criminal activity, being unemployed and being homeless. Beneath these indicators there appears to be a level of depression, unhappiness and purposelessness among boys that warrants serious community attention. A key factor in all of this is the sense of masculinity.

In 1974, a seminal reader was published about the experience of growing up male. It is interesting to quote this at length, because it represents a much earlier diagnosis of the problem, and to reflect on what progress has been made since then.<sup>70</sup>

Boys are treated, and are expected to behave in certain ways defined as masculine ... the masculine role says that we males are supposed to seek achievement and suppress emotion. We are to work at 'getting ahead' and 'staying cool'.

As boys we learn that getting ahead is important in both work and play. Grades are handed out in school, teams are chosen on the playground and both of these events tell us how well we are doing and how much better we could be doing. Here our masculinity is tested in immediate physical competition with others. Moment by moment, our performance is measured in relation to

others. Both in winning and in losing, the masculine role exerts strong influence. It is not enough to win once, we have to keep winning. The continuing evaluation in relation to others encourages us to keep trying, but also insures that we can't ever really make it, once and for all. Our learned need to keep proving ourselves helps explain why many of us – no matter how hard we work or how much we achieve – remain vaguely dissatisfied with our lives.

As males grow older, the bases for evaluation change, but the importance of establishing a ranking of work among individuals remains. As adults, the physical skills that were reflected in sports become less important than the mental and social skills that are reflected in prestige and income. What we learn growing up prepares us for these adult skills and rewards. As adolescents, one important area we were rated on was our social facility with females. Trying to get on well with females created anxiety for many of us, but mainly we accepted the situation as just another place where we should try to ignore our fears and go ahead.

Staying cool, no matter what, was part of what we learned growing up male. We knew that big boys didn't cry, and that real men didn't get too excited except in places like football games. Spontaneous emotion – positive or negative – was suppressed or restricted to certain settings. We learned to mute our joy, repress our tenderness, control our anger, hide our fear. The eventual result of our not expressing emotion is not to experience it.

Our restriction of emotionality compounds the stress put upon us by our striving to get ahead: we are often unable to acknowledge fully how the striving makes us feel. We suffer in many ways that may related to the strain our emotional denial places upon our physical body. Compared with women, we die younger, have more heart attacks, and contract more stress related diseases.

The drive towards getting ahead and staying cool has functioned, more or less well for men as individuals and for society as a whole for a long time. Much work has been accomplished, and many troubling feelings have been avoided. The masculine role has provided answers about who we are and what to do. But for ... some men what the masculine role offers is insufficient. Some of us no longer find our fulfilment in external rewards that come from meeting masculine standards; instead we seek internal satisfaction that comes form fuller emotional involvement in our activities and relationships.

The issues raised so many years ago are still evident, even though poor employment options and a greater sense of public anomie are now more prominent; and it seems that they have not yet been addressed in a way that has made significant inroads into changing the patterns through which young men seek a sense of masculinity. This remains the case, even though there has been much public discussion of the topic as evident in the publishing of a number of books and articles on masculinity, as well as the introduction of various educational initiatives for boys.<sup>71</sup> There remains an urgent need for more 'carry through' from the thinkers, writers and researchers on masculinity to young people, families and educators.

By contrast with the apparently slow progress of a ‘men’s movement’ and programs for boys, in the same period since this reader was published, the objectives of ‘women’s movements’ have been prominent, and many of them have been achieved. Boys have acknowledged that girls seem to have more social support and sense of direction from women’s movements in their various forms (this term is used here with considerable generalisation, without the opportunity to look at the meanings attached to the phrase ‘women’s movement’). Young men do not seem to have similar useful identity resources compared with those available to young women. Traditional concepts of masculinity have been challenged by the women’s movement, adding to uncertainty about the male role. Greater freedom of expression and acceptance of homosexuality within the community are also relevant to the question. For some young men, perhaps even a significant proportion, the way to express their masculinity in a meaningful way remains a considerable problem.

No doubt it is not only appropriate but urgent that these issues be widely discussed in the community and included for study in any education in identity.

## Notes

- 
- 1 M McLuhan 1969, quoted in W Glasser 1972, *The identity society*, p. 8.
  - 2 LG Engedal 2006, *Homo viator: The search for identity and authentic spirituality in a post-modern context*. In K Tirri (ed.) *Religion, spirituality and identity*, p. 48.
  - 3 R Eckersley 2006, What is wellbeing, and what promotes it? <http://www.wellbeingmanifesto.net/wellbeing.htm>, pp. 11–12. Accessed 26/06/06.
  - 4 Engedal 2006.
  - 5 P Ward 1993, *Worship and youth culture: A guide to alternative worship*, p. 41.
  - 6 *ibid.*, p. 43.
  - 7 Young people’s experience of the local church or faith community is not often one where they feel a democratic, egalitarian atmosphere that welcomes them and makes them feel at home, or where their ideas and contributions would be regarded and accepted as valuable.
  - 8 R Smith & P Standish (eds) 1997, *Teaching right from wrong: Moral education in the balance*, p. 141.
  - 9 This question was first addressed in M Crawford and G Rossiter 1988, *Missionaries to a teenage culture: Religious education in a time of rapid change*, in the chapter ‘Overcoming media naivety’, p. 176.
  - 10 M McLuhan 1967, *Understanding the media*, p. 245.
  - 11 Klein quoting comments by Howard Shultz, CEO of Starbucks. Klein 2000, *No Logo*, p. 20.
  - 12 Scott Bedbury, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 21.
  - 13 Klein 2000, p. 21, quoting Renzo Rosso (Diesel) and Anita Roddick (Body Shop).
  - 14 *ibid.*, pp. 28–30.



- 
- 15 *ibid.*, pp. 68, 69.
- 16 *ibid.*, pp. 72, 73, 79, 81.
- 17 H Byrnes 2004, Why the school formal is the new teen wedding.
- 18 A Quart 2003, *Branded: The buying and selling of teenagers*, p. 18. See also R Wiseman 2003, *Queen bees and wannabes: Helping your daughter survive cliques, gossip, boyfriends and other realities of adolescence*.
- 19 C Nicolussi 2005, Sydney racing's day of embarrassment.
- 20 M Ligerakis 2003, AJC pampers women to boost racing numbers, *B&T Advertising, marketing and media magazine*, 31 March 2003, <http://www.bandt.com.au/articles/62/0C015662.asp> Accessed 5/06/06; B & T 2004, AJC woos younger crowd to 'party', *B&T Advertising, marketing and media magazine*, 27 February 2004, <http://www.bandt.com.au/articles/EA/0C01E0EA.asp> Accessed 5/06/06; W Sinclair 2005, AJC relies on princess pulling power, B & T 2004, *B&T Advertising, marketing and media magazine*, 1 September 2005, <http://www.bandt.com.au/news/9c/0c03619c.asp> Accessed 5/06/06.
- 21 K Davenport 2005, Just as the horses need to be race track ready, so do the fashionable fillies.
- 22 A Moses 2005, Princess power: A nation of princesses; the favourite fantasy of Australian women; From theatre to reality TV, the myth of the princess has ever been more popular.
- 23 C Cole 2005, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 7. **[No Cole 2005 in Bibliog. CORECT AND NOT NEEDED JUST A RANDOM PERSON QUOTED IN NOTE 22 DO NOT HAVE A BIBLIL REFERNCE FOR THEM EVEN IN THE ORIGINAL]**
- 24 Innes 2005, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 6. **[No INNES in Bibliog. If Cole and Innes are people such as commentators, we need their first names SIMILAR TO THE ABOVE CANNOT REFERECNE AS HAVE NONE JUST A PERSON QUOTED IN THE QUOTE GO TO THE ORIGINAL FRENCH LETTER FOR LOREAL I DO NOT HAVE IT HERE BUT IT WAS IN THE ORIGINAL]**
- 25 *ibid.*, p. 6.
- 26 An advance notice of M Carr-Gregg's book *The Princess bitchface syndrome* is given in M Devine 2006, Training for parents lost in a world ruled by puberty blues.
- 27 B Delaney 2006, Absolutely fabulous: Spend, glam up and party, but is self-indulgence all it takes to make a young woman happy?
- 28 *ibid.*, p. 21.
- 29 Advertisements for Lancôme Paris, Target USA and Bluefly were from *Instyle* (USA) November 2005; and for L'Oréal Paris in screened television advertisements, 2006.
- 30 Delaney 2006, p. 22, referring to RH Frank 1999, *Luxury fever: Why making money fails to satisfy in an era of excess*.

- 
- 31 L Carne 2006, Meet the emos, our latest tribe.
  - 32 Vonnegut 1961, *Mother night*, quoted in Delaney 2006, p. 22.
  33. Eckersley 2006, quoted in *ibid.*
  - 34 J Lunn 2006, Nice romper, but will it go with the couch? High-end baby gear.
  - 35 Quart 2003, pp. xxiv, xxv, 95, 59.
  - 36 *ibid.*, p. 4.
  - 37 *ibid.*, pp. 59, xxv, xxvi, 31.
  38. *ibid.*, p. 8.
  39. *ibid.*, p. 6.
  40. Klein 2000, p. 64.
  - 41 Quart 2003, p. 6.
  - 42 *ibid.*, p. 17. See also C Lumby 1997, *Bad girls: The media, sex and feminism in the 90s*.
  - 43 Quart 2003, p. 147.
  - 44 *ibid.*, pp. 164, 173.
  - 45 SL Gilman 1998. *Creating beauty to cure the soul: Race and psychology in the shaping of aesthetic surgery*, p. 158.
  - 46 Quart 2003, pp. 177, 183.
  - 47 *ibid.*, p. 177.
  - 48 D Hebdige 1979, *Subculture: The meaning of style*, p. 12.
  - 49 J Walker Smith & A Clurman 1977, *Rocking the ages*, p. 111.
  - 50 Quart 2003, p. 117.
  - 51 *ibid.*, p. 12.
  - 52 R Majors & JM Billson 1992, *Cool pose: The dilemmas of black manhood in America*.
  - 53 PN Stearns 1994, *American cool: Constructing a twentieth century emotional style*.
  - 54 M Danesi 1994, *Cool: The signs and meanings of adolescence*.
  - 55 TC Frank 1997, *The conquest of cool: Business culture, counterculture and the rise of hip consumerism*.
  - 56 D Pountain & D Robbins 2000, *Cool Rules: The anatomy of an attitude*.
  - 57 *ibid.*, p. 12.
  - 58 *ibid.*, pp. 13, 19, 22, 26.
  - 59 This summary is drawn from *ibid.*, pp. 19–31, 155.
  - 60 A Giddens 1998, *Conversations with Anthony Giddens*, p. 31, quoted in Pountain & Robbins 2000, p. 164.

- 
- 61 Pountain & Robbins 2000, pp. 151, 155.
- 62 *ibid.*, p. 158.
- 63 *ibid.*, p. 152, 153.
- 64 *ibid.*, 2000, p. 153.
- 65 *ibid.*, 2000, p. 157.
- 66 The source of the information and the quotations reported here are from M Forney 2004, *How Nike figured out China*.
- 67 Pountain & Robbins 2000, p. 165.
- 68 *ibid.*, 2000, pp. 161, 165.
- 69 *ibid.*, 2000, p. 164.
- 70 J Pleck & J Sawyer 1974. *Men and masculinity*, pp. 3–4.
- 71 Some Australian publications on boys and masculinity include: S Biddulph 1995, *Manhood: An action plan for changing men's lives*; S Biddulph 1997, *Raising boys: Why boys are different and how to help them become happy and well balanced men*; RW Connell 1995, *Masculinities*; M Drummond 1998, *Bodies: A real emerging issue for boys*; N Edley & M Wetherell 1995, *Men in perspective: Practice, power and identity*; D Tacey 1997, *Remaking men: The revolution in masculinity*; D Tacey 2000, *Reenchantment: the new Australian spirituality*; P West 2000, *From Tarzan to the Terminator: Boys, men and body image*, Conference paper presented at the Institute for Family Studies Conference, Sydney, 24 July; P West 2002, *What's the matter with boys? Showing boys the way towards manhood*.