



I'm just a teenage dirt bag, baby!

## **I'm just a teenage dirt bag, baby!**

Written by Sue Nelson

This publication is one of an occasional series of papers researched, written and produced by ENCAMS and funded by the British Cleaning Council. It attempts to highlight the issues of local environmental quality and anti-social behaviour.

**[www.encams.org](http://www.encams.org)**

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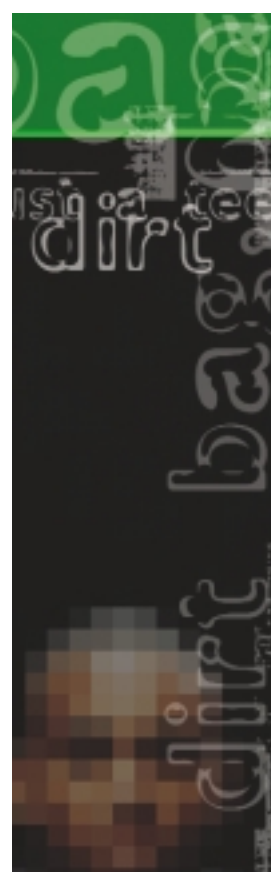
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# Foreword

## Foreword by the Chairman of the British Cleaning Council

Britain's multi-million pound cleaning industry established the British Cleaning Council (BCC) in 1982. Membership of the Council is open to any recognised trade association, institution, research or educational body concerned with industrial, commercial and institutional cleaning.

BCC has a number of objectives. Primarily it coordinates the common activities or interests of the British cleaning industry, promoting it to UK based institutions and associations, and to local and central government. It provides a forum for all constituent bodies to meet and work together to further the aims of the industry as a whole. BCC actively supports research, education and training and has played a key part in the "upskilling" of the industry's workforce.

BCC undertakes sponsorship of exhibitions and seminars connected with all aspects of cleaning. In particular we have been involved in the Cleaning Show for some time. This important event is run every two years at the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham, and has become the focus for the promotion of cleaning industry services and equipment in the UK.

Whilst we feel we have made much progress on all the above issues, we would like to see BCC more actively strive towards the achievement of two further objectives. First, to increase local and central government's awareness of the cleaning industry's huge contribution to the economy. This is a multi-million pound industry, and yet it still remains unrecognised as a major part of the UK economy or as a major employer.

Secondly, cleaning is traditionally seen as a low-level, low-impact activity which the public prefers to ignore or forget. But the truth is, within days our factories, hospitals, schools, offices and transport systems would not be able to function if cleaning services were withdrawn. I am proud to be in the cleaning industry. Health and hygiene are a fundamental right in our society, and the million or so people who are involved in cleaning deserve a higher status and recognition for their important, but underrated work. We would like to see the public gain a greater understanding of the role of our unsung cleaning heroes, who often labour unseen late at night or early in the morning.

Given BCC's remit and our new push on the above two objectives, we were keen to sponsor this series of occasional papers which are being sent to key government and institutional opinion formers and influencers. We have had a long relationship with ENCAMS, which has been an active member of BCC for some time, and we want to highlight the issues surrounding good quality environments. Be assured these are important issues and we feel that they deserve greater consideration and recognition.

I hope you will find the contents stimulating and thought-provoking, and next time you're in a hospital or pub, or on a train or in your office, or even just walking along the street – spare a thought for the people who clean up after the rest of us!

**Paul Pearce**

Chairman, British Cleaning Council



# Foreword by the Chief Executive of ENCAMS

ENCAMS is the organisation which runs the Keep Britain Tidy campaign, and manages a number of local environmental quality programmes such as the Blue Flag for beaches and Eco-Schools. It produces the annual Local Environmental Quality Survey of England for government which measures the state of our streets. ENCAMS is best known for its campaigns and public information on litter including car litter, gum deposition, drugs related litter, fast food litter and youth litter. However, we have also campaigned on a number of other anti-social behaviour issues such as flyposting, fly-tipping, dog fouling and neighbour noise.

We are funded by Defra in England, and work closely with other government departments in the ODPM and the Home Office. We have recently produced the Fast Food Code of Practice for Defra, which is a voluntary code for the industry and local authorities to better tackle the increasing problem of fast food litter. We are currently working on a revision to the Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse which is expected to be completed in 2005. But ENCAMS' work doesn't just cover England. We have offices in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland funded separately from those devolved administrations. After all, litter, waste and anti-social behaviour do cross international boundaries and are not just a problem in one country.

ENCAMS has been a member of the British Cleaning Council for as long as I can remember, because our individual remits are so complementary. Broadly, we try to deal with the sources and causes of environmental degradation, whilst the cleaning industry has to cope with the consequences. However, I am particularly impressed by the current BCC Board's intention to "up the ante" and raise the status and profile of the industry, and their determination to launch a number of new initiatives in the next couple of years.

This series of occasional papers is an example of one of BCC's new initiatives, and shows how the two organisations are working together to gain more recognition for some of the issues. ENCAMS is therefore fully committed to increase its support for BCC's work and objectives, and begin to get the profile of the industry raised and appreciated. If ENCAMS can get behind BCC and do more to support the role of cleaning and cleaners, maybe your organisation can too.

## **Alan Woods**

Chief Executive, ENCAMS



# Introduction

In early 2002 ENCAMS commissioned Marketing Works, a market research agency, to carry out face-to-face interviews with teenagers to inform future campaigning to this target audience. The brief was simple: give us independent research so that the ENCAMS marketing team can construct campaigns to change teenagers' littering behaviour for the better. At the same time we carried out a number of anti-litter pilot schemes in schools and asked Marketing Works to analyse their impact.

To our disappointment the results were terrible; the pilots made little or no impact on litter deposition and the segmentation work was inconclusive. The research makes interesting reading, however, and could be of use to teachers or local authorities that wish to tackle litter in and around schools. After all, it's better to learn from our mistakes than to start from scratch, and although our pilots did not have a significant effect there were some small improvements. The research is described in the final section of this paper.

The second commissioned research involved Dale Southerton of Manchester University, and explored the sociology of "teenagedom". This was a necessary second step for ENCAMS to gain a better understanding of the intermediary state between childhood and adulthood.

We followed Southerton's research with an analysis of teenage and litter semiotics. Arguably the foremost practitioner in this area, Greg Rowland analysed teenage mass cultural influences and gave us a list of guidelines to follow when constructing campaigns aimed at this age group. It was the final part of the jigsaw, giving us, at last, sufficient clues to develop a marketing strategy to change youth behaviour.

Both of the above areas of research, described in detail in the first two sections of this paper, will be of use to any organisation that communicates with or aims messages at teenagers. It is not just pertinent to litter behaviour but also anti-social behaviour, and arguably gives much "food for thought" in relation to buying behaviour too. We believe our findings are as relevant to the private sector as the public sector, and we hope that by publishing them it will help socially-responsible organisations to learn from our work.

At the time of going to print, ENCAMS is in the process of developing a brief for a national anti-litter youth campaign due to run in late Spring 2004.

## **Sue Nelson**

Marketing Director, ENCAMS

# Segmentation of Youth Litter Behaviour

In early 2002 ENCAMS commissioned Marketing Works, a market research agency, to carry out face-to-face focus groups and interviews with 13 to 16 year-old children. The research objective was to understand their littering behaviour and try to see if there were common attitudes that emerged, particularly in relation to the following:

- their opinions of litter;
- why they litter and how often;
- their perception of the effectiveness of current anti-litter measures at school;
- their reactions to a range of litter-related stimuli;
- their general views on anti-litter measures.

## Research methodology

Good practice in the area of market research with teenagers showed that “friendship pairs” was the best approach. Children are adept at not telling the truth but giving answers to adults that they think they want to hear. They often mix fact and fiction, but are less likely to do so when their best friend is with them, as they will correct each other if they disagree. Teenagers also do not respond well to large group research, the temptation to show off, or keep quiet in a larger group generally skews the results. Marketing Works therefore employed the technique of “friendship paired depths” (two friends interviewed at depth) with a smaller number of focus groups of 8 to 10 teenagers.

The first stage involved a mix of single-sex groups and paired depths of teenagers aged between 13 and 16 years, with a representative ethnicity sample. We selected children from a range of schools – less desirable, more desirable, Catholic and private – to see if the school environment had a significant effect on their behaviour. We also ensured there was a geographical spread across the country, and a representation of rural and urban environments. The research was undertaken during the summer of 2002.

When this first stage of research was concluded Marketing Works would group the emerging behaviours into attitudinal clusters (or segments), thus splitting teenagers into generalised segments. When these segments are identified Marketing Works carries out a second stage of research by trying to recruit teenagers who exactly personify the segment behaviours. This allows them to verify the segments, to probe and explore the teenagers’ thoughts in more depth, and to collect lifestyle information (age range, socio-economic grouping etc). In the third stage Marketing Works carries out quantitative analysis, using a traditional questionnaire technique, to see what percentage of the total group is in which segment. This is important, because if one segment is particularly small it would not be worth targeting, conversely if one segment was very large we may just target that one to the exclusion of the others.

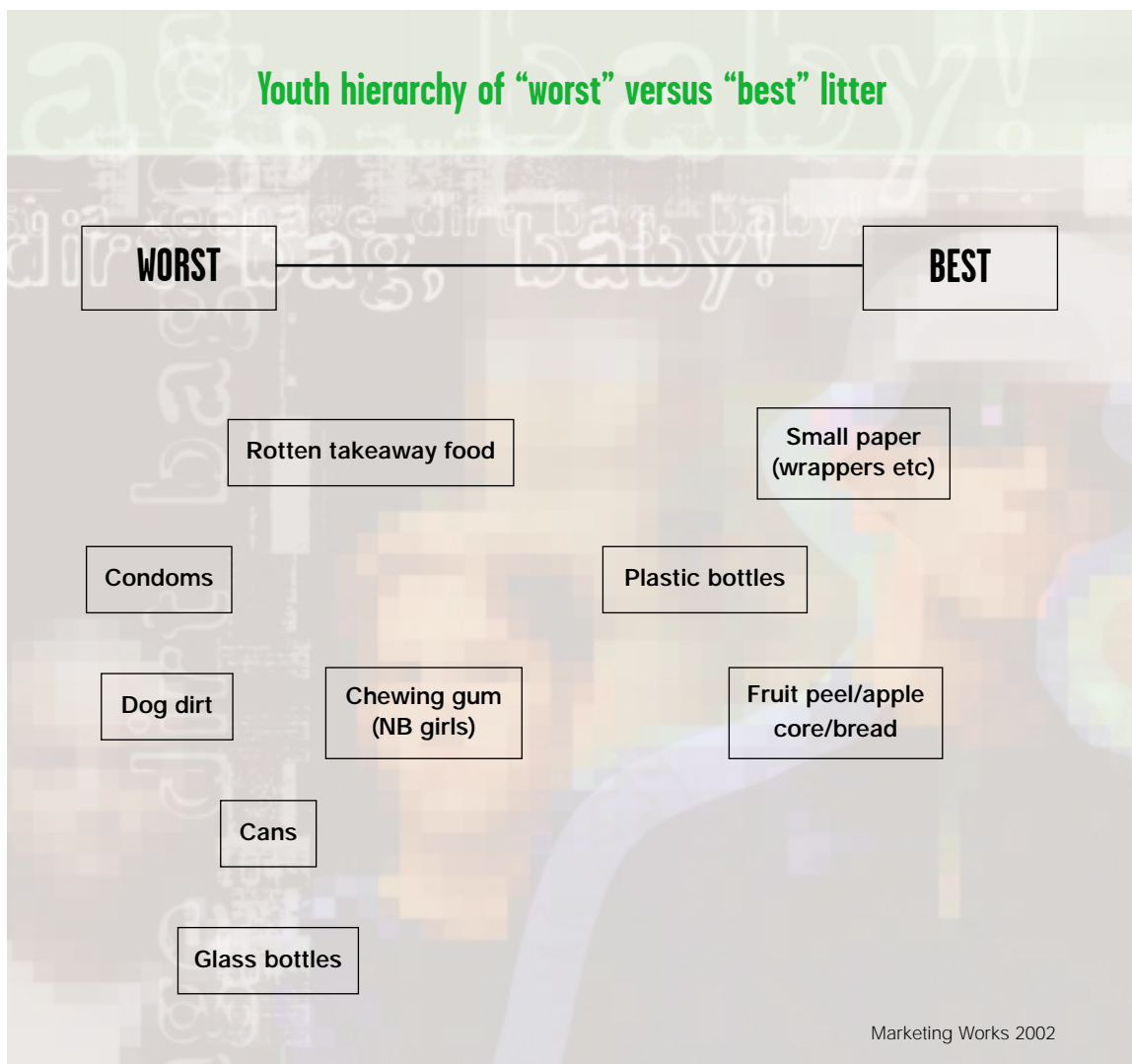
After these three stages ENCAMS would have a greater understanding of the thought processes of teenagers during the act of littering, and would be able to construct campaigns to try to change this behaviour. Marketing channels (eg radio, bus stop, cinema ads) would be dictated by the research. At ENCAMS this approach is called marketing research – research to inform marketing – decisions, rather than market research – generally a state of market report.

The above methodology had been adopted very successfully by ENCAMS for its adult campaigns. It had gained measurable improvements in for example: dogfouling (reduction of 27% nationally), car litter (reduction of 48% in targeted areas), textile recycling (increase of 25% nationally), and other anti-social behaviour campaigns such as neighbour noise, flyposting and fly-tipping. What was not clear however, is whether this approach would work for youths.

## Spontaneous image of litter

For most teenagers the word “rubbish” immediately sprang to mind as the word to use to describe litter. This replicates Greg Rowland’s thoughts (see the previous section), and emphasises the fact that the word “litter” should not be used in teenage communications as it is not part of their vocabulary. The appearance of litter was often mentioned spontaneously: “anywhere you go, you can see it”, “it makes the place look horrible”.

Such comments showed teenagers’ dislike of litter and how it affects the environment detrimentally. The items that most constituted litter to this age group were (in order), crisp packets, cans, bottles, paper, fast food packaging including the food and chewing gum. Following further probing, Marketing Works mapped the hierarchy of litter for youths as shown below. This is very similar to the hierarchy of litter described by adults, which shows that larger, dirtier items are somehow “worse” than smaller cleaner items in their own minds.



## When and why do youths litter?

The most common and almost universal response to the question “why do you litter?”, was that they could not be bothered to use a bin. In this age group they believe they litter because they are too lazy, but a theme of the dislike of bins is also at the forefront. This is illustrated in the following quotes:

**Laziness** – “it saves going to the bins doesn’t it?”; “we are all just too lazy to bother”; “there are bins around the school but people just can’t be bothered”; “it’s easier to just chuck it away”.

**Not enough bins** – “there’s never a bin when you need it”; “there can be no bins for miles”.

**Bins were overflowing or dirty** – “there are lots of bins in the park but they are dirty and full of wasps”.

Teenagers were very happy to admit they drop litter on an almost daily basis. This is in stark contrast to ENCAMS’ adult litter research, where dropping litter was accompanied by high levels of guilt, and often, total denial. When adults were persistently probed their littering transgressions emerged, but most felt less guilty about quite serious misdemeanours than their subversive littering behaviour. Teenagers appear to have a total lack of guilt regarding littering, and this cannot therefore form the basis of litter messages unlike ENCAMS’ adult campaigning.

Teenagers were also quite blunt about when they were more likely to litter:

**In groups or gangs** – “you wouldn’t really put it in a bin at school with your mates, it’s a bit embarrassing”; “if you’re in a group then you would throw it away instead of binning it”.

**Not with their parents** – “my parents are very strict, so I wouldn’t drop stuff on the floor if I was with them, otherwise I would”.

**The norm anyway** – “everybody drops litter at some stage”; “we all do it – so what?”; “we’ll drop it anywhere, everywhere really”.

## Does school culture affect behaviour?

Notwithstanding the above results, ENCAMS was interested to see if a certain type of school “culture” had an effect on littering behaviour. Could certain styles of teaching, a distinct school ethos, attitudes to discipline or standards of educational attainment have an impact on teenage pupils’ anti-social behaviour? Marketing Works analysed school policies on uniform, truancy and bullying, whether the school had high or low educational standards and the general attitudes of teachers and the head. This was cross-referenced with the degree of litter prevalent inside and around the school.

The research showed that all schools have a litter problem, albeit to varying degrees, no matter what the culture, educational attainment, staff attitudes to discipline etc. Unsurprisingly lunches and break times were worst for litter generation, with litter “hotspots” being playing fields, playgrounds, canteens and dining areas, around the school gates and near vending machines. The tidiest places were classrooms as eating was generally banned in these areas.

## What would stop them from littering?

As would be expected, parents and school had the greatest effect on teenagers littering behaviour. However, it is important to note that although all pupils receive high levels of educational messages on environment, citizenship, littering and other low level anti-social activities, and can articulate these clearly, it has little effect on their actual behaviour outside school or parental control. It is as if they have two sides to their personality: the one that they reserve for adults and the one when they are with their contemporaries. In previous sections of this paper the theme of “teenagedom” and how this fits inside an adult world are explored more fully. The quotes below, somewhat depressingly, show that whilst they receive sufficient messages, teenagers don’t really take much notice:

"they are always going on about it in assembly";

"I wouldn't do it at school, the teacher might catch me";

"kids are mostly brought up not to litter, but they won't listen much anyway".

The teenagers we interviewed were happy to note down anonymously the last time they littered (very recent), and the situation:

**The most frequently littered items in order** – crisp packets, sweet wrappers, bits of paper, cans, chewing gum, plastic drinks bottles, cigarette packets, cigarette ends.

**The most likely situations in order** – no bins nearby, with friends, couldn't be bothered, out of a car window, "fell out" of pocket accidentally, playing football, in a mood, dark, baiting the headteacher, adding to a pile of litter that was already there, missing a bin.

Whilst ENCAMS and others continue to push forward with environmental education programmes (such as Eco-Schools) and the theme of personal social responsibility, it is clear that these have only a limited effect. Often they are subconsciously embedded in teenagers but seem to remain as theory, which is not translated into physical practice until adulthood and personal domestic responsibilities emerge. The formal educational programmes are important for teenagers so they can draw on them as they develop into independent adults, but teachers and others will be criticised for not changing teenage behaviour "at the time".

To youths, it is evident that littering is regarded as the norm: few feel guilty about it, they have very little concern of its consequences and it is a thoughtless act. ENCAMS in collaboration with a number of schools had implemented a variety of anti-litter measures across the country during 2002. If teenagers habitually litter, school culture has little effect and formal education programmes mentally register, but don't change behaviour, could any of these make a difference?

## Different litter schemes analysed

Unfortunately, all the schemes that Marketing Works analysed and ENCAMS has experienced, show little improvement in littering behaviour. Depressing as this is, some of these show a marginal difference in litter deposition, but none show significant improvements. In effect, all that they do is drive the behaviour "underground" rather than change it, or deliver a challenge to teenagers to see how they can "get round" any restrictions or new rules.

**Litter picking** – around a third of schools instigate litter picking as a general task, not necessarily as a punishment but as part of a routine. This was not well received by pupils as they hate to pick up litter, and see "no reason" to do so. It would appear that they do not make any connection between their littering behaviour and clearing it up.

**Reward schemes** – ENCAMS carried out a pilot campaign in 2003 in a handful of schools in London. We focused on returning a set number of crisp packets to gain some sort of prize. After trying a variety of rewards, such as days off, non-uniform days, CD tokens, mobile phone extras etc, none was shown to work. In post-research, although teenagers liked the idea, the prize or reward came in for repeated criticism. They claimed that rewards for the whole class or for the school were not very motivating; only individual cash rewards would be of interest to them, and then they would have to have a value of at least £5. Whilst this could work, it is not economically viable and probably unethical to administer.

**Eating restrictions** – some schools tried a number of restriction schemes including banning eating and drinking in certain areas. Whilst these do show some improvements, they are difficult and time-consuming to police and teenagers see the restrictions as a challenge to overcome:

"they did a thing where you couldn't take anything out of the canteen, and we had to smuggle our drinks out";

"chewing gum was everywhere so they said we weren't allowed it in school anymore, but we still do";

"you're not supposed to go out at lunch, but there are ways".

A few schools had banned vending machines, but this harboured real resentment amongst pupils, and did little to prevent littering: "it got so bad they took the vending machines away, but it made no difference." In addition, this can hit precious school revenues quite hard.

**Naming and shaming** – teenagers were polarised in their views: some felt that being named and shamed (for example in assembly), would be so embarrassing or humiliating that it might be an effective deterrent. However others felt that it could be a "badge of honour", in that: "some people might think it's cool to get their name called out and to stand up"; "we'd have an honours list of the worst pupils!"; "I'd stand up and take the applause". There were also comments that littering is nothing to be ashamed about anyway as it's just a fact of life: "it wouldn't be a case of shaming, more like 'oh well never mind'".

**Using older pupils as wardens** – some schools trialled sixth formers as litter and anti-social behaviour wardens. This scheme was very unpopular for several reasons:

- a lack of respect for prefects – "people just take the mick out of prefects"; "most of the people in our school aren't scared of sixth formers";
- hypocrisy – those about to become sixth formers thought it was ironic as they littered themselves: "it would be hypocritical if I was a warden – I do it after all";

- might not bother – it was felt that many sixth formers did not take the scheme seriously: "they might not even be bothered";
- licence to bully – the younger pupils felt that they could end up being bullied by some types of sixth former: "they may end up picking on people they don't like"; "the prefects think they are better than you and boss you around, so they would have more of an excuse to pick on you";
- teachers in general preferred the "carrot" rather than the "stick" approach, and were against punishment in this form.

**Posters and other media using celebrity endorsement** – ENCAMS had run a poster campaign sent to every secondary school in England in 2001–02 using celebrities endorsing anti-litter messages. These included Atomic Kitten, Michael Owen, S Club 7, Hear'Say, and soap stars from Brookside and Coronation Street. However, post-research showed that teenagers viewed celebrity endorsement with considerable scepticism, and knew that previously posed shots were being used albeit with the celebrity's agreement. All felt that it was almost impossible to find a celebrity who would appeal to everyone and that many go in and out of fashion so quickly.

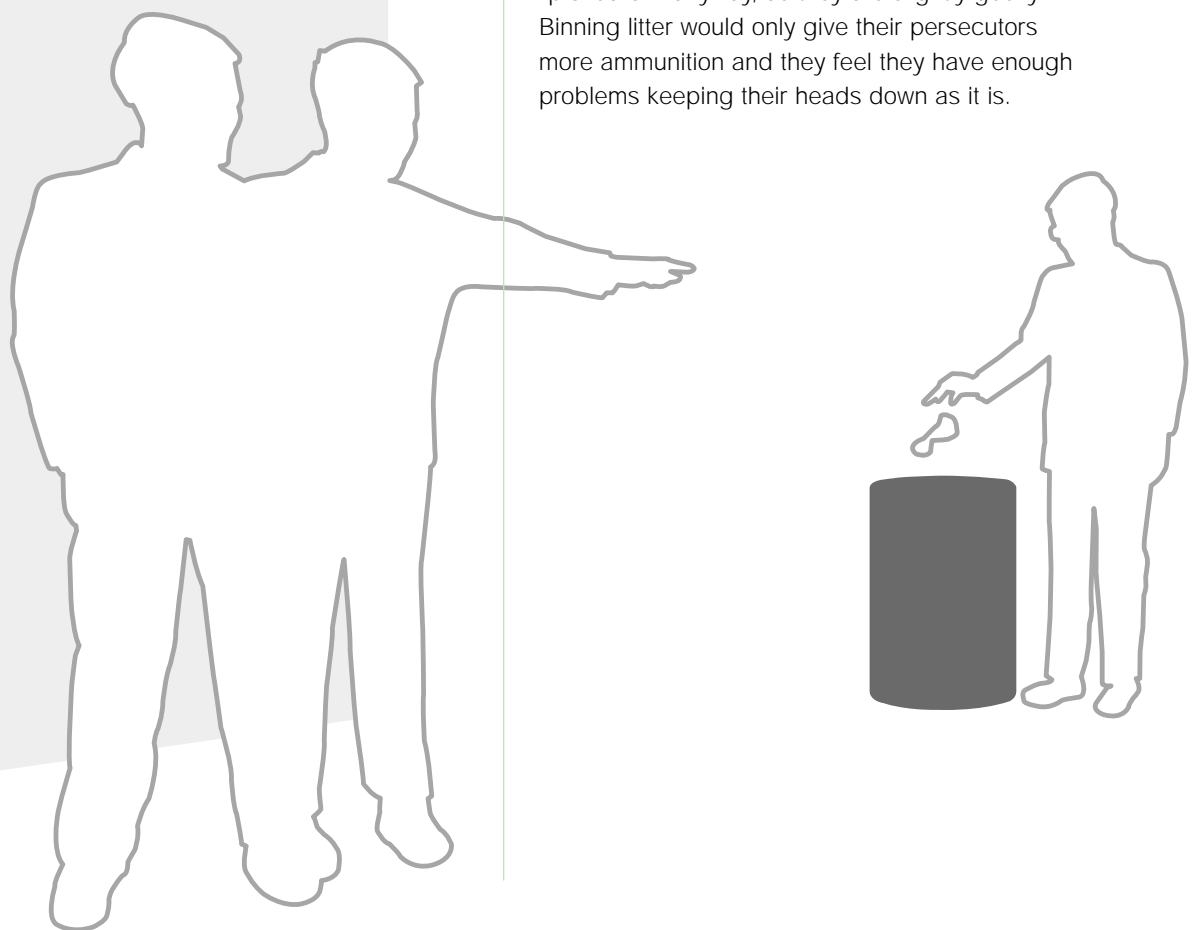
## Final segmentation

Given the above in-depth research, Marketing Works verified that teenagers in general belong to one of four attitudinal groups (segments) towards litter. These are described below. The first two are only small segments, and by far the majority of teenagers belong to the latter two. However, most disturbing for ENCAMS is that whilst this methodology had clearly worked for informing adult campaigns to change anti-social behaviour, there were very few marketing clues for this age group.

## I don't want to be seen as a geek

- Mainly younger, more impressionable teenage pupils of both sexes, and a few older pupils – but this segment is very much in the minority.
- Unlikely to litter when on their own but, when at school, peer pressure made them change their habits: “they think it's hard – and people call you a wuss if you put it in the bin”; “you don't want to look like a geek and bin stuff if your mates see you”.
- They sought safety in numbers: “if everyone else used the bins then I wouldn't be embarrassed to do it”; “the trouble is if you get seen on your own doing it, away from a group”.
- This segment was more likely to want to resolve the litter problem – but was afraid to speak their mind: “it gives the school a bad name, it's not nice”.

There is evidence that this group are generally “picked on” anyway, as they are slightly geeky. Binning litter would only give their persecutors more ammunition and they feel they have enough problems keeping their heads down as it is.



## I'm hard, I'm cool

- Both younger and older pupils, who had, or were aiming to achieve, alpha status in the group.
- Not just male but female too, however a minority segment.
- For them littering was a sign of rebelliousness, proving their status: "I throw litter at people"; "people kick the bins over to prove they're hard".
- They behaved worst when with others or in front of adults they didn't know: "walking down the street chucking chips with a gang"; "we're not allowed out at lunchtime but most people do – and we nick stuff from the shops".
- Like the previous segment, though for different reasons, they change their natural behaviour in front of others, becoming worse in front of an audience. They boast about their misdemeanours: "acting cool in front of your mates"; "people in a gang all throw wrappers on the floor, cos we all do it".

This segment are the most difficult to interview, as explained in the section on the sociology of "teenagedom". They "act up" to interviewers and overclaim their rebelliousness.



## Chat chat, munch munch, litter litter

- Any age, slightly more likely to be female than male.
- They viewed litter as matter of fact, it's simply something that happens: "if you say I drop litter, well nobody says anything about it – it's no big deal".
- No thought was given to their actions: "you don't think about it, you just do it".
- They would rather not be distracted from their activities: "you are just walking along and you don't want to break up the conversation by finding a bin".
- Some older children who were in their final year and who were leaving school were less likely to bend to the school rules, as they had nothing to lose: "they could try stopping us leaving at lunchtime but it wouldn't work, we're leaving soon anyway".

In the previous section Greg Rowland elaborates on this theme, by explaining that teenagers do not wish to "break the social flow of their activities". If they did it would make binning litter an emphatic statement, whereas teenagers need to appear casual and "going with the flow".



A stylized illustration of a person in a white outline, standing in a grey, angular environment. The person is holding a small object in their right hand, poised to drop it. In the background, there are two dark grey cylindrical bins. The scene is set against a solid green background at the top of the page.

## Blame it on the bins

- A very large segment, very much a pupil with a blaming mentality, although in reality they are just lazy. For them the reason why they litter is laid squarely on a lack of bins: "if there was a bin we'd use it".
- This segment knew that littering was wrong, and in most cases would rather not do it, but needed a bin nearby (ie within arm's reach immediately they needed it) to overcome their inherent laziness: "you're not going to run 500m on the playing field to put a Mars Bar wrapper in the bin".
- If there were no bins in the vicinity then they saw no alternative other than to litter: "if I'm near a bin I'll put it in, if there isn't a bin then I'll throw it on the floor – there's nothing else to do".

Marketing Works felt that the issue of "the bin" would be worthy of further investigation. Although it wasn't expressly stated by teenagers there seemed to be a real aversion to using it that went beyond laziness.

## Summary

Research methodology with teenagers needs to be different from with adults. Teenagers are either very tempted to give answers that they feel will be well received by interviewers, or will overstate their rebelliousness. The Marketing Works methodology for this group would appear to be the correct strategy, minimising the inherent weakness of teenage research, however such work will always be skewed as teenagers are unreliable interviewees.

For teenage campaigns it is clear that the word "litter" must not be used. They do not relate to this word but spontaneously use the word "rubbish" instead. By contrast, all other definitions and descriptions of litter are very similar to adult perceptions, and are in line with ENCAMS' adult litter research.

Teenagers have a refreshing, if depressing, honesty about their propensity to drop litter. Many claim they drop it every day, without thinking and without any regard as to the consequences. Unlike adults they have a complete lack of guilt in respect of this behaviour, and are candid about when and where they litter.

Littering behaviour is strongly entrenched in teenagers, and school culture makes little difference. Teenagers litter in well-disciplined environments, in highly committed teaching regimes and in schools with high levels of educational attainment, as well as at the other end of this spectrum. They also do so whether they are in rural, inner city or suburban settings.

Formal education programmes on anti-social behaviour are present in a variety of guises such as citizenship and PSE. In general, they also make little difference to teenage behaviour, but they are embedded into their psyche, and teenagers can articulate the messages that they promote. It is essential that this push continues as it would appear these messages emerge as modifications to behaviour later on as adults, but unfortunately not at the time.

Although a number of pilot teenage anti-litter schemes were tested across the country, none made a significant difference. The best result recorded was an 8% decrease in litter, despite a large concentration of resources. In all honesty ENCAMS does not feel that this is substantial enough to claim it is the sole result of the campaign. Such a result could be due to other factors such as weather conditions. These results are unpalatable but irrefutable.

In ENCAMS' previous research into adult littering, dogfouling and recycling behaviour, campaign messages and marketing media were tested. In every case a couple of marketing themes and directions emerged that showed adult behaviour could change, and the consequent campaigns based on the research achieved significant results (between 25% and 50% difference). For the first time since ENCAMS used segmentation methodology to plan campaigns, this type of research has not led to any firm "leads" or clues for marketing approaches.

These disheartening results force a radical re-think of the approach to teenage campaigning – ENCAMS cannot use its adult campaign research-led methodology on this group. But two segments cover the majority of teenage attitudes and behaviours regarding litter, so if campaigns are developed they need to recognise the strong teenage themes of laziness and the problem of "the bin".

# The Sociology of 'Teenagedom'

In early 2003 ENCAMS commissioned Dale Southerton of the ESRC Research Centre at Manchester University to review its youth research and campaigning to date. Previous campaigns developed as a result of the Marketing Works research (see the final section of this paper) had not proved as successful as ENCAMS' adult campaigns using the same methodology – why not? We wanted to know more about the state of "teenagedom", and the sociology of teenage existence to see if a different approach needed to be taken. We agreed that this additional element alongside the segmentation research would give us a better chance of influencing teenage behaviour.

## Trial and error

Throughout 2002 and 2003 ENCAMS ran a number of teenage litter campaigns. Some were practical pilots in schools to examine a range of different methods to reduce litter and general anti-social behaviour. Some emphasised the "stick" approach and some the "carrot". We enlisted the help of the community, local businesses, the local authorities, schools and the children themselves. We used a variety of mechanisms including fines, rewards, education techniques and finally a full national campaign outside the schools' boundaries. It is true to say that although in some cases we got an improvement in litter deposition and other behaviours, the best result was only an 8% improvement. Compared to our adult campaigns on car litter and dogfouling (39% and 40% improvements respectively), we considered this sustained work to be unsuccessful. ENCAMS asked Dale Southerton to cast a critical eye over our attempts.

Dale believed that given the hypocritical nature of adult messages directed at teenagers (ie do as I say, not as I do), it was not surprising that carrot and stick methods did not seem to work. The teenage litter campaigns that ENCAMS ran were, by teenage standards, condescending and paternalistic.

However, he believed that to highlight and mock adult inconsistencies in relation to litter and anti-social behaviour with the suggestion that children could actually appear "more adult than adults" by not doing these things, might be worth exploring. Greg Rowland (who was commissioned to conduct a third tranche of research for ENCAMS in this area), also highlighted this potential approach in his findings.

## Researching children

ENCAMS segmentation work on young teenagers was based on direct research with the children themselves. Although ENCAMS knew the difficulties of this approach it shaped its research carefully to minimise the inherent problems and difficulties. However, essentially it used its successful adult segmentation theories as a methodology for research on children. Southerton articulated the problems of direct research from a sociological angle.

He argued that ENCAMS' fundamental problems of the validity of the research were due to our adult conceptualisations of childhood, and how we impose such understandings on children's lives. We see children as simpler, innocent and more naïve versions of adults. Consequently, much of the social science literature is concerned with how we can research children, given that they are more likely than adults to give answers that please, rather than what they really feel or think.

Children are even more attuned with discourses of normality (they know exactly what is expected of them) and are particularly skilled at putting an adult version of events onto adult issues. They do this so that we get the answer they think we want to hear, and this makes direct research very difficult. As an illustration, whenever a child is asked a question about politics or about the environment – they literally talk in a way that is "mini-adult".

In other words children in this setting act like adults in training – so asking them questions in this way is likely only to result in them revealing their understandings of adult representations of the problem and not their own. Answers that are contrary to our adult understanding are generally not a child's understanding, they are a mis-judgement of their perception of the adult world.

Southerton's advice is that there are no methodological words of wisdom in this observation. ENCAMS' youth segmentation work, like all other child research, is flawed. Therefore all that the researcher can do is present the best explanation of the results, taking into account the flaws of that data, which is exactly what ENCAMS attempted to do in the Marketing Works research. Southerton also notes that many social scientists of childhood insist on participant observation, but that this is also tainted by the kids "acting up" to the researcher. In a well-documented study of youth gangs in Chicago, it was shown that the gang members committed more crime while being observed than they did usually. They were "acting up" under adult observation.

It became evident that for youth campaigning childhood can only be understood in relation, and by contrast, to adulthood. An understanding of this would help ENCAMS develop its campaigns from a more knowledgeable base. In addition, the following describes Southerton's views on a number of themes that ENCAMS must consider if it was to have any success in future youth campaigning, namely: teenage rites of passage, children as consumers and citizens, and dirt and cleanliness.

## Childhood versus adulthood

It can be argued that childhood is an adult construct – it is a concept that is used by adults to differentiate "Us" from "Them". To penetrate this process of differentiation, it is important to note the binary classifications that, at the most fundamental level, differentiate between, say, childhood and adulthood:

SOURCE OF DIFFERENCE	
Childhood	Adulthood
Pure	Defiled
Innocent	Corrupt
Body	Mind
Emotion	Reason
Rural	Urban
Nature	Culture

What is most interesting about these binary categories is to think in terms of the passage from child to adult. What the table suggests is that childhood is understood as some pure form of adulthood, a form that has yet to be corrupted, one in which the body comes before the mind and before thinking. For example, we presume that children eat to refuel, they play until they drop, they think in terms of their physical well-being before they are concerned with anything else. Children are seen to be lacking in adult capacities of reasoning and seen as holding basic emotional understandings of the world around them.

The split between nature and rural emerges through association with the symbolical imagery of the urban as polluted and socially manipulated by adults. In contrast, rural, like children, is in some way more natural, less tainted by the world around it. This leads to the culture vs. nature split in which culture comes to represent sophistication whereas nature refers to more base needs.

All these observations are adult presumptions of what being a child is like.

The above also underlines the point that childhood is a stage of life based upon separation and exclusion from the adult world. As numerous historians have shown, childhood is a modern invention and it is one based around the exclusion of children from various spheres of life (eg work, politics, many public spaces including streets) and their separation and containment within institutions such as schools and the family home. In the last few decades we have deliberately separated children from the adult world, increasingly preventing them from interacting with many environments in order to protect them.

Much social scientific work debates the state of childhood as resting between two positions. The first suggests that the boundaries between adulthood and childhood have become increasingly blurred in recent years – children appear to become adults more quickly. The second, as discussed above, conversely suggests that children have become progressively separated and excluded from adult life.

On the one hand, therefore, children have increasingly gained access to aspects of “adult life” and particularly those that are deemed morally inappropriate or too psychologically mature for them to handle. Examples include access to adult tv, drink, drugs, sex, family breakdown, crime and in their status as consumers. These apply mostly to teenagers and led to the popular view (in the 80s and early 90s) of the “death of childhood”, although in real terms these fears relate more to the end of childhood arriving several years earlier than it had in the past.

On the other hand, and partly as the response to the first state, children have become increasingly segregated and excluded.

They spend more time in the institutions of school (or college) which have become oriented towards overtly preparing them for the “adult world”. Children have become more confined to the home and their leisure has become more privatised (game consoles, computers, tv etc), more “curricularised” (after school clubs, weekend activities) and more consumer oriented (having the power to make decisions on spending their own money).

In short, children no longer seem to want to be children (the first state) and, therefore, adult reactions are to try even harder to encourage them to remain so (the second state). It's difficult to inhabit this world of completely contrasting pressures.

## Teenage rites of passage

Contemporary marketing techniques rest on the premise that not every product suits the whole of the general public. Consumers across the UK need to be targeted effectively, and to do so they are usually put into clusters or segments for marketing purposes. It is unimaginable now that an advertising agency would consider marketing a brand of shampoo to retirement age women and teenage boys simultaneously. It would instead develop, brand and market that product to just one consumer segment, playing on their needs and wants along the way.

Companies that produce children's goods segment the market according to medical discourses of child development: what toys are suitable for what boys and girls; then by age group; then by personal characteristics of children and possibly by social class classifications. The culmination is that childhood has come to be understood as a series of clearly defined life course stages, each with its own degree of adult surveillance. Babies quickly become toddlers, then comes the nursery age, followed by infant, then junior, then tweenies (pre-teen), young teenager, mature teenager, and then young adults (around the age of 18).

Much has been written about the child development stages, but ENCAMS was particularly interested in the 13 to 16 age group. We believe that generally this is the first time that children begin to regularly enter the public realm unaccompanied by adults. It is the time when they start to go to school on their own, hang around with their mates on their own, and become more influenced by their peers than their parents or teachers.

Although not proven, ENCAMS anecdotal evidence showed that whilst this age group can articulate (and apparently believe) messages on “big” environment and “local” environment, this is not replicated by their actions, particularly when with their peers. They appear to genuinely understand and support the basic concepts of global warming, depleted wildlife etc, and they really do hate degraded local environments, especially litter, graffiti and vandalism. However, their group actions are generally contrary to their, often strongly held, views. ENCAMS wanted a better understanding of this “teenage rite of passage” stage, and believed that the cusp of the child-adult transition, could hold clues to its future campaigning.

Southerton explained a concept that suggests that adult orientations towards children, particularly parents’, treat them in a similar way to how adults treat their own lifestyle. At different ages parents have different responsibilities towards their offspring. The basic process then is a gradual receding of parental control as children get older. With this comes expectations that children will be children and that they “should rebel” but only along adult-constructed channels. For example, research shows that teenagers are expected by their parents to experiment with alcohol. Many parents suggest that they would be concerned if they did not. It is normal behaviour for that age group to abstain from drinking (and not even like it), but it is a rite of passage towards adulthood, partly pressured by parental expectations of “soft” rebellion. Of course, this is not what parents tell their children.

This is a subtle process of setting rules but knowingly relaxing them, hoping that by letting them softly rebel, they will not truly rebel later.

Perhaps more important is what all this means to childhood itself. Teenagers in particular are caught in the position of formally being children, yet informally being expected to pick up some of the bad habits of adults on the way to becoming autonomous individuals. In this view, littering or other anti-social behaviour could be regarded as an expression of adulthood even if adults reject such behaviour as irresponsible and something that children should not do (as is the case with drinking). It could be seen as a sign of rebellion, which is picked up as a theme in the research by Rowland (to follow). Southerton believed it could be possible therefore to position littering, graffiti and so on, as juvenile behaviour, as something that is not part of growing up or one of those relatively harmless rebellious things that kids do (to get it out of their system, as it were). Rowland in his research takes this further suggesting that littering, in particular, is such a pathetic form of rebellion, say when compared to teenage smoking, sex, drinking and drugs, that it is just not anti-social enough to bother; it is not a big enough statement on the rite of passage journey.

## Children as consumers and citizens

Southerton believed that the above approach to campaigning may send out contrasting messages, but that the issues raised by the emergence of children as consumers and citizens was particularly interesting. Children, after all, are being “trained” as consumers, ie to spend money, as never before. However, ENCAMS believed that whilst teenagers as “buyers” is a strong theme, this may be more appropriate in the styling and graphic presentation of the campaign itself. The starting point in ensuring youth campaigns have the right “feel” and “look”, no matter what the message, is in the rhetoric and language of the consumer.

Southerton felt that the observations of Buckingham (2000) were relevant in this instance. A simplistic version of this thinking is as follows:

Since the early 1980s, the consumer has become something of a contemporary hero figure – this is a discourse whereby consumerism is embedded into more and more aspects of daily life. This has empowered the consumer, who can affect the economy by exercising personal choice. As an example there have been interesting comments recently by government to urge the public to spend more to bolster negative pressures on the economy. Through choice and drawing from the wide range of goods available in the market, the individual exercises their autonomy in piecing together their own lifestyle and their own identity. The outcome is that individuals are no longer so constrained by the old structures of class, gender, age and the old style “establishment” as dictator of lifestyles. Again, this theme is replicated by Rowland with his thoughts on post-modernism.

Consumerism has since extended from adult to children. In essence, the role of parents and teachers includes instructing the child on the mastery of different forms of consumption, as well as traditional learning concepts. The outcome is an increased emphasis on teaching children to become autonomous individuals in the choices that they make in daily life. Choices that previous generations could never have dreamed of. Today's children have a responsibility to themselves to become competent consumers and as a consequence have been afforded the rights of citizenship and all that goes with it.

Buckingham (2000: 76) provides a summary of this process:

*“Children have gained a new status, not merely as citizens but also as consumers: they are seen as an increasingly valuable market, but also as one that is extremely difficult to reach and control.*

*They cannot simply be ‘exploited’, much less patronized by adults who claim to know what is good for them. Here, too, substantial energy is being expended on ensuring that children’s voices will be heard. Yet, in the process, the distinction between citizen and the consumer may have become increasingly difficult to sustain.”*

By “distinction” between citizen and consumer, Buckingham suggests, is that the emergence of consumerism was politically linked with notions of citizenship, but that there is a fundamental difference between the two concepts. Citizenship is altruistic – it is about concern for others and corresponding responsibility for one's own actions. ENCAMS often refers to this as personal social responsibility. Yet consumerism is about the self, it is about using the market for one's own benefit, to pursue a lifestyle. One of the basic premises of free market liberalism that underpin consumerism is that individuals must look after their own self interests and make choices in light of such interests.

This also means that children are caught between the pillars of 1) growing into practised autonomous individual consumers; and 2) being guided and moulded so that their autonomous actions fit within adult understandings of citizenship. Yet again, these two pressures are contrary and confusing for teenagers. The adult response has been to extend to children greater rights as individuals and as consumers while at the same time imposing more authoritarian and discipline related forms of control in regard to personal altruism. This is probably why one of the teachers interviewed in the Marketing Works research suggested that children already have too many “do's and don'ts” messages thrown at them, and are generally confused by official adult messages. ENCAMS must make sure it doesn't preach by using paternalistic messaging in its campaigns.

It is this pressure on children that is held as the driver of what has become known as “cynical chic”. This is that children, and particularly teenagers, become cynical of adult messages and of the world in general. It becomes part of teenage identity to question adult understandings of the world, to point out the inconsistencies and hypocrisy of adult statements, campaigns and advertising. Rowland goes further and suggests that ENCAMS should recognise this ridiculous inconsistency and use this irony implicitly in its campaigns. He asserts that in general teenagers love irony. They enjoy celebrations of stupidity and of naff objects as their own “two fingers up” to adults, and they believe that adults don’t even realise it. That’s the joke – a double irony. Again, as Buckingham suggests, “teenagers . . . are ceaselessly urged to be ‘mature’ and constantly reminded that they are not. It is not surprising that they are often so keen to challenge what they perceive as inconsistency, complacency or hypocrisy on the part of adults”. This approach is discussed further in the following section of this paper.

## **Dirt and cleanliness – comfort and convenience**

The notion of dirt, and its relation to comfort, cleanliness and convenience, is a peculiarly teenage preoccupation. It is not replicated to the same degree in adults.

To start, dirt is defined as “matter out of place”. What is interesting is that dirt was defined by what was visible. Over the last 100 years or so dirt has, in effect, become invisible through the notion of germs and bacteria. Southerton was surprised that much of ENCAMS’ campaigning work was firmly placed in the idea of dirt as visible. Its fast food litter campaign which focused heavily on rats, who by cultural implication are unhygienic, clearly made an impression on children, but this was in relation to the physical presence of rats, rather than the omnipresence of germs.

If dropping litter could be more closely associated with germs and a lack of hygiene (particularly in relation to the depositor of the litter) then this might encourage children against dropping it.

In campaigning, ENCAMS could emphasise unhygienic spaces as very off-putting, given teenage understanding of germs and how they think they can pollute the body. However, the problem of focusing on decomposing waste could translate into empty sweet wrappers or cans being germ-infested – the result may only underline the need to keep litter away from the body, thereby increasing the likelihood of dropping litter – an act of getting it away from their body as soon as possible.

What was clear from the research conducted by Marketing Works is that children explained dropping litter in terms of:

- Comfort – they felt more comfortable when litter was away from the body and only littered in public spaces rather than spaces of comfort (eg the home).
- Cleanliness – litter might be dirty but it was dirt that should be kept away from the body with few implications of being unhygienic when it was dropped elsewhere.
- Convenience – the inconvenience of using bins was striking.

These are three key points in relation to dirt and convenience that could be explored or at least confronted in ENCAMS’ campaign messages.

The issue of germs and dirt led us to the problem of the bin. This was hinted at in the Marketing Works research, but has led ENCAMS to believe that there is a subtle difference between dropping litter and not using a bin. It would seem that teenagers with their obsession for cleanliness, are not so much inclined to littering, as absolutely determined not to use a bin. A bin is everything they hate: unhygienic, smelly, dirty and germ-laden; it inconveniently interrupts the social flow of their activity with peers; and is after all a decidedly adult construction.

## Summary

Given the results of Southerton's research, we now know for sure that teenage/child research is ultimately flawed. They tell you what you want to hear, and we impose our own understandings of what it is to be a child on our interpretations. ENCAMS would treat the research as a hint for direction, but would not trust it implicitly in the future.

ENCAMS compiled the main points from Southerton's observations of youth thinking to help remind us of what it is to be a teenager:

- Teenagers are constantly fighting a conflicting battle between the childhood drivers of body and emotion, with the adult pressure for them to be driven by their minds and by reason. Their bodily drivers and emotions which they fight to keep under control in social situations, are never far from the surface.
- Parents expect their children to rebel, but only along the lines that they set for them, eg drinking alcohol. Teenagers recognise the inconsistencies in being expected to "soft" rebel, especially when adults often transgress themselves or get angry when their children drift into real rebellion.
- Children at young ages are taught how to make purchasing decisions. By the time they are teenagers they are sophisticated and independent consumers who can interpret complex advertising and communication messages. However, they view these very cynically. By contrast, they are expected to exercise this selfish right and yet be altruistic, socially responsible citizens. Again the disparity of these two conflicting expectations is not lost on them.
- Teenagers are being exposed to morally inappropriate aspects of adult life far earlier than any other generation, and yet they are excluded or segregated from adult environments as never before. Whilst adults expose children mentally to morally corrupt "virtual" media, hypocritically they often do not allow them access to "physical" environments.

- Dirt and germs are a persistent theme to teenagers, with the bin being the embodiment of all their fears surrounding lack of hygiene.

The most persistent message emerging from the above points is that the teenage world is full of conflicting advice. Almost every aspect of their interaction with adults is fraught with hypocrisy and irony. Nothing illustrates this more than our incessant urge for them to grow up, whilst constantly reminding them they are not. Therefore any campaign messages that hint at being paternalistic, preachy or "directive" will not work. Moreover, teenagers are so sophisticated as consumers and so used to being targets of multi-million pound advertising campaigns, that they will view messages very cynically.

From this research it is clear that ENCAMS needs to ensure that it finds innovative ways of campaigning and not simply impose an adult perception of teenagers into its work.

## Conclusion

Given the Southerton and Marketing Works research, and ENCAMS' experience of youth litter and anti-social behaviour campaigns, we felt we still had one missing element. Whilst ENCAMS had conducted primary (face-to-face original) research with teenagers and so had a better understanding of the social aspects of their existence, we knew little about the cultural context that influenced them. This was important, as our future campaigns would need to sit side-by-side with cultural influences from the media, fashion, music, films, books and sport.

Contextualising their cultural influences would be almost impossible using primary research, especially given the unreliability of teenage responses. For the final analysis of youth behaviour we decided to use secondary and observational research, consisting of a semiotic understanding of the popular culture that influences teenagers. We asked a "semiotician", Greg Rowland, to conduct this final research element.

# The Semiotics of Youth Anti-Social Behaviour

Following Southerton's research (described in the previous section), Greg Rowland, a commercial semiotician, was commissioned to develop marketing messages for anti-littering behaviour. His previous work included advertising campaigns for Pot Noodle and Lynx, both aimed at teenage audiences. Rowland developed these using semiotic analysis of popular cultures that influence children.

Semiotics is the study of the meaning that images and objects project. Advertisers try to control how viewers perceive their messages by carefully selecting the colours, images and objects in their adverts. Teenagers are particularly adept at placing meaning onto the media messages they receive. Understanding the context of teenage culture would be critical for ENCAMS, if the campaigns it developed were to change youth behaviour.

ENCAMS asked Rowland to conduct research to:

- hypothesise as to the cultural conditions that encourage litter;
- semiotically review qualitative research on litter;
- explore popular culture's representations of anti-social behaviours;
- identify key codes and cues that influence behaviour amongst 13 to 16 year-olds;
- advise on appropriate tones of voice for addressing 13 to 16 year-olds;
- offer guidance on visual and other cues for an anti-litter campaign.

Rowland began by describing what litter is to a teenager and what it signifies to them.

## Litter and its connotations

Rowland believed there were a number of perceptions associated with litter that teenagers noted however subliminally, and these were worthy of further investigation:

- to teenagers litter indicates an environment that gives out a sign of low self-esteem (this observation is backed by the Marketing Works research);
- littering is a safe, minor form of rebellion and transgression; you are unlikely to get caught and you certainly won't get fined or put in prison;
- the act of littering shows teenagers as consumers. Litter in this context is a literal sign of post-consumption. It shows that you have enough money to exert your consumer power and it's a visual sign of your wealth in this respect;
- litter is a "phatic" gesture, something casual and unthinking, whereas putting litter in the bin is an emphatic act – it takes effort and thought;
- teenagers do not link "big" environment (global warming etc) to their immediate local environment (research by ENCAMS with adults and children endorses this observation);
- litter is a sign of disorder – the random remnants of the immediate past.

However, the meaning of litter to teenagers is counteracted by the connotations litter has to them in an adult world:

- the word "litter" immediately signifies an adult directive communication, because it's not a teenage word. They never use it when talking to each other so any reference to this particular word will always feel as if adults are "preaching" or directing them to behave in a certain way. It is synonymous with grouchy old ladies saying "pick that up young man"; of a different generation; a different wavelength: "we wouldn't dream of dropping litter in my day";

- picking up litter is something a teenager would never do, especially with its link to germs and dirt. ENCAMS' evidence that some schools use litter picking as a punishment for a number of transgressions other than littering, is not helpful. Again, this endorses the fact that litter messages are an adult construct;
- adults associate littering with dubious morals; it is insinuated that if you litter it doesn't say much about you as a person. However, something that shows adults in a bad light could actually be an attractive quality to teenagers;
- the old-fashioned use of the phrase "litter lout" involves another non-teenage word. But its link with "lager lout" has aspirational connotations for a young person who wants to be old enough to participate uninhibited in the drink culture;
- whilst ENCAMS relied heavily on guilt (this communication tactic researched well in campaigns on litter and dogfouling to adults), teenagers have no emotional resonance with authority-induced shame. They admit honestly that they drop litter (where an adult would not), and they do not feel any guilt about it (where an adult does).

Rowland believes that campaign messages using the word "rubbish" would be much more teen-friendly than litter. The word has a wider meaning than litter and is used naturally in teenage conversation, for example: rubbish at sport, rubbish haircut, rubbish kisser, rubbish tv programme, Justin Timberlake's rubbish, Man United are rubbish. To teenagers this sounds less adult and petty than "litter", and is part of the teenage lexicon rather than being a word cited by someone in authority. In addition, "trash" may too have some positives. Getting "trashed" is associated with drunkenness or general misbehaviour, such as "trashing a hotel room" and it has American cultural associations, which teenagers generally see as positive and desirable.

## Teenagers growing up in a post-modern world

Southerton made some reference to the fast-moving post-modern world that teenagers grow up in. However, Rowland is adamant that an appreciation of post-modernism is a critical part of the understanding of teenage culture.

For Rowland, there are almost no hierarchical dimensions for teenagers to consider as past generations have. Growing up in the 1950s, it was very clear that "the establishment" dictated much of work and home life, the media, sport and so on. Laws dictated a somewhat suppressed society, especially in relation to sex. The general population couldn't access things instantly, they had to save and plan and wait. They didn't have consumer choice or competition between brands.

Now many things are available this minute, on demand – witness the growth of text messaging, fast food and multi-tv channels. In today's fast-paced ever-changing world, the general population have much of the power, with "the establishment" rarely quoted as existing, let alone dictating lifestyles. Ordinary people have more money, and in the battle of the brands consumers have the ultimate power of choice. Those choices are almost limitless, whereas ordinary people some decades ago were quite restricted in their decision-making. News moves instantly too, and is available 24 hours a day. If an issue breeds some form of rebellion, the media quickly commoditises it and makes it seem mainstream. Growing up as a teenager now, with so much freedom and choice, so much you can access this second – what "real issues" could you rebel against?

Post-modernism means there is no easily determined structure; so many topics and themes have equal "air time". The march of popular culture, which is determined by consumer whim, is increasingly superficial and short-lived. Teenagers are used to news, music, fads, celebrities and fashions that come and go very quickly.

They are used to weighty, globally-important issues being juxtaposed with frivolous, puerile ones. Witness the war in Iraq reported in the same breath as Victoria Beckham's attempt at a musical comeback. They have been brought up with a remarkable mix of cultures daily. Not only that, they are unconcerned with authenticity and would think nothing of eating a chicken tikka pizza, with some garlic bread and American fries, washed down with orange juice imported from Spain. The irony of this incredible mix of imports is not apparent to them.

Rowland believes this culture, particularly for teenagers, epitomises a celebration of the superficial, the "now" and the "me" generation. Because it all moves so quickly, nothing appears important especially as the solid connections of family, authority, structure and morality have mostly been eroded. Therefore teenagers have a problem with giving "deep" commitment as young people have in the past. Now if you fully commit, it will have gone out of fashion or be overtaken in a short period. In any case what could you seriously commit to, as an issue?

If ENCAMS is to engage post-modern young people, it will need to avoid any implications of societal structure or authority.

This viewpoint also has implications for pushing overtly environmental messages. Teenagers understand the bigger macro-environmental information that is taught in school, but they are cynical that the actions of the individual (especially non-adults) can make a difference in terms of global environmental issues. This is a result of the consumer power and recognition they hold, which is bestowed on them by the marketing profession and their parents. After all if they are fêted as individuals by the big teenage brands, how can they believe that their actions have global or collective consequences? In terms of campaign messaging, environmental consequences are not the right way forward, as they don't naturally sit with the "me" generation. These are better pushed in the relentless "drip, drip, drip", of a formal structured teaching format or through programmes such as ENCAMS' Eco-Schools.

This theme continues in relation to appealing to individual social responsibility. In today's culture people understand themselves as free individuals unaccountable to a wider social structure. As suggested by Southerton, appealing to social responsibility cues may therefore not be valid for teenagers, especially given the push to teach children how to be expert consumers.

## Possible teenage campaign themes

Given the context of post-modernism, Rowland suggests some possible themes for campaigns:

### Dirty is fun

- dirty carries a lot of cultural positives, as it represents sexiness, anti-authority and has an aesthetic of chaos. While clean-cut sexiness still sells, its opposite ("dirty") is ever-present, particularly in fashion and music. (Witness grunge and heavy metal);
- ultimately dirty is more interesting than clean – chaos is more exciting and valid than order. For example, modern pop psychology fears extreme cleanliness more than mild dirt – a teenager is expected to have an untidy room, if they were extreme in their cleanliness it would be perceived as a truly abnormal behaviour.

### Smallest rebellion

- it's actually difficult to be a genuine rebel in the context of post-modernism (see above), therefore when structures of authority are fluid and individualised, rebellion needs to be portrayed as playful, self-conscious and ironic;
- clearly, popular culture is much more interested in big transgressions like drugs, teenage sex, HIV, crime etc. It may therefore be possible to suggest litter dropping as a sad, small rebellion with little real transgressive value.

### Litter is phatic

- litter dropping is a phatic signal, a small signifier of anti-social behaviour (compared to the emphatic and deliberate signals of sex/drugs/crime);

- it's important to note that this form of transgression is the only one that represents no fun in its execution, ie sex, alcohol, smoking and drugs do at least offer some pleasure or instant gratification, dropping litter does not give physical pleasure. Therefore, asking kids not to drop litter does not actually prevent them having fun – unlike other more major prohibitions/transgressions.

#### **The big overclaim**

- it is unsurprising given the constantly conflicting messages and hypocrisies they receive from adults, that teenagers love "overclaims" or "over-exaggerations" or other plays on sarcasm and irony. This treatment of a message is generally successful with teenagers as they have a natural grasp of irony, and "get the joke". They find it even more amusing that adults don't think they do;
- the current Lynx (men's deodorant) ads aimed at teenagers adopt this tactic. They massively overclaim, in a humorous way, that if you use Lynx, supermodels will fall at your feet.

#### **The problem with the bin**

As discussed by the Marketing Works research and by Southerton, the issue of the bin is a strong theme for teenagers. Rowland's interpretations assume that the use of the bin could be a key theme for future campaigning. To teenagers in particular it is:

- evil, dirty, horrible, always full, not to be bothered with and too far away;
- the physical site of teen angst over dirt and hygiene;
- the antithesis of The Body, ie the bin is everything the (teenage) body should not be;
- a black hole to be feared and revered at the same time (ie germs from The Bin could affect you/harm you in some way).

## **Maintaining an open dialogue**

Young people are continually exposed to facts. Any use of facts in campaigning will signify teaching and teachers ie authority. After all, children spend a lot of time in school memorising and absorbing facts. But facts are continually downgraded or "spun" in the media, and teenagers believe them to be generally unreliable especially through advertising, rather than through school.

In campaigning terms, the presentation of a fact or rational information allows two possible interpretative positions: "I agree" or "I disagree". For example, if we were to claim that enough litter is dropped every day to fill Wembley Football Stadium, you will either agree or disagree with this assertion; your interaction with the message starts and stops inside a few seconds. However, metaphorical communications allow people to play with meaning, to interact emotionally and imaginatively. If an advert is less overt and more playful, we naturally try to work out what it means and how it applies to us, and begin to engage with the message. Most successful youth brands avoid stating facts, but use them obliquely as a springboard into metaphor.

## **Conclusions for formulating teenage messages**

Like Southerton, Rowland also offered a checklist of teenagedom that ENCAMS should use as a constant reminder when formulating campaigns. He followed this with a simple set of rules:

- the self is much more important than the consequences of actions, appeal to the "me" part of a teenager;
- remember teenagers have extremes of emotion that are "lived" in the moment, they are only interested in what happens today and are not overly concerned with tomorrow let alone next month or 50 years' time;

- teenagers expect instant results and have a very limited attention span, don't do complex or long-drawn out campaigns – they can't be bothered;
- teenagers are full of uncertainty and fear (of self and of others), therefore facing their fears could be a fertile area;
- pressure to be like everyone else and not to stand out from the crowd is immense, to recognise this may hit a chord with teenagers if used carefully. This is a paradox of fitting in yet trying to rebel at the same time – a desire to be the “same but different”;
- embarrassment is a huge area of concern for them, therefore they are self-conscious over everything: appearance, lifestyle, choices, behaviour etc. Recognising or playing up to this could be pertinent;
- sexual attraction, flirting and banter is beginning to hit the radar in the early teenage years. The importance of appearance and cleanliness is critical and another fertile area;
- teenagers feel that they are constantly misunderstood by adults, so pretence of understanding them or being on the same level or wavelength will be met with cynical responses. Just remember the teacher who tried to be one of us!
- there is a current theme of being slobby and apathetic as part of teenage rebellion. There is a batch of slob-heroes just now, such as Kevin the teenager, Homer Simpson, Johnny Vegas, characters from US “gross out” movies and (American Pie etc) revenge of the nerd/slob (nerd-gets-girl movies). This could prove useful in message treatment;
- create a dialogue and keep the campaign “open” to interpretation. Do not send out direct and overt messages eg “Keep Britain Tidy”, they will be universally ignored as teenagers are told what to do all day by both teachers and parents;
- avoid the use of “facts”, this is too close to the authority of school and teachers;

- try to use overclaim and exaggeration, the humorous irony will not be lost on teenagers.

When formulating its previous youth campaigns ENCAMS' staff were hugely concerned that they didn't appear to be condescending or appearing to be adults trying to be cool teenagers. We argued frequently about the use of vocabulary in particular, as we were so afraid of striking the wrong tone. On assessing our attempts, Rowland felt we were trying so hard that it showed, and more importantly, this was picked up by teenagers, thus undermining the campaigns. He advised that we shouldn't try so hard, instead adopting a more easy-going approach as this signifies authority to a teenager. In his experience the best way to achieve this would be to relax and amuse ourselves in a childish and stupid way. He emphasised that if we consequently found our ideas childishly amusing, they would too. He also proffered a few other simple rules:

- sidle up to subjects rather than address them head on;
- create metaphor that engages the imagination;
- don't worry about being contemporary and don't talk like cool kids. This never works!
- create a parallel universe of consistent meanings;
- embrace perversity and stupidity and celebrate “crapness”;
- break the rules of the sector;
- be naughty and surprising;
- create “open texts” that allow viewers to play with meanings;
- speak to people first, age-group and social class second;
- offer communications that have the appearance of complexity but are actually fairly simple to decode eg fcuk;
- create ideas and words that can be endlessly modified and repeated in the playground – playground currency is the ultimate badge of success!

- make young people feel empowered by their participation in a parallel imaginary world.

## Summary

After nearly two years of research, formal programmes and pilot campaigns, ENCAMS decided to plan its 2004 national youth campaigns around two main areas – the massive overclaim, and litter in relation to bigger transgressions. We commissioned a design agency to use the checklists developed by the research as a measure of campaign acceptability. Given the findings and checklists, it is likely that adults may not find the campaign treatments acceptable to them, or will believe that teenagers will not get the “irony”. This is adult arrogance and shows a lack of understanding of teenagedom and all it entails.

It is clear that if ENCAMS wants to change youth behaviour, it will need to take the research lessons and be bold in its campaign execution, testing it with its teenage audience before release. To dilute this, in the pursuit of not offending influential stakeholders, would be a waste of time and money – put simply, the campaigns are not aimed at adults, why should we take note of whether they like them or not? However, it would help ENCAMS if it publicised and communicated its youth behaviour research. To do this would allow stakeholders to understand our decision-making process and painstaking research-led marketing. This may lead to unexpected advocates when controversial campaigns appear.

Whatever the campaign solutions, be they controversial or not, it doesn't matter how memorable the ads become, how much interest they generate or how much media coverage they gain. ENCAMS strongly believes that using shock tactics for their own sake is not relevant if they don't change behaviour. As usual the only key measure of success will be whether litter, or other anti-social behaviours we target, will actually decrease on the ground.

## Conclusion

The problem facing ENCAMS is that littering is just not important to teenagers. They do it without thinking – an unconscious act, free of guilt. There are small degrees of rebelliousness and peer pressure in litter behaviour, but in essence it is strongly entrenched and habitual.

For the first time, ENCAMS and Marketing Works both agreed that the segmentation research was not enough to move forward into marketing strategy. It was felt that a better understanding of the sociology of adolescence was needed. The resistance to adult norms and conventions made teenage message development a daunting task. Teenagers behave in a tribal way and are keen to conform to this tribal culture, but how is this constructed and how does it operate? It was felt we needed to gain more knowledge of teenage values and cultural drivers to have any chance of changing behaviour. As described above, ENCAMS commissioned Dale Southerton a sociologist from Manchester University to give us more marketing clues.

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