1. Introduction

We examine sibling relationships ("sibship") within the context of consumer socialization in order to further investigate the role siblings play within, and as part of, the broader family dynamic as consumer-socialization agents. Consumer socialization has been highlighted as an important topic for consumer researchers (John, 1999) and policy makers alike (Ekström, 2006) who seek to understand the significant role and spending power that children have within the family unit, and the many influences on their consumption.

The family has often been described as *the* consumer socialization agent (Caruana and Vassallo, 2003); yet existing studies of consumer socialization within the family setting have tended to focus on "adult-initiated" (i.e. parental) socialization behaviours. Whilst such studies have not discounted the role that other family members (e.g. siblings) may play as consumer-socialization agents (Carlson, Laczniak and Wertley, 2011), the horizontal movement of consumer insight, training and imitation among siblings is rather under-explored (Kerrane and Hogg, 2013). Given significant changes in how contemporary families are formed (e.g. the rise in dual income and single parent families) children are now suggested to spend more of their time with their siblings than anyone else (Sanders, 2004), and a "greater understanding of sibling relationships" is called for within the context of consumer socialization (Tinson and Nuttall, 2007, p. 186).

Our contribution is thus twofold. First, we seek to explore the nature of sibling relationships as a much under-explored area of family life (Kramer and Bank, 2005); and second, we seek to theorise the role played by siblings as socialization agents within the family

dynamic. We do this through placing primacy on the voices of children as siblings while conceptualising the family as a complex network of embedded relationships, utilising a family systems theory approach (Epp and Price, 2008; Minuchin, 1988). Family systems theory contends that it is inappropriate to explore sibling relationships in isolation from the broader family nexus in which they are embedded, and that elements of one family subsystem (e.g. sibling relations) are likely informed and influenced by relations that exist in another familial subsystem (e.g. parent-child relationships). We identify how multiple and simultaneous family relationships coalesce, shaping processes of consumer socialization within the sibling group. Informed by Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory and Adler's (1927) theory of individual psychology, theories which are often used to theorise sibling relationships (Whiteman, McHale and Soli, 2011), a variety of mechanisms are then highlighted by which siblings act (in both positive and negative ways) to shape the skills, knowledge and attitudes of their brothers/sisters in the marketplace. In order to do this, we initially present a matrix of sibling relationships based on a horizontal and vertical family systems analysis. We then use this matrix to conclude by presenting a typology of nascent child consumer identities that begin to emerge as a result of socialization processes.

1.1 Familial consumer socialization

Interest in consumer socialization, the "processes by which young people acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace" (Ward, 1974, p.2), has suffered from a relative neglect in recent years (Ekström, 2007). Whilst it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the entirety of consumer socialization, in the review that follows we focus on the socialization agent which is often described to have *the* most significant impact on children - the family (Neeley, 2005).

Studies of familial consumer socialization have tended to explore "adult initiated" behaviours through largely documenting the socialization actions of parents within the family environment (Carlson et al., 2011; Kerrane and Hogg, 2013). Two aspects of parental socialization behaviours have emerged prominently in existing studies of family consumer socialization, *family communication patterns* (see, for instance, Moschis, 1985) and *parental style* (see Carlson and Grossbart, 1988, for a review). This is likely informed by Baumrind's (1980, p. 640) wider definition of socialization itself, viewed as "an *adult-initiated process* by which developing children, through insight, training, and imitation acquire the habits and values congruent with adaptation to their culture" (emphasis added).

Although such typologies have provided a useful overview of adult-initiated socialization behaviours within the family setting at a general level, research has in turn been called for which examines family as a highly collective enterprise, signalling the need to "explain the dynamic interplay of individual and relational identities that interact in space and time to account for the unfolding outcomes" (Epp and Price, 2008, p. 51). Exploring socialization behaviours within discrete and isolated family dyads (e.g. parent-child; or even sibling-sibling alone) is therefore criticised on the basis that the complex interplay of individual, relational and collective practices amongst family members is likely neglected. Consumer researchers, instead, need to explore socialization processes which are nested within the broader family environment and as informed/influenced by multiple familial relations and interactions (Epp and Price, 2008). In this regard consumer socialization is under theorised, and theories relating to the operations of the sibling relationship (embedded as they are within the broader familial nexus of relationships) represents, we suggest, a significant gap in existing family consumer research.

1.2 Sibling relationships

In relation to the role siblings play as consumer socialization agents, research has explored how children can influence the innovative consumption behaviours of their siblings (Cotte and Wood, 2004); how borrowing and sharing practices amongst sisters facilitates the transfer of consumer skill (Tinson and Nuttall, 2007); and how siblings learn to strengthen purchase requests to parents through sibling coalition formation (Kerrane, Hogg and Bettany, 2012). This remains, however, a relatively small pool of research, and research which largely desegregates the socialization influence of family within another, albeit underexplored, family dyad (sibling-sibling).

This small, but growing, pool of consumer research acknowledges the role siblings play in shaping the consumption behaviours of children, complimenting research in other disciplines which stress the importance of sibling relations. Siblings are suggested to have, for example, a pronounced influence on the social, emotional and cognitive development of children (Dunn, 2002; Karos et al., 2007; Pike, Coldwell and Dunn, 2005) and for many individuals the sibling relationship is their most enduring relationship. Sibship is an integral aspect of children's social worlds and is embedded in a series of affective prosocial (e.g. sharing and co-operative) and negative exchanges (Karos et al., 2007), with sibship characterised as a fluctuating relationship (Edwards, Hadfield and Mauthner, 2005; Punch, 2008) which often involves both cooperation and conflict (Punch, 2008).

Despite the significance of sibship, relatively little is known about the sibling relationship (McIntosh and Punch, 2009). The quality of parent-child relationships can, however, in line with systemic approaches to family life (Minuchin, 1988), in turn impact sibling relations (Pike et al., 2005), with parental differential treatment of children (the tendency of parents to display less consciously or intentionally equitable parenting) giving rise to sibling rivalry (Suitor et al., 2008; Tucker et al., 2005). Systemic approaches to family life (Minuchin, 1988) therefore recognise that the whole (of the family) is more than the sum of its

parts (family members). Whilst dyadic relationships within the family (e.g. sibling-sibling) can be considered as separate entities, subsystems of the family likely influence one another (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). The family systems approach, in line with the work of Epp and Price (2008), therefore argues that elements of the family subsystem (e.g. sibling-sibling relationships) can only be fully understood by considering the larger network of interdependent relationships within which siblings are embedded.

1.3 Theorizing sibling relationships

Sibling relationships have recently been identified as under-considered and under-theorised in family research (Whiteman et al., 2011). Where theories are used to understand sibling relationships, *social comparison theory* (Festinger, 1954), *Adler's theory of individual psychology*, and *family systems theory* (Adler, 1927; Minuchin, 1988), introduced earlier, are often drawn upon. Given the complexity of the sibling relationship a single theoretical approach to understand sibship may be less than adequate, and research is called for which draws upon multiple theoretical perspectives within this field (Whiteman et al., 2011). In this study we explicitly draw on social comparison theory, intersecting this with the theory of individual psychology, locating this within a broad family systems theory approach to offer a nuanced theoretical contribution in our exploration of sibship within the context of consumer socialization.

Social comparison theory (SCT) (Festinger, 1954) is a well-established social psychology theory often used in the study of siblings (Moller and Marsh, 2013). SCT is based on the notion that we are intrinsically motivated to self-evaluate based on comparison to others. Evaluative information provided by others serves for the protection and survival of the self, with an individual tending to compare herself/himself to similar others for comparison standards ("*do I measure up*?"). Given a shared family background and environment siblings

are clear targets for such comparison (Whiteman et al., 2011), with siblings likely to evaluate how their parents treat them vis-à-vis their brothers/sisters and resulting patterns of consumption. With upward comparison, individuals compare themselves to admired others, and through perceiving similarities they enhance their sense of self; with downward comparison an individual's sense of self is enhanced through perceptions of feeling better off (Moller and Marsh, 2013).

SCT has gained some currency in consumer research, predominantly to underpin research which examines the effects of comparisons that consumers make between themselves and others in terms of ability or intrinsic worth (see, for example, Ackerman, MacInnis and Folkes, 2000; Belk & Pollay, 1985). Social comparison outcomes are, however, a contested terrain, as upward or downward comparisons do not always have predictable outcomes. For example, upwards social comparison can lead to positive aspirational feelings and behaviours, but the outcome could also lead to negative self-evaluation and low self-esteem (Pila *et al* 2014); similarly, downwards comparisons can lead to positive self-evaluation, but the outcome of this could also lead to the development of a superiority complex and negative behaviours with regard to effort (Bounoua *et al* 2012). It is here, in trying to understand the differential outcomes associated with social comparison behaviour, we suggest that Adlerian theory can offer additional insight.

Adler's (1927) theory of individual psychology is a social psychoanalytic theory. Adler outlined how the family dynamic resulted in particular outcomes in terms of the individual's management of their lifestyle and positionality within the family. This can be characterised by a pull between establishing oneself as part of the group (identification) (Lucey, 2010) and distinguishing oneself from the group (dis-identification) (Sanders, 2004). Working within the Adlerian tradition, Vivona (2010, p. 13) argues that "to create a unique and valued identity

relative to the identity of one's siblings requires managing the tension between wishes for personal uniqueness and interpersonal closeness".

Adler's theory revolves around egalitarianism, and the equal treatment of siblings on the part of parents (Whiteman et al., 2011). Sibling rivalry is therefore explained by the need for children to avoid inferiority feelings, and thus, to overcome inferiority by reducing competition, siblings often differentiate themselves within the sibling relationship. As Vivona (2010) put it, children become within the family dynamic "the smart one", "the artistic one", and so on. This "dis-identification" can result in healthier sibling relationships in the face of parental favouritism or differentiated treatment, with comparison to similar others negated. Whilst parental differential treatment (PDT) across siblings is very common (see Suitor et al., 2008; Tucker et al., 2005), research has tended to look for the causes of this differential treatment rather than the outcomes.

Adlerian theory is used in parent and family education programmes which focus upon building better relationships (Allen *et al* 2014; Gfroerer *et al* 2013; Shifron 2010), and as such its outcome focus (on achieving harmonious relationships) lends itself well to augmenting the process based social comparison theory, and to extend research on sibling relationships *per se*, grounded within a family systems theory perspective. In terms of the study at hand, establishing the dynamics through which individuals become socialized as consumers within the family setting, and the role siblings play within that set of relationships, adds a further dimension to the benefits of utilising this intersection of theory.

This study, therefore, drawing on SCT and Adler's theory of individual psychology, seeks to further explore the mechanisms by which siblings help to socialize each other in to the consumer role, conceptualising the family as a complex network (Epp and Price, 2008). As such, we seek to pursue a central research question: by what mechanisms do children draw on

their sibling relationships, embedded as they are within the dynamics of broader familial relations, to develop their skills and identities as consumers in the marketplace?

2. Methodology

In this qualitative, interpretive study, a total of 30 children, drawn from 13 families from the North-West of England, were recruited to take part in the research process (see Table 1). Such a relatively small sample size, in line with other interpretivist studies of family consumption, is needed to enable an in-depth understanding of the complexity of intra-familial and intra-generational relationships to emerge (Kerrane and Hogg, 2013). Given the private nature of family life (Lindsay, 2000) initially personal contacts were used to help gain access to the families recruited, and the families were purposively chosen to ensure that at least two children were co-resident at the family home.

<Insert Table 1 "Respondent's details" here>

The children recruited aged from 7 years to 14 years old, and data collection occurred over an eight month period. Children in middle childhood (approximately 7-13 years old) were recruited as this is an under-researched age group and because at this age children are suggested to think about their emotional relationships/their own place and status in social groups (Edwards et al., 2005). Parents granted initial consent for us to approach their children to take part in this study, and then consent was directly sought from the children. In order to reduce parental coercion our child informants were directly informed that they could opt out of the research at any time. Strict ethical guidelines and procedures for informed consent were adhered to (Mason, 2004), and this study obtained ethical approval from the University ethics committee.

In-depth interviews, successfully utilised elsewhere in studies of child consumption (Lawlor and Prothero, 2011), were conducted with each family. Initially short interviews were conducted with the parents, and topics such as parent-child and sibling-sibling relationships were discussed[1]. A series of in-depth interviews were then conducted with the children. The interviews were conducted in the family home and during the interviews with the children we asked them about the everyday nature of their relationships with their brother(s)/sister(s)/parent(s); how they socialized with their siblings; whether they liked or disliked the same things as their siblings; and how, and indeed if, their sibling relationships shaped their consumption.

Although it was our intention to interview each child individually the in-depth interviews were, similar to family life, often disrupted by other family members, with the children dipping in and out of the interviews with their siblings. In retrospect this was actually very insightful, and we gained an understanding of sibling alliances and relationships in a manner that was not intended. The children did, however, also have time alone in which their individual voices were heard, out of earshot of other family members. The expertise of one of the authors, a qualified nursery nurse with significant experience of working with children in a local authority social services setting, was utilised in terms of making sure that the questions posed to the children were accessible, along with how to deal with sensitive family issues, should they be raised.

Primacy was placed on the experiences and voices of the children themselves. Although our research is largely rooted within sibling-sibling interaction, we move beyond such simplistic understandings by capturing some of the dynamics at play within the family network

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[1] In the Smith family, the grandmother of the children (Julia and Chris) participated in the interviews. Following a disruption in parenting between the parents (Simon and Rachel), the grandparents of the children acted as primary caregivers for the children during the time of data collection.

which worked to shape this relationship. The children, for example, commented on how perceived overly favourable parent-child relationships informed sibling relationships.

Data were analyzed on two main levels (within and across family cases) and closely followed the stages involved in analysing qualitative data described by Spiggle (1994). Stage one of our data analyses began with the authors reading the transcriptions of each interview. Notes were then compared between the research team, and then a new reading of the complete transcriptions occurred. Each family was initially examined at the idiographic level which allowed for categorization of data from which larger conceptual classes emerged. The interpretation of the interview texts was undertaken using a hermeneutical process (Thompson, 1991; Thompson, Locander and Pollio, 1990) which involved moving iteratively, back and forth between interview texts (within and across family cases) and the literature. These concepts were then compared across the family cases and global themes emerged at stage two of our analyses which captured the essential dimensions common to all the participants' interviews.

3. Findings

The children described their sibling relationships in relation to a continuum which ranged from adversarial to co-operative in nature. Our child participants also highlighted how the quality of sibling relationships (adversarial vs. co-operative) were, in turn, informed by parent-child relationships and the resulting consumption practices played out within each family. Again, a continuum of consumption practices (largely fostered by parents) were described by the children, adjudged to be largely equitable ("*we all get the same*") to largely differential ("*some of us get less than others*"). Our findings lend support to a contagion effect – that embedded and multiple family relationships work to shape the consumer socialization experiences for children within the family. Figure 1 presents a framework outlining four

dominant categorisations vis-à-vis sibling relationships and perceived parental treatment in relation to consumption which emerged from our research encounters. The four interpretive categories identified will be described in turn.

Figure 1: Interpretive categories of sibling-consumption relationships

			Sibling-to-sibling	
			Overall quality of sibling relationship vis-à-vis consumption activities	
			Adversarial	Co-operative
Parent-to-children	Dominant Consumption pattern across the relationship	Equitable	Adversarial/equitable	Co-operative/equitable
		Differential	Adversarial/differential	Co-operative/differential

3.1 Adversarial/equitable consumption relationships

In studies of sibling rivalry it is common to find authors advocating equality of treatment across all siblings. However, some studies warn of the potential perils of treating children exactly the same (Faber and Mazlish, 1998). Supporting that view, in this category of sibling-consumption relationships there was a great deal of conflict evident within sibling interaction, although the children reported that they were fairly treated, overall, by their parents in terms of consumption. The children recognised equality in parent-child relationships, but closely monitored this to make sure that "*I don't miss out*";

> "You can't have one of us being bought one thing, something, and not the other, so we watch what each other gets. If they're bought things and not me it starts war".
>
> *(Alex, age 10)*

The children discussed feeling highly protective of the products that they owned. This made the children very selfish with their own possessions, with the children often unwilling to share their possessions with their siblings, as Tara describes:

> "These are my things (..) my clothes, my iPod, my laptop, they're all mine. Sarah can't have them, she's not allowed to use them. She's got the stuff she asked for and I've got my things".
>
> *(Tara, age 9)*

In one sibling group Paul (age 7) and Charlie (age 10) Fishwick shared a bedroom, which they worked to divide in to two separate spaces with the use of gaffer tape on the carpet to demarcate each child's space and personal possessions. This demarcation, however, did not result in equal satisfaction, as Paul reports: *"I've got the door side, it makes Charlie mad"*. The positive socialization intentions of parents (*"we need to treat the kids equally"*) backfires here, leading to negative socialization behaviours developing amongst the sibling group (i.e. little borrowing and sharing practices were recalled). More than this, equality on the part of parents (i.e. the need to treat their children in a "fair" and even way) instilled the need for one-upmanship on the part of their children to show that they are different to their siblings, or worthy of "special" treatment. Paul and Charlie, for example, work to share their bedroom space/enforce separate areas to demarcate their personal possessions, yet the boys work for ways to set themselves apart from the sibling group. In this case, Paul has the door side of their bedroom, which poses problems for Charlie in terms of accessing his personal space, heightening Paul's sense of power in his relationship with his brother.

From a consumer socialization perspective, siblings acted to both support and hinder the consumer development of children. On the one hand, children closely monitored the consumption of their siblings to police equality of purchases. This could be important for the

children to learn about "appropriate" brand and product choices of their contemporaries. Similarly, making claims to equality could be one way in which children learnt to best frame their purchase requests to parents. But on the other hand, the children (largely through the actions of parents) became highly protective of their personal space and possessions. Whereas borrowing and sharing practices have been identified as important ways in which children learn about consumption (see, for example, Tinson and Nuttall, 2007), little evidence of this was demonstrated in adversarial/equitable sibling relationships.

3.2 Adversarial/differential consumption relationships

Within this sibling relationship category conflict was also apparent, although this conflict was much more pronounced and revolved around the perceived preferential parental treatment of certain siblings (Suitor et al., 2008; Tucker et al., 2005). Emma (age 13), for example, describes her younger sister, Rebecca (age 11), as "*the star*" within their family. Emma feels that her parents often unfairly yield to Rebecca's purchase requests, actions which taint the sibling relationship, as Emma describes:

> "I don't even like Rebecca that much, she's a bit of a pain. She'll come in my room and mess it all up, try and take my iPod, she always tangles up my headphones and we end up hitting. So when (..) she once asked me should she should get a '1D'[2] bag for school and I just said yeah, fine, get it, whatever, just to get her away, off my back, even though I thought people would laugh [at her]. The girls at school hate '1D', they like 'The Wanted'. She shouldn't come in my room".
>
> *(Emma, age 13)*

Although siblings have been found to act as important opinion leaders for one another in supporting the consumer development of brothers/sisters (Kerrane and Hogg, 2013; Tinson and Nuttall, 2007), in this example we show how siblings can deliberately mislead and sabotage

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[2] Emma says that '1D' represents 'One Direction', a popular UK boy band (comprising Harry, Zayn, Louis, Niall, and Liam) which enjoys rivalry with another UK boy band called 'The Wanted' (comprising Nathan, Jay, Tom, Siva and Max).

the consumption of their brothers/sisters with deliberately negative consequences. Such actions were apparent across a range of sibling relationships. In relation to Emma and Rebecca, however, the negativity of this sibling relationship appears somewhat exacerbated by the nature of their family make-up. Emma and Rebecca are resident step-siblings, with relations amongst step-siblings characteristically difficult and tense (Sanders, 2004) because of a lack of shared genetic inheritance and common family history (Punch, 2008).

This sibling relationship category was highly competitive but a much darker side of consumer socialization behaviours emerged on the part of disenfranchised siblings ("*I'm sick and tired of him getting his own way all the time*"). Research on consumer socialization often points towards the constructive actions by which individuals develop consumer skill sets (guided by the supportive behaviours of others), yet in our research encounters with sibling consumer socialization agents, negative and detrimental behaviours were apparent. Given the "devastating lack of inhibition" evident within sibling relationships (Dunn, 1984), this is a relatively unique environment in which to explore socialization tendencies.

This darker side of sibling relationships was apparent through the alienation of favoured children within the families studied. Parental differential treatment antagonised the children ("*why don't they treat us fairly*?"), leading to negative consequences for the favoured child. In many cases the favoured child discussed feeling isolated from the sibling group, excluded from important consumption discussions other siblings participated in:

> "They don't really talk to, involve me in things. I can't (..) I'd like to say what do you think of this? Or what do you think people at school would say about these jeans? But they don't, I can't talk to them".
>
> *(Charlotte, age 11)*

This, we argue, is likely to impact on the quality of the socialization environment a child is embedded within, or the sources of information a child can access within the family. The children wanted to speak with their siblings about products/brands *before* approaching their

peers outside the family; as such siblings represent an important checking mechanism before their consumption is unleashed beyond the family setting.

Consumption has been identified as a way in which siblings can connect to one another through shared/joint product ownership (Edwards et al., 2005), in this relationship type this worked in the opposite direction. Rather, consumption was a bone of contention amongst children when a sibling was perceived to be favoured by parents, and children often reported "pinching" the products purchased for the favoured child. Frequent parental yielding to a child's purchase requests antagonised other siblings, having a detrimental effect on the quality of sibling relationships.

3.3 Cooperative/equitable consumption relationships

Co-operative/equitable consumption relationships were identified as being much more supportive. Within this relationship siblings would willingly share products with one another, supported by the notion that the parents of such siblings in turn treated their children in a fair manner. Co-operative parent-child relationships have been found to develop similarly co-operative behaviours amongst siblings (Sanders, 2004). The perceived lack of parental favouritism developed within the siblings a sense of fair play, and borrowing and sharing practices were often recounted by the children within this category as a way to support the consumer learning of their brothers/sisters. More than this, in a pronounced and constructive manner, siblings actively introduced one another to products and brands that they felt their brothers/sisters would enjoy – extending the borrowing and sharing practices identified elsewhere (Tinson and Nuttall, 2007). Kerry, for example, purposefully recommends products to her younger sister Janine (age 10), as Kerry explains:

> "My friend Clare at school's got this really nice pink top, it's got sparkles down one side. I thought Janine would like [it], the colour was good (.) she really likes pink. So I said to Janine, I said that she should buy it, it would look good. I don't think she's been

in TOPSHOP[3] before, so that was quite new for her ... I said we'd take her in to town to buy it, but Mum wasn't keen".

(Kerry, age 13)

Kerry works to support Janine's consumption choices, with Kerry (like other children within this relationship group) acting as an important opinion leader for her sibling. Accompanied shopping trips, often a feature of parental socialization behaviours (John, 1999), were also recounted by children as ways in which they purposefully developed and informed the consumption choices of their siblings (and subsequently both Kerry and Janine described going together to TOPSHOP to purchase this item of clothing, despite their mother's initial reservations).

Within these supportive sibling relationships the siblings openly talked with one another about consumption. Betty (age 11) and Tim (age 9) help to illustrate this, and whilst the narrow age spacing between siblings has been found to lead to sibling rivalry (Jenkins et al., 2005), this was not the case for Betty and Tim. Instead the children thought carefully about their purchases/purchase requests to parents, and even formulated shared/joint product requests together, as Tim explains:

> "At Christmas I kind of say I want this, what do you want? We both wanted [an] XBOX[4] last year, we wanted the same thing, so I said, well, if you ask for that, I'll ask for games and then we can share, we can play, use it together. Mum and Dad wouldn't buy us the same things, not two of the same things, that would be a waste [of money] ... it's in Betty's room now, that's where we put it, so I just go in when I want to play on it or we play on it together".

The actions of Betty and Tim help to demonstrate a number of behaviours which were also evident amongst other stories involving cooperative/equitable sibling relationships. The children could understand and consider the point of view of their parents (in this case, that

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[3]Kerry explains that TOPSHOP is one of her favourite shops which stocks relatively inexpensive, but very fashionable, clothes. Kerry regularly visits TOPSHOP with her friends.
[4] XBOX refers to Microsoft's gaming console, XBOX360

parents were unlikely to purchase duplicate and expensive computer consoles for each child), understood that joint purchase requests would prove to be effective when influencing their parents, as identified by earlier research (Kerrane and Hogg, 2013), and that children often taught one another about consumption and how best to influence parents/consumption matters (e.g. Tim encouraging Betty, not in an exploitative manner, to ask for a different, yet complementary, product to him at Christmas time; Kerry introducing Janine to a new clothing brand). From a consumer socialization perspective, we therefore have examples of how children can act as important agents of consumer learning for one other ("*this is how best to ask for things*") through sharing their consumption expertise/experience ("*you need to consider the point of view of parents*") and working in the best interests of their sibling ("*it would look good on her*").

It might be assumed that this type of sibling relationships is the ideal, and certainly parents actively sought co-operative, harmonious relationships between their children. However, in one of our sibling groups (the Smith family children) a significant trauma had taken place, and the children were subsequently placed in the full-time care of their grandparents. In the immediate aftermath of this, the children acted contrary to their usual somewhat adversarial relationship, as reported by their grandmother, towards a highly co-operative and harmonious relationship. This mirrors research (Mosek, 2013; Sanders, 2004) that demonstrates that trauma or loss of a parental figure (particularly maternal) can have a significant effect upon the sibling relationship, often resulting in siblings becoming more dependent upon each other and more supportive, due largely to shared feelings of social isolation (Metel and Barnes, 2011).

3.4 Cooperative/differential consumption relationships

Differential consumption was evident within the cooperative/differential sibling relationship. In this category, preferential parental treatment of certain siblings was noted by the children ("*some of us get less than others*"), although such 'unequal' consumption was maintained within largely cooperative sibling relations. Mark (age 12) and Jack (age 14), for example, both recognise Mark as being favoured by their mother, within consumption terms at least, as Jack describes:

> "Mark gets way more than me (..) he gets way more, but I'm fine with that. Mark needs his Ralph [Lauren] or his Tommy [Hilfiger], I'm fine with that, that's who he is ... I'm happy with my cheap back jeans and jumpers, 'cos that's who I am, that does me fine".

Mark and Jack describe themselves as being a 'Jock' and 'Emo'[5] respectively, and in this mature and supportive sibling relationship Jack accepts that in order to support Mark's identity as a Jock, Mark often needs quite expensive designer goods.

Mark and Jack are half-siblings who share the same mother, but have different fathers. Whilst Mark has regular contact with his father, Jack has no contact with his biological father. Differential treatment here is exacerbated by the fact that Mark retains two parents (albeit his father is no longer resident in the family home, but contact remains) and Jack only one. In an apparently irresolvable family dynamic, this means that Mark receives more material gifts and treats than Jack. As a single mum, their mother reports that she is in no position to refuse gifts from Mark's father, nor does she think that this would be ethical (if she refused purchases bought for Mark by his father she reports that she would be inadvertently favouring Jack, through instilling equality within the family), and on the other hand she is also not in any financial position to match Mark's advantage.

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[5] Emo, Jack tells us, is a fashion style/lifestyle that he adopts which is characterised by wearing dark clothes and, for Jack at least, minimal branding; Mark says that Jocks like sports, and often wear designer labels such as Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger.

Such examples and others relating to, for example, cultural norms and ability norms (Mosek, 2013) work to highlight the complexity of the family unit, and Mark and Jack's example highlights how historic patterns of family experiences also work to inform the sibling relationship. Rather than their experiences of family breakdown leading to high levels of sibling negativity, as reported elsewhere (see, for example, Jenkins et al., 2005; Sanders, 2004), the boys develop a mature and close relationship as a consequence. Similarly, rather than parental differential treatment leading to sibling rivalry (Mark gets bought more things than Jack), as existing studies would suggest (Tucker et al., 2005), this is not the case.

Where a great deal of parental differential treatment of children appeared apparent siblings often co-operated to redress power imbalances in the equitable treatment of children. Whereas it is common to find unequal parent-child relationships, sibling relationships are suggested to be evenly dispersed in terms of power balances (McIntosh and Punch, 2009); with siblings found to lend one another support in studies of consumption (Kerrane and Hogg, 2013). In some cases during our research encounters, the favoured child realised their position within their family ecology and acknowledged the lesser treatment of fellow siblings. In such cases the favoured child at times worked to restore balance (further highlighting the cooperative nature of this sibling relationship), lending his/her influence support to the 'disfavoured' child(ren), as Tina describes:

> "I don't think things are fair [in the family], really. I think I get too much, Bobby doesn't get as much, so I need to help him".
>
> *(Tina, age 9)*

Whereas the spill-over hypothesis (Pike et al., 2005) of sibling behaviour would contend that the transference of behaviours from parents to children (i.e. the favoured position of Tina) would affect another relational subsystem of family life (i.e. that Bobby would dislike Tina as a consequence of this preferential treatment, causing rivalry amongst siblings), this was

not apparent. From an early age children are aware of comparative parental treatment (Richmond, Stocker and Rienks, 2005), with siblings sharing a common sense of history (Punch, 2008). In the case of Tina and Bobby a compensatory range of behaviours is noted, and rather than Tina enjoying her favoured position within family life, Tina uses this to the advantage of her less-favoured brother (through, for example, covertly requesting products from her parents which she then passes on to Bobby; or forming coalitions with Bobby to bolster his chance of influence success). Here, deficiencies in a parent-child relationship are resolved, or at least weakened, through supportive (and protective) child-child relations (Sanders, 2004) within the context of consumption. Relationships with siblings play a major part in social learning (Edwards et al., 2005), and Tina's future relationships with others may very well be informed by her family experiences and the inequalities she, and other siblings, worked to redress (a theme we build on further in our discussion section).

4. Discussion

The interpretive analysis of our empirical data presented a matrix of sibling relationships based on a vertical (parental treatment regarding consumption) and horizontal (quality of underlying sibling relationship) dynamic, broadly embedded in a family systems approach, to show a range of relationship types that may emerge from equitable and differential treatment by parents. We show that equitable treatment does not always result in harmonious sibling relationships, and that differential treatment does not always result in disharmony. Drawing on SCT and Adlerian theory, as outlined in our literature review, we now examine the processes that may underpin these particular sibling relational/parental treatment states, and conclude with a suggestion of what outcomes there might be in terms of children's socialization into the role of the consumer. In doing so we ask how these processes around sibling

relationships outlined in our matrix, embedded within the broader dynamic of familial relationships, socialize children into nascent (i.e. developing) consumer identities.

Figure 2. Unpicking the dynamic of sibling relationship types towards nascent consumer identities
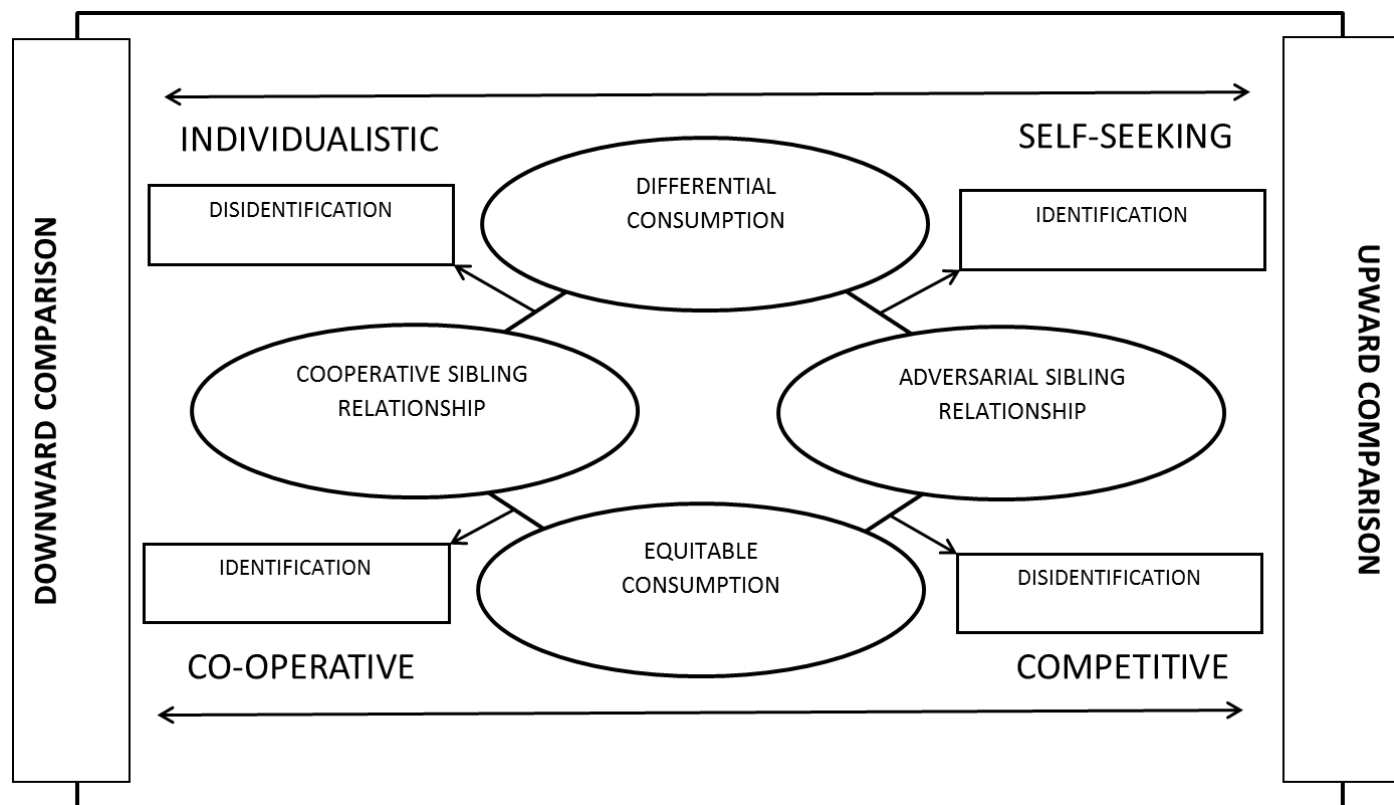
4.1 Co-operative/Differential sibling relationships leading to individualistic consumer identities

In this sibling relationship, children are treated differently by their parents in terms of consumption goods and treats, but the relationship is co-operative and largely harmonious. As can be seen in figure two, the processes involved with regard to disidentification-identification and social comparison is that in this relationship *downward social comparison*, together with a *disidentification* strategy, is the primary driver of sibling harmony with regard to consumption.

To explain, typically in high social comparison contexts, such as families, upward comparison, that is the perception that one person has an advantage to you (such as better treatment from parents) leads to jealousy, and thus high levels of sibling rivalry (Pila et al., 2014). However, instead in this case downwards social comparison is made and thus rivalry is reduced. To return to the sibling group of Jack and Mark (the emo and jock), as Jack (age 14) explains:

> "I'm socially responsible, I get second hand stuff and swap stuff with mates, charity shop, it's cool! Buying lots of stuff, made in sweatshops and that, is bad. I look at all that designer gear [on Mark] and I think, I'm better, it's my choice to be how I am, and a better person, really".

Here Jack, who is materially disadvantaged due to the family context, rather than making an upwards social comparison and perceiving his disadvantage as such, is instead making a downward social comparison to his more materially advantaged brother.

This social comparison process leads to a position of disidentification within the sibling group, where Jack is carving out a niche for himself, an individual consumer identity as different as having an equally valid, or even superior, position within the family. Interestingly, Jack and Mark's mother, who cannot equalise the treatment of her sons in terms of material good and treats, instead supports this disidentification, spending time with Jack sourcing alternative outlets for cheap clothing and encouraging his growing attraction to vintage clothes. We suggest that the socialization context for Jack supports the development of a nascent consumer identity that we would call *individualistic*. Here children emerge from the family dynamic as actively seeking consumption opportunities to display individualism in the face of what might be perceived as disadvantageous material conditions.

4.2 Adversarial/equitable sibling relationships leading to competitive consumer identity

In this sibling relationship type, the children were treated equally, but policed this equal treatment vociferously and often bickered and squabbled over comparisons between them, demonstrating a high level of sibling rivalry. The process underpinning this, we suggest, is a constant upwards comparison between the siblings in relation to their own positionality. The children are acutely aware of any advantage their other siblings may have, and monitor and compare their sibling's advantage compared to their own disadvantage, and strive to redress this. In effect this is not so much a policing of equality, but more a striving for advantage (Faber and Mazlish, 1998). For example, one of the sibling groups in this category reported "price-checking" using the internet, often around gift occasions, as Sarah (age 11) explains:

> "On Christmas day I went up to my room and checked [on the internet] all Tara's prezzies [for price] and all mine. I got more money spent on me, not much, but more ... I told her, she was really cross. She sulked until the shops opened and she could get something to make it fair."

Sarah's apparent pleasure at getting a demonstrable advantage over her sister, Tara, and the fallout from this demonstrates that within this highly competitive relationship, advantage, or differentiation, is actively sought within a relationship where constant upwards comparisons are being made to each other over consumption treatment. As outlined above, in high social comparison contexts, like the family, upwards comparisons can lead to jealousy. Here disidentification is constantly attempted as a coping strategy resulting from a felt need to be treated better than the other sibling(s), to be differently favoured in the face of strictly enforced equitable treatment. Often this nascent *competitive consumer identity* spilled over into other socialization settings like school, the extended family, and local friendship groups, demonstrating the importance of family relationships in the process of consumer socialization.

4.3 Adversarial/Differential sibling relationships leading to self-seeking consumer identity

In this sibling relationship pattern, children are treated differently by their parents, but this leads to an adversarial relationship with a high level of sibling rivalry, we suggest, due to upwards social comparison. This particularly affects the disadvantaged child, but also often has negative implications for the favoured child. For example, as Vivona (2010) argues, normal sibling rivalry seeks superior treatment, but victory often results in significant guilt. Similarly, Exline and Lobel (1999) posit that being the constant target of upward social comparison can cause distress and strain which would affect the favoured child.

However, focusing on the disadvantaged child, we found that the (understandable) upwards social comparison underpinning this rivalry often manifested itself in a strong need for identification with the (perceived) favoured sibling. In one of the stories presented earlier within this relationship type, Emma describes her sister Rebecca as "the star" within their family. Instead of carving out a niche for herself, Emma presents a picture of a child who wants to be like her sister, despite the often negative feelings she has towards her, and as such the strategy she uses is identification (rather than disidentification) with her sibling. One discussion with Emma related to the purchase of an expensive dancing dress for Rebecca to take part in a local carnival. Emma, who was clearly jealous of this purchase, rationalised the behaviour of her parents in terms of her own shortcomings:

> "Mum said it [the dress] was too expensive and I'm a cow [in the carnival] anyway, and that I don't look after my things, which is right. Rebecca is tidy. I try to be, but I'm not (..) I'll never be like Rebecca".
>
> *(Emma, age 13)*

Here Emma justifies the assessment of her parents that Rebecca is more worthy of special treatment and shows a desire to be like her i.e. Emma combines upward social comparison with identification with her sister. Here we feel that the nascent consumer identity might be best described as *self-seeking*, as consumption circulates around inwardly-turned assessments of

self-worth and self-determination within a context where the self is seeking a legitimate identity within the family (attaching to the favoured sibling in this case).

4.4 Co-operative/equitable relationships leading to co-operative consumer identity

In this mode of sibling relationship, equitable treatment leads to a largely co-operative relationship with reduced sibling rivalry. It could be argued that this is the ideal type of sibling relationship, and one to be aspired to. However, as outlined earlier, this relationship type can also mask underlying issues relating to a felt need for the siblings to strongly identify with each other, to stick together, and to support one another.

We would argue that this is the result of a downward comparison which might manifest itself in one of two ways, depending upon the context. For Betty and Tim, the context of their harmonious relationship is a downward social comparison relating to a comparison with others, mainly generated by their parents, who are at pains to discuss with them their comparatively "lucky position". Betty and Tim's family are regular churchgoers and are non-materialistic and part of their faith relates to that. Betty in particular states that she has taken responsibility for activities in the church directed at "those less fortunate", despite her own family not being particularly wealthy. However, in the case of Julia (age 12) and Chris Smith (age 14), their trauma, and move to a different parental situation (a shift from their parents looking after them, to their grandparents acting as primary caregivers), we suggest, has led to a downward comparison with themselves and their family situation at an earlier age. As Chris (age 14) explains:

> "I just blame myself for what happened. I wasn't helpful round the house, my room was a mess, me and Julia were always fighting and making a noise. I'm not like that now. Grandma doesn't let us get away with it [arguing over things] she's strict, but it's better".

This "temporal social comparison", (Möller & Marsh, 2013) has led to a strong need for identification with each other, and to support each other through their significant life changes, and both children expressed a thankfulness that things (and they) had changed. In both cases, downwards social comparison (towards others outside the home/towards themselves at an earlier time) led to strong identification within the sibling group, and as such, we suggest, even within the negative context of the latter example, the sibling groups were learning how to be, and emerging within their family socialization contexts, as *nascent co-operative consumers*.

Within our findings and discussion section we therefore signal the importance of the sibling relationship and the potential influence sibship may have in the development of consumer identities. Childhood experiences are likely to shape consumption behaviours and identities in later life (Ward, 1974), with sibship representing an untapped resource for understanding how individuals develop (Kramer and Lew, 2005). In comparison to other family relations (e.g. parent-child), understanding how sibling relationships work to inform developing consumer identities and consumption patterns has been given scant attention (Kerrane and Hogg, 2013). In this paper we highlight ways in the "doing" of sibship (the actions siblings take towards each other), and we show how siblings actively work to construct their relationships and identities within the context of consumer socialization. Our research findings point towards the important role that siblings play as agents of consumer socialization, with the quality of sibling-sibling relationships informed by other relations within the broader family dynamic. Whilst consumer socialization is often portrayed in supportive and constructive terms, a darker side of sibling socialization behaviours is unearthed.

5. Managerial implications

From a practitioner perspective, marketing managers are interested to understand how decisions are made and shaped within the family unit (Lee and Collins, 2000). In this paper we

show the important role that siblings play in teaching one another about consumption, with siblings acting as important (and up-to-date) opinion leaders for one another. The significance of the sibling role, as an important checking mechanism before their consumption choices are exposed to their friends, offers opportunities to marketing managers in terms of carefully targeting marketing communication messages within the family.

However, a degree of caution is needed here in terms of siblings being able to gauge the credibility of the information that is offered to them. Similarly, understanding which agents of learning shape consumer socialization in the family setting also offers practitioners insight in terms of which sources of information children are accessing in order to make consumption choices. Given the important role siblings play in this process, marketing managers would be wise to explore the sources of product information children access in order to disseminate this understanding to their brothers/sisters (e.g. through online means).

Such understanding of sibling socialization influence could also be leveraged, for example, in social marketing campaigns. For instance, older siblings could act as important opinion leaders within the family for younger siblings, and their behaviour (in terms of drinking alcohol/cigarette consumption) has the potential to intra-generationally influence younger siblings (through siblings making both upwards and downwards social comparisons). Again, social marketing campaigns need to consider the potential influence siblings have in terms consumption (especially given that siblings are often the sources of much social comparison).

6. Limitations and directions for future research

Existing studies of consumer socialization have largely focused on constructive efforts and positive socialization intentions, although our research findings potentially point towards a darker side of sibling consumer socialization. Whilst on the one hand the children exhibited positive behaviours (e.g. by suggesting products that their brothers/sisters may like), they also

demonstrated destructive/negative socialization behaviours (e.g. offering incorrect consumption advice and opinions). Given the ambivalent, emotionally uninhibited nature of sibling relationships (Pike et al., 2005; Punch, 2005) this is perhaps to be expected, and further research is needed which explores the potentially damaging consequences of such sibling socialization behaviours.

Our study draws from cohabiting siblings, and scope exists to explore the dynamic nature of sibship as played out across multiple residences and between full, half- and step-siblings. Disruption within family life (e.g. divorce/separation) is likely to impact sibling relationships, and we also acknowledge the potential for sibling relationships to change with time/across family types. Although exploring the effects of family type on the socialization tendencies exhibited by siblings was not the main focus of this paper, we offer some glimpses of how this differential influence may play out. Further research is needed, however, in this area. Similarly, more longitudinal research is needed which investigates the patterning of sibling behaviours over time/family circumstances.

Our study explores the role children play as agents of consumer socialization, and we recognise the life-long nature of socialization. Further research should also investigate whether adult siblings teach one another consumer skills, recognising the enduring nature of sibship. Further research is needed which also explores, for example, the role gender and the age of the child plays in teaching one another consumer skills; and whereas parent-child patterns of communication and socialization style have been explored (Moschis, 1985; Carlson and Grossbart, 1988), sibling-sibling patterns of interaction also need to be documented.

We feel that the networked approach to exploring family life (Epp and Price, 2008) holds great potential in investigating consumption issues within the family. In this paper we place primacy on the voices of children, and future research should collect data from multiple

(if not all) family members in order to capture the dynamics at play within contemporary family life.

7. Conclusion

In this paper we have made three interlinked contributions. First, we have furthered understanding of the part sibling relationships, embedded within the dynamic of family relationships, play in socializing child consumers, using a matrix based on an intersection of horizontal (sibling-sibling) and vertical (parent-child) consumer socialization. We have shown how various sibling relationship patterns emerge in relation to the consumption activities within the family and the quality of the sibling relationship, highlighting vis-à-vis consumption treatment that not always "equal is better, different is bad".

Second, we have shown how children use various sibling relational (social comparison) and identity (identification/disidentification) strategies to cope with different parental styles of consumption treatment, based on the kinds of comparisons they make to each other, and their ability to negotiate their own positionality within the family. The third contribution relates to the use of these novel theoretical intersections to suggest the formation of nascent consumer identities: *individual, self-seeking, competitive,* and *cooperative*. We conclude that in terms of child consumer socialization, seeking and developing balance and moderation in the push and the pull of upwards and downwards comparisons between siblings and developing a balanced and healthy level of both identification (seeing yourself foremost as part of the sibling group) and disidentification (seeing yourself foremost as an individual) is likely to develop healthy relationships in activities relating to consumption.

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Table 1: Respondent's details

Family pseudonym	Family type[6]	Parents/Guardians	Working status of parents/guardians	Children (Ages)
Charlton	Nuclear	Paul Sylvia	Civil servant Sales advisor	Alex (10), Claire (8)
Winton	Single-mother headed family	Andrea	Senior Administrator	Anna (11), Tony (13)
Jones	Nuclear	Ray Clara	Dentist Dentist	Tara (9), Sarah (11)
Fishwick	Nuclear	Pauline Phil	Teacher Account Manager	Paul (7), Charlie (10), Levi (13)
Webster-Artingstall	Blended	Albert Webster Fiona Artingstall	Builder Child minder	Emma Webster (13), Rebecca Artingstall (11)
Smith	Cohabiting-couple	Eve (Grandmother) (Simon) (Rachel)	Mechanic Teacher	Julia (12), Chris (14)
Young	Cohabiting-couple	David Elizabeth	Doctor Doctor	Charlotte (11), Liam (12), Michael (9)
Johnson	Nuclear	Jack Mary	Head Teacher Housewife	Janine (10), Kerry (13)
Lawson	Nuclear	Nick Anne	Sales Assistant Office Manager	Betty (11), Tim (9)
Lewis	Single-mother headed family	Marie	Retail Assistant	Mark (12), Jack (14)
Parry	Nuclear	John Anthea	Building contractor Housewife	Tina (9), Bobby (11)
Bright	Single-mother headed family	Kay	Teacher	Chloe (12), Edward (8), Steven (14)
Edgeworth	Nuclear	James Carmel	Administrator Civil servant	Harry (7), Anna (11), Zoe (14)

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[6] We characterise each family 'type' by how the adults described their family. It should be noted, however, that the children referred to other family members (e.g. non-resident fathers) in their interviews (although for the sake of simplicity, extra names do not appear in the above table).