

## **The 'Chav' Subculture: Branded Clothing as an Extension of the Self**

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the chav phenomenon as a consumer subculture, with special reference to branding and consumer behaviour. The study is important because of the presence of chavs in many consumer markets, and their significant role in the consumption of numerous products. The aim of the primary research was to compare the branded clothing choices of two groups, namely chavs and non-chavs. A qualitative method was used, namely a survey of thirty 14 to 23 year olds (fifteen each of chavs and non-chavs), followed by in-depth interviews with four of the respondents. The issues studied were the relationships between the choice of branded clothing and the respondents' social experiences, or backgrounds, as well as whether these backgrounds acted as motivations for the respondents' consumer behaviour. The findings indicate a relationship between the wearing of branded clothing by chavs and their social backgrounds. Their consumption behaviour may be explained by the wearing of branded clothing as an extension of the self. The findings also provide an indication of differences between chav's and non-chav's perceptions of branding and consumer behaviour.

**Keywords:** *Chav, subculture, branded clothing, consumption, designer brands*

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### **1. Introduction**

Chav was the buzzword of the year in the United Kingdom in 2004 (Carter, 2004; Bennett, 2013). It has since become a common term for individuals or a group of youths, defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2004) as, "a young person, often without a high level of education who follows a particular fashion, usually designer labels, and if they're girls, very short skirts and stilettos, chavs see baseball caps as a status symbol and wear them at every opportunity." Originally, chav was a buzzword used to describe girls in Chatham, London, who wore short skirts and big jewellery, and who were uneducated and socialised in groups in towns or urban areas. It often implies voluntary lifestyle choices that represent incompetence and poverty (Bennett, 2013). Prime Minister David Cameron maintains that "people are out of work due to their personal inadequacies" (Timmins, 2012). The term has since become widespread across the UK, emphasising, "branded sportswear, excessive jewellery and a general lack of subtlety in appearance, (with some seeing chavs as) synonymous with ignorance, poverty and violence" (Walker, 2005). Le Grand (2012b) defines chavs as "white working-class youths dressed in street ware clothing and jewellery ... associated with vulgar taste, loutish and anti-social behaviour, teenage pregnancy and welfare dependency." It is further associated with lower classes, deprived areas and relying on social benefits (Hollingworth and Williams, 2009). It has also become a market segment - chavs are one of the nine 'teenage tribes' (accounting for 9% of teenagers) identified by Watt (2006). The unruly behaviour associated with chavs, such as threatening younger children (Pain, 2003), attracted media attention, including the development of numerous Internet sites, e.g. Chavscum.co.uk (Chavscum, 2004). It has also led the UK Government to target youths who dress like this group, in an attempt to cut down on street crime (Marrin, 2005). This newly formed subculture's central tenet is consumption (Parker and Lyle, 2005) and it base sits identity on fashion and clothing symbols, which distinguish the chavs from other groups of youths. Two of these symbols are the Burberry design check and baseball cap. Large fake jewellery, track suits and certain designer brands are also symbols of being a chav (Hollingworth and Williams, 2009). The overall aim of this research was therefore to compare the branded clothing choices of chavs and non-chavs and to investigate these choices' effects on the perception of the self-image. In other words, is there a relationship between type of clothing worn and whether someone is considered a 'chav' or not?

### **2. Literature Review**

Le Grand (2012a) explains that identity formation among the white working-class youths of the United Kingdom involves adopting certain local styles or fashions, which he refers to as 'markers of taste'. These

identities are structured by class and categorizations made by others, but the choice of these 'markers of taste' are individualised choices regarding fashion and lifestyle. Thus issues of self-perception, possessions (including fashions and brands) and subculture will play a major role in the development of an individual's self-identity. The extant literature on these issues will now be discussed.

**The Extended Self:** Early research by Grubb and Hupp (1968) found that different self-concepts could be influenced by possession of certain brands. The relationship between self and possessions has been widely researched (Sayre and Horne, 1996; Richins, 1994; Malhotra, 1981), with Belk (1988) being the major work on the extension of the self, showing that we regard our possessions as part of ourselves and "we are what we have and possess." Possessions are linked with the management of our identities, which is consistent with chavs being identified by their possessions, usually baseball caps, Burberry designer checked clothing and bulky jewellery. According to Belk's proposition, chavs wear these items to extend their self-concept. This is supported by le Grand (2011) who shows that such 'markers of taste' help to shape identity. Belk's work was criticised by Cohen (1989) for its lack of "meaning, explanatory power and empirical identification". He maintains that Belk's conclusions are "breezy" and argues that "researchers must be capable of identifying possessions that are not self-defining, or the concept loses all scientific meaning". He maintains that researchers should look much further than ideas of the self-concept to explain the self in consumer behaviour. More recent studies have looked at youths and the concept of materialism (Schaefer et al., 2004; Wells, 1996), which tends to agree that material ownership brings happiness and self-fulfilment. Materialism studies are regularly linked to the ideas of possessions and the extension of the self. These are discussed in more depth below.

**Possessions and Status Symbolism:** Belk's (1988) understanding of possessions as an extension of the self is extended in his 2004 study, *Men and their machines* (Belk, 2004). In this study he carried out in-depth interviews at a car show in America and found that male automobile enthusiasts "see their cars as both extensions of themselves and as animate beings". In this study he also refers to status symbolism in the case of automobiles. He suggested that men feel more powerful and gain more status from "the conspicuous consumption" of cars, which are clearly seen as status symbols. Status symbolism has been widely researched. With regards to branding, Tan Tsu Wee and Chua Han Ming (2003) said that marketers engineer the symbolism of a brand and give a personality to the brand that becomes part of the consumer. They went on to highlight that the consumer forms a relationship with the brand. They argue that the self is made up of much more than just a person's possessions, also being comprised of thoughts, ideas, experiences and people. However, Ball and Tasaki (1992) argue that, for young consumers, ownership has more association with high attachment than with high emotion. The authors highlight a gap in research on the involvement with a product group, rather than with a single possession, and stress that the relationship of involvement with the consumer is important.

**Symbolism and Branding:** Tan Tsu Wee and Chua Han Ming (2003) argue that branding is used to provide symbolic meaning and emphasises symbolic value. However, Fournier (1998) maintains that "meaningful relationships are qualified not along symbolic versus functional product category lines, or in terms of high versus low involvement classes, but by the perceived ego significance of the chosen brands." This could arguably be linked with the chosen relationship between the chav and the Burberry design check on clothing, as the label attached to the brand once suggested prestige and wealth. Chav's perhaps choose to adopt this brand to form a relationship with the label. Piacentini and Mailer (2004) made several interesting points about the subject of branding and youths. They looked at youth consumption of clothing brands and found that youths make choices that "are closely bound to their self-concept" and are fundamentally used for self-expression and "role fulfilment, making the wearer more confident and capable". Clothing acted as an indication that the wearer has similar characteristics to those who wear the same sort of clothes. Piacentini and Mailer (2004) concluded by saying that the two schools used in their research, a private school and a comprehensive school, showed different attitudinal traits regarding branded clothing. Respondents from the comprehensive school implied that branded clothing was chosen in order to attach a higher monetary tag and to be like the other students. In comparison, the private school respondents did not like the concept of heavy branding, which they felt was a result of "social conditioning". Private school pupils would not need to show through their clothing that they are not poor, as they portray this through their private school attendance. An issue here then is that chavs are poorer than others, hence their preference to wear heavily branded clothing such as the Burberry check as a display of wealth.

Symbolism in consumer behaviour is discussed by Belk, Bahn and Mayer (1982), who say that “the major sources of information about the language of expressive consumption are media, family, schools and peers”. They state that young adults attempt to communicate through stimuli attachment and express themselves through consumption, which acts as a powerful tool to express personality and attitudes. Considering branding as a symbol, Levy (1959) said that the consumer is significantly affected by the symbols encountered in the identification of goods within the marketplace. This affect can be linked to symbolic interactionism. This, according to Sirgy (1982), “views the self as a function of interpersonal interactions”. More recently, Solomon et al., (2002) discusses the notion of symbolic interactionism and meanings behind consumers’ identities. He says that “the meanings of consumers themselves are defined by social consensus”. This again can be related to extension of the self, as symbols are used as a role attachment, and it could be argued that the brands people choose convey the image and message they wish to portray. These images and messages are often consistent within consumer subcultures, which are discussed relative to chavs in the next section.

**Subculture:** Subcultures of consumption are significant when studying the new chav phenomena. Schouten and McAlexander (1995) define a subculture of consumption as “a distinctive subgroup of society that self-selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand or consumption activity”. For example, Arvidsson (2001) describes how a counter-subculture was partially created by Vespa scooter marketing and advertising in the Italian youth market. Although the chav phenomenon has not yet been academically identified as a subculture due to its recent emergence, the group has been recognised by the media. Similar sub-cultures that have also been recognised include the Goths, punks, skinheads and yuppies who all used consumption as a method of message stimuli and group conformance. Consumers within subcultures act as the producers of culture. Through their consumption they can give brands powerful new meanings that can alter the meanings originally targeted by marketers (Holt, 2002). Campbell (2005) refers to this as “subversive customization”, namely adapting the product-use for self-expression or creativity. This is in line with the controversial publicity impact on Burberry from chav product usage, which gave the brand a negative set of messages and affected the profits of the company. “Burberry’s overall sales for the last quarter were disappointing, blamed in part on the chav factor” (Barns, 2005). In response, Burberry withdrew their checked caps from the market (Inconspicuous consumption, 2005).

The chavs are not the only members of society to affect the image of the Burberry brand. Two pubs in Leicester (and others in other areas) banned people from wearing the Burberry check pattern because of the brand’s association with football hooliganism and drunkenness (Parry, 2004). Other brands have also been through troubled times, such as the Ben Sherman brand, that was “working hard to overcome its association with Mods and yob culture” (Parry, 2004). The Strong bow brand was associated with “skint chav lads” (Armstrong, 2005) and the Prada brand is not welcome in some nightclubs (Lusher, 2005). These are also brands that have suffered from being associated with youth subcultures. A similar unfortunate association between the chav subculture and criminality is also implied by Connor and Huggins (2010). Some brands, however, have done the opposite, not dissociating themselves from chavs – Asda, for example, “launched ‘chav sweets’ – a range of Love Hearts called ‘Whatever’s’ with Chav phrases such as ‘bothered’ and ‘minger’ printed on them” (Heaps and Mather, 2006). When referring to subcultures, it is also relevant to consider social groups. Stafford (1966) studied informal social groups, finding that not all groups interact with relevance to consumption, but suggesting that subcultures are not formed unless consumption traits are found. The rationale behind the formation of groups of young people can be looked at from a sociological angle. Tribe culture and brands (2002) suggested that due to the erosion of traditional sources of identity, such as the family and religion, many young people have formed groups to counteract what is missing in these other areas. Armitage (2012) explains how clothing enables an individual to be identified with a social group. Their clothing, brands and fashion styles are methods by which they present themselves to others. -In other words, such styles and brands enable an individual to become part of a social, or sub-cultural, group with whom they identify. This striving to fit in and belong can be seen as a form of self-actualisation.

**Self-Actualisation:** From a psychological viewpoint, Oleson (2004) shows that Maslow’s fourth stage of need is relevant to this research study, in that it suggests human beings have esteem needs. He argues that within the fourth stage, “people have a general need and desire for status, self-respect, self-esteem and the respect or esteem of others”. He also says that through belonging to a group and being part of something, it all adds up to the “feelings of confidence, power, worth, adequacy and other feelings of usefulness”. This sense of belonging is implied in le Grand’s (2010) discussion of the spaces and places

where chavs socialise. Money can also contribute to a sense of self-esteem and self-actualisation, through the purchase of designer clothing. In fact, Hearn (2008) relates the rise of self-branding to the concept of self-actualisation. In this way branding produces a 'self' for public consumption.

Since designer clothing may build self-esteem, it is important to consider the effect, on branding and attitudes, of designer possessions, as this is a large part of the chav phenomenon. This can also be related to the concept of identity being portrayed through the possessing of designer labels. Fournier (1998) argued that consumers form emotional relationships with brands that have an impact on their self-concept. Hence, perhaps the reasons the chav groups choose the Burberry brand is because it is a luxury brand (Ritson, 2005) and because "the most defining feature of the chav phenomenon has been its adoption of brands that were once associated with the smart set" (Barns, 2005). Although the chav phenomenon has been widely covered in the daily press, very few academic studies have been done (Economou, 2007). Cope (2005) stresses the need for taking this phenomenon seriously and researching it as a component of contemporary society. Morris (2010) maintains that media treat this subculture negatively and from a narrow viewpoint, implying a need for more research to better understand youth subcultures, which reinforces the necessity for this study.

### 3. Methodology

**Research design:** The aim of this research was to explore the relationship between the chav phenomenon and chavs' usage of branded clothing, and whether this behaviour could be seen as an attempted extension of the self. As a contrast, those people who choose not to wear branded clothing and who form an opposing group to those categorised as chavs, were also studied. The methodology chosen to collect the data was qualitative and suited the exploratory focus of this study.

**Sample:** The data was collected by exploring the ideas and thoughts of thirty 14 to 23 year olds. This age group was chosen from the definition of a chav being a youth. The sample was split equally between male and female, and was also categorised into two homogenous groups. The first group of respondents were the perceived chavs and these respondents had at least two factors in common with the dictionary definition, mainly lack of education and wearing certain brands of clothing. The second group were the non-chavs, and these respondents met none, or at the most one, of the characteristics from the definition. This anomaly (meeting one characteristic) was an occasional use of branded clothing, which is common amongst many youths in modern contemporary society. Thirty respondents were felt to be an adequate sample for an exploratory study. The sampling method was judgemental, with the interviewer choosing respondents who seemed to meet the chav or non-chav criteria. For the in-depth interviews, one male and one female each were selected from the chav and non-chav samples. These four respondents (two chav, two non-chav, and two male, two female) were selected from the original thirty respondents by judgemental sampling, based on their willingness to cooperate and their perceived ability to respond adequately. The non-chav interviewees were called A and B and the chav interviewees were called C and D:

- A was male and wore branded clothing sometimes, usually Henri Lloyd brand. He wore designer clothes because of the quality and style and to be like his friends but only wore baseball caps for functional purposes - "sometimes I can't be bothered to do my hair". He saw the chav culture as a phase and that most of them "hang around street corners getting up to no good".
- B was female and did not wear branded clothing. She was against designer clothing and thought "it makes people look like they need something else to give over an image of being trendy or cool". She didn't consider being trendy or cool an important attribute to her clothing consumer behaviour and said "I think people who wear a lot of obvious branded clothing look silly to me."
- C was male and wore branded clothing. He said "I feel better when I wear brands" and argued that "if I went out with no decent clothes they wouldn't speak to me" referring to his group of friends.
- D was female and fit the chav criteria for a female by wearing short skirts and stilettos. Her motives for wearing branded clothing were because it is "cool" and "everyone wears them" and strongly suggested that people who wore unbranded clothing were "knobs" and "gypos". This suggests that by personally attacking others about these consumer behaviour choices, she was actually portraying her identity of low social status.

**Data collection instrument:** A questionnaire was developed and derived from the literature. The set of qualitative questions aimed to gain an insight into the reasons and ideas behind the respondents' consumer behaviour and their attitudes towards wearing branded clothing. These questions were mostly

open ended in order to gain a more in-depth response and freedom was given to all respondents to answer how they wish. A few closed-ended questions were included to gain descriptive statistics. A card with the definition of a chavenabled respondents to judge whether they fitted into this group or not.

**Data collection:** Data was gathered from a range of places such as pubs, streets, youth clubs and shopping centres, all of which are common places for chavs to be found. Questionnaires were completed on the spot, which encouraged a higher response rate. The interviewer was present whilst the questionnaires were completed in order to present respondents with the card and to ensure that the correct person was responding, and was not being excessively influenced by friends. The in-depth interviews were carried out in the respondent’s homes (2 interviews) or within the vicinity of their homes (2 interviews), such as the street or gardens. Respondents were asked to choose the location of the interview in order to let them feel more comfortable and confident in their own chosen surroundings. These interviews were carried out in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the research phenomenon. The interviews were unstructured to enable a wide range of discussion and a more personal response from the interviewees. Data was collected over a period of two weeks. The questionnaires were conducted in a total time span of eleven days and the interviews were done over four days. One in-depth interview was carried out per day, allowing for time to transcribe the audio recordings after each individual interview. There were no restraints on the length of interviews, which continued until the interviewer was satisfied that enough information had been gathered. However, anti-social behaviour and hooliganism are traditionally associated with chavs, so there was a potential risk to the security of the researcher. In order to be secure when the interviews were taking place, at least one other person was in the room with the respondent and the interviewer. Also, when the questionnaires were administered in streets or shopping centres where there was a risk to the security of the researcher, two other people joined the researcher.

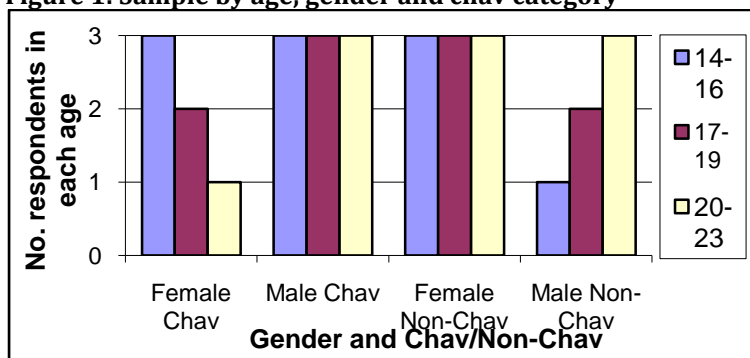
**Analysis of data:** The data from the questionnaires was analysed predominantly via the content of descriptive words used in the responses in order to compare the opinion of the two groups. These were tabulated into word groups to gain a truer understanding of perceptions and motivations, and of commonalities and differences. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and analysed using word tables in order to identify feelings about the relevant issues.

#### 4. Results

The first stage of the study involved a questionnaire survey of the thirty respondents. The sample was categorised according to chav/non-chav, by gender and by age, with the first two categories being split equally, while the three age categories were split into thirds.

**Description of sample:** The sample is illustrated in Figure 1, which indicates a reasonable representation across the various categories, although there were fewer female chavs and male non-chavs than the other two categories. This was not considered a problem since no attempt was being made to create results representative by each specific sub-category, e.g. ‘male chav 14-16’.

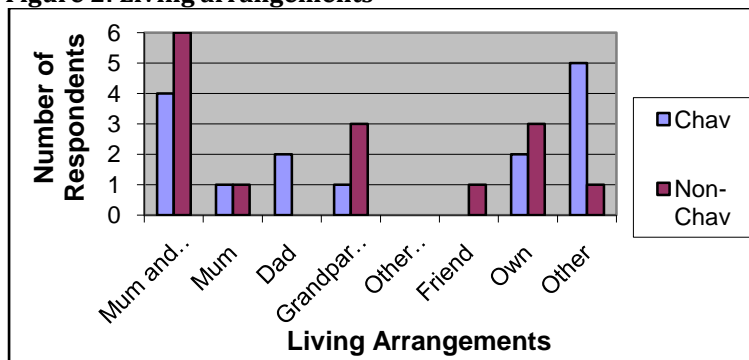
**Figure 1: Sample by age, gender and chav category**



Where someone lived was thought to possibly indicative of their social status. The living arrangements of the sample are therefore reflected in Figure 2. The chav group mainly lived with “other” (which was mostly foster care), whilst the non-chav group mostly lived with their mum and dad (six out of fifteen). Two thirds of non-chavs lived with some form of family, while only about half the chavs lived with family.

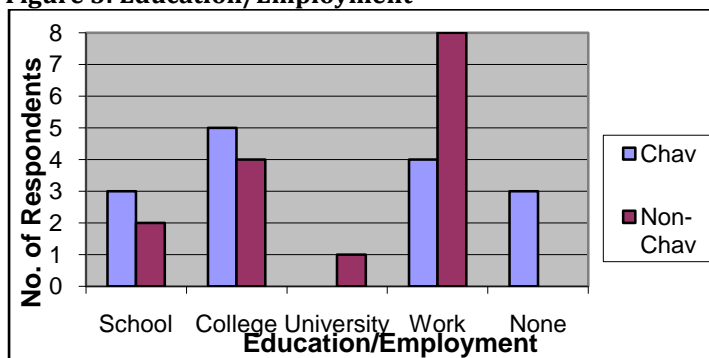
As suspected, chavs had more non-standard living arrangements, while more non-chavs lived in more standard family oriented living arrangements. Such lack of family oriented living arrangements by chavs could be expected to be associated with the less socially acceptable behaviour associated with chavs.

**Figure 2: Living arrangements**



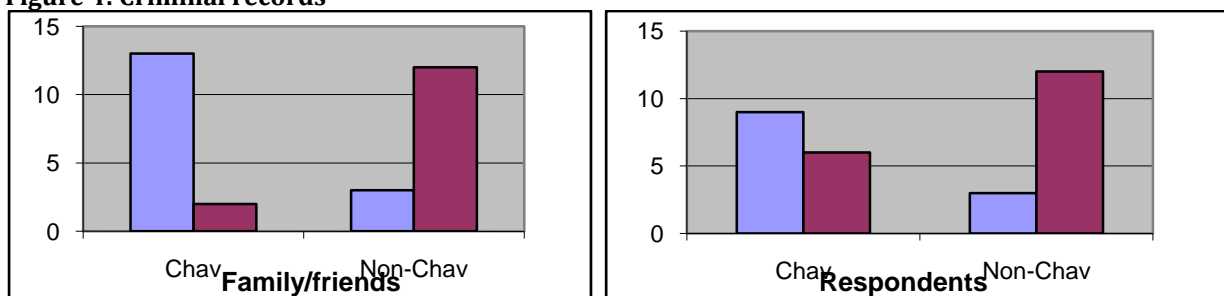
Chavs are often defined as poorly educated and unemployed, so it was necessary to define the sample in these terms. With regards to education and employment, most of the non-chavs (eight out of fifteen) were in employment as opposed to only four out of fifteen chavs, but the numbers in education were much the same. Three of the chavs were neither in education or employed, so presumably were unemployed, as is shown in Figure 3. Although not considerably different, the chav grouping did reflect slightly lower education levels and slightly higher unemployment levels.

**Figure 3: Education/Employment**



Anti-social behaviour and criminal behaviour are associated with the chav stereotype (le Grand, 2012b). It was therefore important to identify if this was relevant within the sample. There appears to be a noticeable difference between the two groups regarding criminal records (see Figure 4). Thirteen out of the fifteen chavs had a friend or member of their family who had a criminal record, but only three out of the fifteen non-chavs had friends or family with criminal records. Regarding the respondents themselves, nine out of the fifteen chavs had criminal records. In contrast, only three out of the fifteen non-chavs had criminal records. The finding is interesting considering the entire sample was under the age of twenty-three, which indicates that the chavs may have a higher propensity to criminal or anti-social activity, as is suggested by the stereotype.

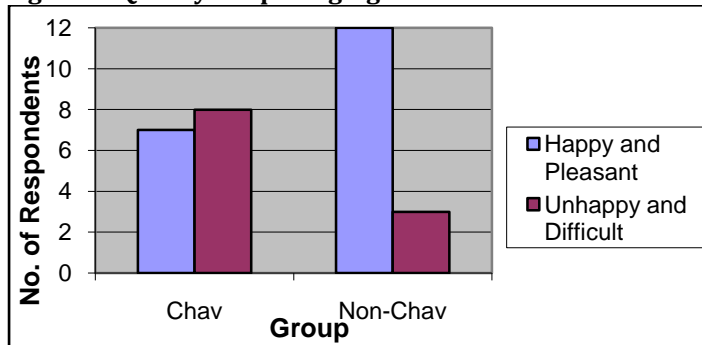
**Figure 4: Criminal records**



Key: Blue =yes, have criminal record - Red = No, don't have criminal record

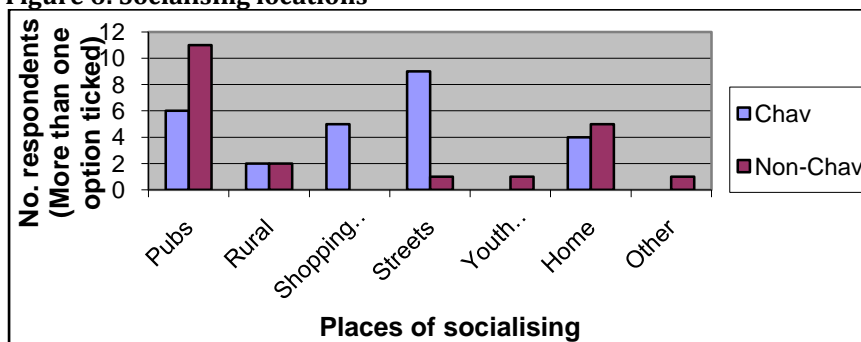
From a sociological viewpoint, it can be expected that a person’s upbringing could be influential on their social behaviour. With regard to the opinions on the sample’s upbringing, the results, reflected in Figure 5, were as expected. From the chav sample, eight out of the fifteen said they had an unhappy and difficult upbringing, which may be due to the high number of the sample, or their family or friends, with criminal records, and that the majority live “in care” rather than with family. Twelve of the non-chav sample responded that they had a happy and pleasant upbringing.

**Figure 5: Quality of upbringing**



With regard to socialising, as expected from the stereotype, Figure 6 shows that chavs mostly socialised in the streets, pubs and shopping centres, while non-chavs were more likely to socialise in pubs or at home. This finding supports the stereotype of chavs and is consistent with le Grand’s (2010) finding of the importance of place for chav socialising and for chav group membership

**Figure 6: Socialising locations**



A number of other findings were of interest:

- Non-chavs seemed to understand the derogatory meaning of the term chav better than chavs did.
- Only ten of the fifteen chavs saw themselves in this category after reading the definition
- The chavs were aggressive and negative towards the thought of being labelled a chav.

These findings are consistent with much of the literature on chavs, namely that it is mostly a derogatory term used by the middle classes to describe working class youth, rather than a term used by the working class youth to describe themselves (e.g. Bennett, 2013; le Grand, 2012a; Timmins, 2012; Tyler, 2008). The overall findings discussed above are summarised below in Table 1.

**Table 1: Summary results of sample characteristics**

Category	Chav	Non-chav
Living Arrangements	Other (mainly foster care)	Mum and Dad
Education/Occupation	College/Work	Mostly work
Friends/Family with criminal record	13 out of 15	3 out of 15
Respondents’ Criminal Records	8 out of 15	3 out of 15
Upbringing	Unhappy and Difficult	Happy and Pleasant
Socialising Places	Streets	Pubs
Religion	None	Two third followed religion

**Interview Results:** To better understand and interpret the survey results, and to explore the attitudes to clothing and brands, in-depth interviews were held with four of the respondents. Regarding the term chav, the two chav interviewees were unaware of the meaning and had not heard of it before. When told the definition, they identified with the group and did not see it as being derogatory. On the other hand the two non-chav interviewees did know what the term meant and did feel that it was derogatory, but also that it was just a name for a group of youths that has been around for a long time and was simply a “phase”. Words commonly used in the interviews by the four interviewees to describe themselves and the other sample group were identified and are listed in Table 2. These words can highlight the interviewees’ own consumer motivations as well as their attitudes to the “other” group. It is indicated by the choice of words used by the non-chavs that their consumer behaviour reflects a more functional motivation, whereas the chavs are more influenced by others (peer pressure) and by “keeping in” with their friends and peers.

**Table 2: Word List**

Chav			Non-chav		
Themselves (branded wearers)	clothing	Others (unbranded clothing wearers)	Themselves (unbranded clothing wearers)	Other (branded wearers)	clothing
Cool, nice, friends, self-confident, dole, better, fashionable, being a lad, decent, image, money, spending, naked, nobody, everyone, important, thick, stress, laugh, losers, harder.		Gypo, stupid, no money, can’t afford it, tramps, idiot, knobs.	Confident, comfortable, expensive, fancier, style, design, feel, smart, reasonably priced, subtle, lifestyle, trendy, morally.	social, money, trouble, fake, cheap, tacky, influenced, hereditary, need something else, image, silly, trouble makers, criminals, incomplete, substitute.	

Table 3 indicates that chavs’ motivations for wearing branded clothing were mostly related to wanting to feel more confident and to keep up with fashion trends. Non-chavs did not feel bothered by what they wore, i.e. whether branded or unbranded, but they would feel awkward or a “show off” were they to wear branded clothing. The correlations reflected by the two tables suggest that chavs and non-chavs have different attitudes to clothing and different motivations for the clothing they choose to wear.

**Table 3: Motivations and feelings towards branded clothing**

Category/Motivation	Frequencies of mention	
	Chav	Non-chav
Money	2	3
Trend/Fashion	3	1
To fit in	1	1
Confidence	6	1
Awkward/Show Off	0	4
Not bothered/No different	2	5

Although the exploratory nature of the study precludes definitive conclusions, the results broadly suggest that there is a connection between the lack of a social entity (family, religion, etc) experienced by chavs and the wearing of branded clothing. Motivational values for clothing choice were seen to be more functional from a non-chavs point of view, but in the chav group, wearing of branded clothing could be seen as an indicator of their lower social position, and as an indicator of membership of a social grouping. Chavs focused on identity, confidence and image as their motivations, which suggests they wear branded clothing as an extension of the self, as the thought of being seen by their friends or others in unbranded clothing was unbearable.

**Discussion:** The empirical results have provided some evidence that chavs do wear branded clothing as an extension of the self, because, on the whole, none of them would be seen outside their homes unless they wore their branded clothes to give them their own identity. This study supports Belk’s (1988) work



that suggested that we regard our possessions as part of ourselves. Chavs, as stated earlier, are characterised by their identities, which are shown through their choice of possessions, including branded clothing. Belk argues that possessions are linked with the management of our identities, which supports this study's finding that chav clothing provides an extension of the self. Their motives for wearing branded clothing were to portray that they had money (when in fact they did not, as most of them were not employed). This would suggest a relation with the work of both Schaefer et al. (2004) and Wells (1996) who said that material ownership brings happiness. Owning high class brands such as Burberry seems to make chavs feel fulfilled. In comparison, people who wear non-branded clothing seem to feel happy and fulfilled due to their upbringing, and feel that education and personality have more influence on their identity. The symbolism attached to a brand like Burberry, which is expensive and was once seen to be mostly worn by the gentry, means that the chavs are attaching themselves to the brand and attempting to adopt the ego effect from the brand (Fournier, 1998). Confidence was a major motivation factor for wearing branded clothing as, "people on the streets would think I was a nobody" (Interviewee D) if she did not wear branded clothing. This agrees with the work of Piacentini and Mailer (2004) who suggested designer clothing is chosen to increase confidence and is used as a tool to attach a role to the person.

Motivations for not wearing branded clothing were simply to not feel "awkward" or to avoid looking like a "show off". The non-chavs saw the chavs as wearing branded clothing to show off something they thought they had, when in fact they didn't. The reason for the chavs motivation to extend the self through branded clothing is also related to their social upbringing. Non-chavs seemed to be part of a "normal" stable environment and tended to agree that they had happy and pleasant upbringings. Chavs on the other hand said they had unhappy and difficult upbringings and many of them did not live with a member of their family and had criminal records. These comparisons seem to draw a set of conclusions that fit the literature and give a sub-cultural explanation of some of the past researchers' work. This paper agrees with Tribe culture and brands (2002), which said that young people tend to form groups due to an erosion of the traditional sources of social influence such as the family or religion. Belk (1988, 2004) talked about possessions and how they improve a person's status. Solomon et al., (2002) stressed how messages are portrayed and images gained through branding. This is true of the chav groups who use expensive brands such as Burberry to get a message across that their identity is more socio-economically viable. This, emphasised by celebrity endorsement of the brand, and the UK Government's attempt to ban youths dressed this way from public places, adds to the connotation of the images already created by the youths themselves.

**Implications for marketers:** Despite the negative and derogatory connotations of the chav label, and the so-called hijacking of brands such as Burberry, chavs as a market segment are very important to marketers. Quinn (2010) for example quotes a UK retailer as saying "it is custom that we are not going to turn away". Although many chavs are not in work and do not have considerable disposable income, they do choose, as indicated previously, to spend what they have on branded clothing items to establish their personal identity and to associate themselves with their social groups. Thus, this market segment with its conspicuous consumption and dedication to brand names is very important to marketers and retailers. Of further importance to marketers is the fact that there has been a growing merger of celebrity culture and the chav subculture as illustrated by Tyler and Bennett's (2010) discussion of celebrity chavs and Raisborough et al.'s (2012) discussion of a celebrity chav death. The chav subculture is no longer something to be denigrated and demeaned, but to be considered as a valid market segment – many young people see celebrity chavs as role models and follow their consumption and fashion purchases. Therefore, marketers must pay particular attention to understanding youth subcultures. They are complex and rapidly changing and not well understood by adults (Morris, 2010). This is also illustrated by the fact that 'chav' is being reclaimed by some people as a positive sub cultural identity, for example, in the music industry (Tyler, 2008).

## 5. Conclusion

This study on the chav phenomenon aimed to explore more deeply the meanings behind choices of branded clothing and a comparison with people who choose not to wear branded clothing. In conclusion, the identity of chavs plays an important part in their consumer behaviour and in their branding choices. This suggests that they feel part of a group by keeping up with the fashion trends of their friends. This may be partly derived from their not being part of a family in the past. Their social status is also an

important factor influenced by their choice in branded clothing. They feel that, by wearing branded clothing, they portray an image that they are wealthier than those who choose not to wear branded clothing. However, this is rarely true, as the study has indicated that most chavs were not in work, which meant they had no, or limited, income, unless they were on benefits. The chavs also tended to verbally attack those who wore unbranded clothing, which may indicate their perceived lower socio-economic status. With regard to the social upbringing of the two groups, the study shows that non-chavs had a more structured, happy childhood and this may explain why they do not need to attempt to gain status through brands.

**Limitations:** Various problems are often experienced when researching socially sensitive issues or groups. In this study a number of such problems were experienced.

- Recruiting chavs for the research was difficult as assisting the researcher was seen as contrary to the group's values, and those who did assist were mocked and called names.
- The choice of unstructured interviews was problematic as the chavs were not very forthcoming, responding in short terse answers, while the non-chavs gave more in-depth thoughtful answers.
- Chavs, in addition to short answers, were reluctant to answer some questions. For example, Respondent C, when questioned about his upbringing, brought the interview to a close by saying "Is that it now 'cos I gotta go."
- The lack of descriptive answers, and answers like "I don't feel anything" or "I'm not bothered", reduces the meaningfulness of the answers.
- Since there was always a third person present (for security purposes), respondents may have been inhibited or placed under pressure to respond in a socially acceptable manner.

These difficulties could well influence the validity of the study, leading to bias because of different levels of co-operation by the two groups. Therefore, the findings have been treated as exploratory, and care must be taken not to extrapolate beyond the sample.

**Recommendations for Further Research:** The tentative and exploratory nature of this study indicates a need for a more definitive, preferably quantitative, study of a larger sample, to provide more reliable results. In addition, research to delve deeper into the motivations behind the consumer behaviour and choices of branding of chavs would be worthwhile. The participant observation method could be useful to counter the limitations described above, but it would obviously be difficult for a researcher to achieve safe integration with a chav group. Branding can take many diverse forms, and therefore another area to study might be to focus on certain, more specific, areas such as sportswear worn by chavs. A further approach to researching this group could focus on peer pressure as a determinant of youths' branding decisions and could follow on from Stafford's (1996) work on groups and brands. Although this could be approached in a quantitative manner, research of a qualitative nature could be more important and could contribute more to the literature on chavs.

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