



Norwegian University of Life Sciences
Faculty of Social Sciences
Department of International Environment and
Development Studies (Noragric)

Master Thesis 2014
60 credits

Understanding Drivers of Consumption Practices: A Study of Motivations Among Young Consumers in Norway

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Declaration

I, Tine Waag Fjeldstad, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature..........
Date.....13.12.2014.....

Acknowledgements

First of all I would like to thank my supervisor, Arild Vatn, for the help, patience and encouragement.

Thank you to Øystein Leirtun at Nydalen vgs., who facilitated the focus group interviews and made this research possible. A special thank you to the 23 enthusiastic and attentive young students who shared their opinions, thoughts and feelings with each other and with me.

Finally, to friends and family who have been there with me throughout the process, as sounding boards when I have been stuck, as supporters through the rough patches, and as proof-readers in the final stages; thank you.

Abstract

Mass-consumption of clothing is an important contributor to climate change and other environmental problems. This study aims to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of consumption by looking at two main factors. Firstly, what different motivations are at play for consumption of clothing, and how these motivations intersect and interact. Secondly, how elements of consumer behaviour links to group and individual identity, and the role of clothes in the creation and negotiation of these identities. Lastly the research seeks to better understand linkages between clothes consumption and barriers to behaviour change towards lessening the impact of consumption on the environment. The data is collected through focus group interviews with young consumers in Norway aged 16-18. This provides in-depth qualitative data from consumers in the process of creating their consumer patterns and practices. The findings demonstrate a variety of overlapping and complex motivations for consumption, some of which are hidden from the consumer. The motivations are a mix of internal and external influences. The internal influences include norms and habits, while the sources of external influence include advertising, media and celebrities, as well as parents and peer groups. The relationship between internal and external motivations, or individual agency and structural influence, is complex and filled with tension. There is a clear pattern of contradiction between the consumers wanting to display individuality through consumption of clothing, and wanting to display group belonging. In the mind of the consumer this contradiction is either not apparent or not problematic. The findings suggest that the relationship between consumption of clothing and identity creation is a tenuous one. Clothes are important for identity creation as a form of communication, but only up to a certain degree, and it is not always a successful tool for creating and maintaining identities. The complexity of consumer motivations apparent in this study has implications for policy measures directed towards reduction of consumption. The research shows that there is potential for behaviour change based on the false satisfaction of certain social functions through consumer goods.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Background and importance of research

According to several authors, consumption is much to blame for the state of the planet, including issues such as climate change as well as other environmental problems (Gabriel & Lang 2008, Jackson 2005a, 2005b, Wilk 2002, Winter 2004). Jackson states that ‘The key role of consumer behaviour (and household consumer behaviour in particular) in driving environmental impact has long been recognised’ (2005b p.4), while Winter goes as far as to claim that ‘depletion of the earth’s resources is driven by conspicuous consumption’ (2004 loc. 1372). The steady increase in consumption placing it at odds with the environment has led to a need of understanding what is driving this increase, according to Gabriel and Lang (2008). Understanding the complexity of the drivers behind the increase is paramount for our ability to create policies for sustainable resource use (Gabriel & Lang 2008, Jackson 2005b).

The understanding of consumer behaviour and its normative aspects linked to the mass-consumption of clothes, which makes up a sizeable part of the global economy (Markkula & Moisander 2012), would be an important step towards understanding an important factor of environmental and social problems around the globe (Brulle & Young 2007, Jackson 2005b). This is illustrated by Markkula and Moisander: ‘The fashion and clothing sector makes up a significant part of the global economy and has a significant impact on sustainable development on a global scale’ (2012 p. 109). Looking at how consumers engage with clothes will allow for investigation of several aspects of consumption, such as motivations for choosing particular goods, understanding of outside influence, and the consumer’s interaction with consumer goods (O’Cass 2000). Additionally, the clothing sector is characterised by a high-paced turnover and ‘relies on continuous change’ (Markkula & Moisander 2012 p.110). The material output and amount of waste resulting from clothes consumption is increasing as cheaper garments are purchased more frequently and kept for a short period only (Markkula & Moisander 2012). This makes clothes consumption an important field of study in this context. Clothes are ‘among our most personal possessions’ (Hansen 2004 p373), but production and consumption is global and interlinked. The distance, both physically and psychologically, between production and consumption has become vast, masking social and environmental realities (Jackson 1999), and causing a sense of disconnect.

The field of consumption studies is growing and complex and spans several disciplines. There is however a lack of consistency and agreement between theoretical platforms, as well as a lack of empirical data, particularly of the qualitative kind (O’Cass 2000). This has created a gap of knowledge of the more complex nature of consumer behaviour. Consumption needs to be understood beyond the economic viewpoint, ‘in a wider context of life strategies, of the constitution of meaningful existences’, according to Friedman (1994 p.1). Consumption patterns today are a result of a societal change from a society of stable and fixed social structures to fragmented and unstable social structures (Gabriel 2013, Pooley 2010) and consumption has become increasingly important to communicate and interact with others and to create identities (Wilk 2002). Looking at the role of consumption as tool for social identification and communication will be an important step towards understanding the complexity of motivation for consumption (Wilk 2002). Without such understanding, policy or promotion of consumer behaviour change will be extremely difficult (Jackson 2005b).

1.2. Research aims

This study seeks to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of consumption and how consumption patterns and practices are steeped in social and cultural interactions, as well as public discourses. Consumption patterns have, according to Dittmar and Drury (2000), changed from being based on satisfying physical needs towards fulfilling functions of identity, emotions and status, a change ‘captured by the stereotype of modern consumerism “I shop therefore I am”’ (Dittmar & Drury 2000 p.110). The relationship between practical and social motivations for consumption will be one aspect of consumption practices explored in this study. The research will be focused on investigating what different motivations are at play for consumption of clothing in young consumers in Norway, and how these motivations intersect and interact. It also aims to look at the social embeddedness of the motivations, and the consumer’s own awareness of different drivers for consumption choices, such as norms and habits and other outside influences. Consumer decisions are vastly complex, with different types of influence, and not much is known about the relationship between internal and external influences (Markkula & Moisander 2012). This study aims to add insight to this relationship, especially the tension between agency and structure in consumption motivations.

The study will look at elements of consumer behaviour linked to group and individual identity, and the role of clothes in the creation and negotiation of these identities. It will give

insight into the importance of consumer goods as building blocks for social interactions and communication, and the symbolism inherent in the goods. How important consumer goods are for identity creation will provide an important insight into the social importance of consumer clothing. Again the interaction between structure and agency will be an important backdrop for understanding how consumption of clothing is part of creating and sustaining group and individual identities.

1.3. Research questions

Based on the above, I have formulated the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the roles of consumption of clothing in the creation of individual and group identities? The research seeks to understand the role of clothing in identity-creation in an individual and group setting. It will investigate the role, scope and importance of clothes consumption in communicating identities, as well as the co-production of meaning between goods and consumers, and between groups and individuals in identity creation.

RQ2: What factors influence clothes consumption practices and patterns for consumers and how do the factors interact? This study aims to understand the individual's understanding and awareness of factors influencing their motivations for consumption choices. It also aims to look at the relationship between different motivating factors.

RQ3: How can insights into consumer motivations help us understand barriers and possibilities for behaviour change towards reduction in levels of clothes consumption? Lastly, the research seeks to better understand linkages between clothes consumption and normative social processes and by extension barriers to behaviour change towards lessening the impact of consumption on the environment. This includes investigating discourses that drive consumption, as well as the consumers' understanding of these discourses. How do consumer motivations impact levels of clothes consumption?

This study aims to contribute to understanding the complexities of consumer motivations and identities through focus group interviews with young consumers aged 16 to 18. Adolescence is an especially important period for constructing identities, according to Kroger (2004), and this research will provide in-depth data from consumers in the process of creating their

identities and their consumer patterns and practices. It will add to empirical in-depth data on consumption motivations, and consumption within identity-creation processes.

1.4. Structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 of this paper will provide an overview of the relevant existing theory on consumption and identity. Following this, Chapter 3 will provide an overview of methodological theory relevant to qualitative research and focus groups. It will then relay the methods employed in this study, as well as challenges faced in the research process. Next, Chapter 4 will present and analyse the findings. This will be structured based roughly on the theory chapter, and will provide some further discussion where this is relevant to the structure. Chapter 5 will provide further discussion on the findings and answers to the research questions. Finally the conclusion, Chapter 6, will summarise the findings and the outcomes of the study.

Chapter 2: Theory

2.1. Introduction to the theory chapter

Consumption theory is a broad and complex field spanning several disciplines. In this overview I will draw from several of these disciplines, narrowing the field from general consumption theories towards identity and clothes consumption. Several authors emphasise the centrality of identity in consumption (Ahuvia 2005), although little empirical work is done to assert the level of importance consumption plays in identity creation. The theory presented here will therefore be focused on the intersection between theories regarding consumption and identity, and the level of importance of one for the other.

This research starts off from a social constructivist position. In the overview of relevant theory I will also briefly outline individual choice theory, first and foremost to examine the feasibility of this framework for understanding motivations for consumption and comparing the two positions. Theoretical discussions around structure and agency are at the heart of this study. I will look into these discussions, and argue that structure and agency may not constitute opposites, but rather sometimes work as part of one another or in an overlapping manner. It is important to emphasise that looking at the individual as a starting point in investigating motivations is equally valid given a social constructivist position, although with different assumptions than in individual choice theory. I consider the effects of structure or agency on identity creation and consumption motivations to be relative, and all under the social constructivist umbrella. The social versus the self is a key debate in exploring meanings of consumption (Elliott 1997), and represents different starting points for understanding motivations for consumption. I will not make any conclusions as to whether a contextual or individual starting point is more valid for understanding neither identity creation nor consumption motivations. I will rather argue that the two positions cannot be separated, and that the social and the self are connected and dependent on each other.

The relationship between the general theoretical principles I will outline in this chapter is illustrated below:

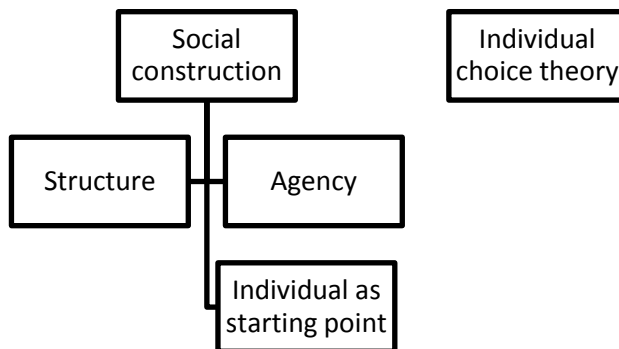


Figure 1: The relationship between underlying assumptions as basis for consumption and identity theory.

After a general introduction to underpinning aspects of the theory I will look at specific aspects of consumption and identity theory, still exploring the tensions between structure and agency.

2.2. Two starting points: individual utility and social construction

Consumption theory can roughly be divided into two schools based on underlying assumptions which create the foundation for theoretical discussions. Consumption theory in economics and marketing is largely based on the individual as an entity, and consumer behaviour based on theories of maximising individual utility (Vatn 2005). This can also be called individual choice theory, and is based on the neoclassical economic model, where the value of an object is based on the utility or happiness derived from it. In this model, the individual makes rational choices (Dittmar & Drury 2000, Vatn 2005), based on pre-existing or given preferences (Vatn 2005), ‘consumption is the product of individual choice, driven by an internal hierarchy of needs’ (Wilk 2002 p. 6). These preferences and the choices which stem from them are based on the individual’s own values. The values are seen as a characteristic of the individual only, i.e. no external factors influence them. Within this model the social and the individual are considered separate entities (Vatn 2005). The idea of the individual as an entity separate from its context is culturally specific as Euro-American, according to Bird-David (1999). The concept of a pre-existing hierarchy of needs has been challenged both from within economics, and other disciplines (Jackson 2005b, Vatn 2005). The assumptions underlying individual choice theory are mainly challenged on grounds of the

social nature of identities, human interactions and choices, ‘Our “individual” decisions are influenced by our relation to others at a level that is beyond our conscious control’ (Jackson 2005b p.38). Although individual choice theory represents a considerable part of consumption theory, this will therefore not be dwelled on at length in this review. I will place this study within the social construction part of consumption theory and will analyse the assumptions based on individual choice theory if and when relevant.

2.2.1. Social construction

Let us look more closely at the social construction avenue. The term social construction is both broad and rather vague from a theory perspective. In this study it will be used in a broad sense, meaning an understanding of identity creation and consumer motivations as being shaped by social context. Critics of social construction claim that if actions can only be explained by social structures, all decisions are always relative. A critical realism approach to social construction, however, considers the social world to also be subject to causal processes, and therefore not totally relative. There are multiple causes to all events and these are mixed between structural and individual causes (Elder-Vass 2012). The criticism of social construction also does not account for the physical world which exists regardless of human perception. This physical world is however conceptualised through human eyes, it is this conceptualisation that informs social constructions (Vatn 2005). In social construction, the individual is socially embedded and harbours norms and values originating in the social institutions the individual is part of (Berger & Luckmann 1967). Social rules, or institutions, that determine behaviour are imbedded in society on several levels, as feelings, norms or laws (Wilk 2002, Vatn 2005). In the analysis of this study, norms are part of the context surrounding the individual (Scott 2012, Vatn 2005), and is an important potential framework for understanding consumer behaviour (Jackson 2005a, 2005b). Norms can be seen as an informal social institution which helps the individual know what is expected in a given situation in order to achieve a certain, socially determined state (Vatn 2005). A simplistic description of how norms are created starts with the individual observing an external routine, performed by others. Then the individual accepts this routine as a fact, which is the point when the routine is internalised in the mind of the individual and s/he will reproduce the routine. Once the routine is internalised its origin may no longer be clear to whoever practices the routine. It becomes a habit and the formation of the habit may be far removed from the

practice, both mentally and in terms of time (Berger & Luckmann 1967).¹ Norms are thus an example of social construction which is performed, perpetuated and potentially changed by the individual, or by groups (Elder-Vass 2012). Sanctioning behaviour by social groups may give the individual the inclination to follow the norm. There might be several norms at work in any given situation, and they may be conflicting, complicating the picture when it comes to motivations for actions (Elder-Vass 2012). Giddens (1986) distinguishes between the everyday normative reasoning for action and the actual motivation underlying the action. The normative reasoning might be clear to the individual, but explaining the original motivation might be more difficult.

Another thing that may be hidden from the individual is the larger context which influences action. It is impossible to speak of motivations for consumption without considering the larger historical and structural factors under which they are taking place. The motivations and choices of the consumer are inevitably made within a larger system, ‘one thing which is not for choosing is the condition under which the choices are made’ (Bauman 2001 p.17). Essentially this means that the discourse within which the consumer is positioned will largely impact possible avenues of behaviour. Within the social construction parameters I will further investigate the consequences of structure and agency debates for understanding consumption motivations and identity creation. I will also look at the significance of an individualistic starting point within these debates.

An individualistic perspective does not need to be based on the perspective of maximising individual utility. If one looks at motivations for consumption from a social construction position, the unit of analysis can still be the individual, although in this framework social context influences the individual’s motivations. Using individuals as a starting point is prevalent in most consumption theory. Individualistic discourses have vast implications for attitudes, creation of knowledge, meanings and understandings (Brannen & Nilsen 2005), regardless of whether it comes from an individualistic or socially constructed starting point (Vatn 2005). On the most basic level it makes the individual the unit of analysis for understanding society (Brannen & Nilsen 2005, Gabriel 2013), which means that any other mode of understanding social relations is subconsciously disregarded. Plumwood (2001) strongly argues that ideas of individual autonomy feed into hegemonic structures of

¹ According to Brannen & Nilsen (2005), it is hard to make connections between personal life and structural forces impacting it as these connections have become obscure. This can be seen as a precondition for the social structures themselves, as their internalised nature are important for their continued existence.

exploitation by marginalising dependency on others, both humans and the environment. In light of this the way we understand structure and agency is important for discourses and thus for policy.

2.2.2. Structure and agency

To understand the tension between agency and structure one must understand the relationship and interplay between the two, according to Brannen and Nilsen (2005). This tension is a classic sociological problem (Elder-Vass 2012), a major component in consumption theory as well as identity theory, and appears under many different names. It is often described as a dichotomy. In order to be more nuanced about this debate, there are several ways of illustrate the more complex nature of the relationship. Talking about structure and agency as being in opposition is too simplistic (Keller 2011), as motivations stem from a combination of the two. Whether this is acknowledged or not, the combination of structure and agency is present in most theoretical debates. It is important to point out that context is important in all of these approaches and as such they all fall under the heading of social construction.

2.2.2.1. Conceptualising structure and agency

I will now present four possible ways to conceptualise the relationship between structure and agency. The first two illustrations below are based on existing theoretical approaches to understanding the relationship between agency and structure. I will argue that these two approaches are simplistic, and therefore problematic. In the third illustration I will re-conceptualise these, taking into account the more complex dynamics at play. The last illustration is of another existing theoretical with a different starting point than all of the above, an interesting alternative for conceptualising the relationship between structure and agency.

In Kroger's opinion (2004), the relationship between structure and agency can be represented through a scale of contextual influence. This ranges from an individual viewpoint, where the individual has agency to adapt to the context, through an interaction between the individual and the context, which can be seen as a sort of co-production. The last point on the scale is individual identity as a passive imprint of the surrounding context.

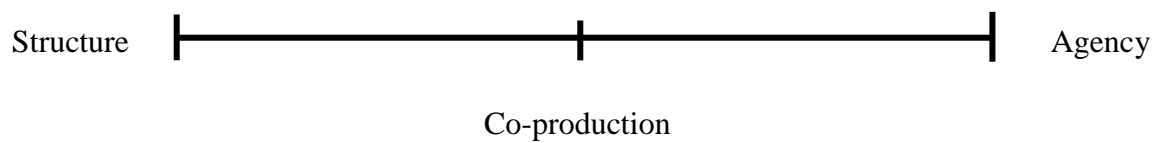


Figure 2: The relationship between structure and agency as fixed points on a scale.

As this conceptualisation has only three points on the scale it comes off as rather one-dimensional. It only leaves three potential points for the interaction between agency and structure to take place. Considering structure as a social pattern external to human agency, and reducing actions to be explained only by structure or agency is too simplistic (Giddens 1986). Vatn asserts that ‘The agent and the structure are, however, two distinct levels that cannot be fully reduced to each other’ (2005, p.53). Doing so excludes important aspects of the dynamic and tension between the two. In order to understand the creation of social structures, both agency and structure are necessary to explain each other (Vatn 2005). Structure influences agency, while agency reproduces structure. Or in other words, actors recreate structure through actions facilitated by structure. Individuals or groups do not blindly take part in this process; it can rather be described as a flow of mixed motives and a continuous monitoring of ourselves and each other in social life (Giddens 1986).

If we amend the illustration to a more dynamic relationship, it fits better with the interaction described above. The level of influence of context can be seen as moving, dependent on the situation, with different theoretical approaches placed at different points. In this case the illustration looks like this:



Figure 3: The relationship between structure and agency as a spectrum.

One theoretical position that can be said to use this understanding of the relationship between agency and structure is the one portrayed by Anne Cunningham. Cunningham (2003) uses a different word to describe freedom of choice, self-governance and individuality; autonomy. She brings to the discussion a view on structure as constraining, thus portraying tension between structure and agency. From this view, the context which influences the choices of the individual can be seen as a threat to autonomy.

This illustration of the sliding scale between structure and agency makes comparison between theories straightforward, the only question being which point on the scale to place

the theory. It does not however account for overlaps between the two. By considering agency and structure overlapping spheres I can amend this shortcoming. This gives us an illustration that looks like this:

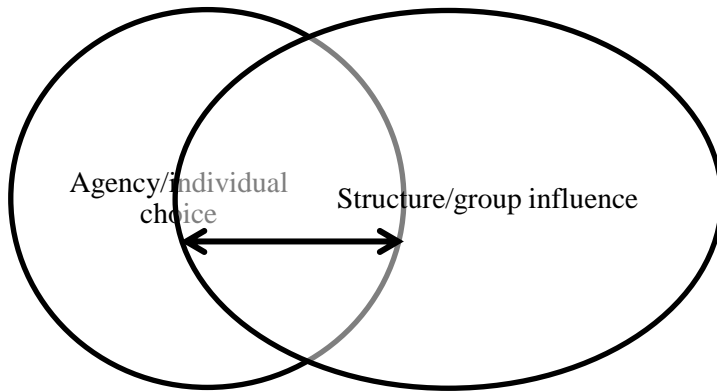


Figure 4: The relationship between agency and structure as overlapping and on a sliding scale.

A lot of consumer patterns are created in the middle. It is akin to the three-point scale above in that certain things fall entirely within the structure or agency category. It does however allow for more overlapping and interactive relationship between structure and agency, especially when allowing for a sliding scale within the overlap. The shapes reflect the larger importance of outside influence on individual choice than other way around (Vatn 2005). Vatn (2005) asserts that some actions and motivations are better explained by structure and some by agency, but the structural component is hard to avoid in analysing any motivation or action. This is because individual action always takes place in a context and any understanding of actions must consider this.

A completely different way of looking at the relationship might explain some of the difficulties in looking at the two as in opposition. Does agency exist within structure rather than as opposed to it? Holland (2002) talks about agency as socially embedded even if stemming from the individual. According to him, agency is a creative process that is responsive to context, often negotiated in order to maintain autonomy, and closely linked to identity. This is an interesting way of considering the relationship, as the two are separate, but inextricably linked. This echoes certain ways of conceptualising agency and structure when using different models to understand social institutions; individual preferences may be influenced by structures, but the choice resulting from the preference ultimately lies in the

hands of the individual (Vatn 2005). An illustration of this understanding of agency and structure looks like this:

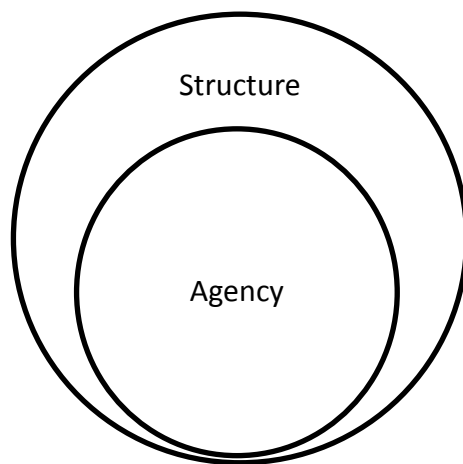


Figure 5: The relationship between structure and agency with agency as existing within structure.

Is this the actual situation or the perception of the individuals? This question is very difficult to answer. The empirical data produced by this study will only speak to the perception of the participants, not a more general application of one model or the other in all consumption and identity theory. The way the individual perceives this is important for understanding the more complex nature of consumption patterns, as well as identity creation. For example, if individuals consider themselves autonomous within social structures, then this has consequences for how we understand consumer motivations. It also means freedom can exist within social structures, something which goes against individual choice theories.

2.3. Consumption theory

2.3.1. Agency and structure in consumption

Within agency and structure debates in consumption literature, advertising is one of the examples most used to express different positions. Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) describe how culture and advertising are closely linked, in a dialectic relationship where culture feeds into advertising and advertising in turn influence consumers and their culture. Advertising in this account becomes a form of cultural capital; ‘Advertising has been recognised as one of the most potent sources of symbolic meaning in modern society’ (Jackson 2005b p.74). Warde (1994) argues that advertisement gives assurance that any consumption choice is the right one, creating a sense of security for the consumer, and endorsing the strength of consumer discourses as normative.

The individualistic viewpoint on the consumer as the most important entity in the consumer society has raised discussions of the empowered consumer versus the malleable, impressionable consumer, depending on your position (Gabriel & Lang 2008). This is true for both purely individualistic positions and socially constructivist individualism alike. Much advertising theory portrays the consumer as a passive recipient of influences, locked in a system or structure they can do nothing about (Brulle & Young 2007). The other predominant strand in individualistic consumption theory focuses on the liberating and empowering effects of consumer society, concentrating only on agency. In much consumption theory advertising is considered an important outside influence. Parts of consumption theory perpetuates that advertising is a choice-based discourse adding to the individual's freedom, and that consumption practices based on agency are in general empowering. From some perspectives it is regarded as a restricting force for individual autonomy; advertising can be seen to make us want things we would otherwise not prefer. It can create and operate the consumer's motivations (Cunningham 2003). In this case the relationship between structure and agency becomes filled with tension. The question is whether the person themselves made the decision to want the product, in which case the consumer "owns" the choice. This crucial point can be a difficult one to define. Is the consumer aware of this decision? Has the outside influence made such an impact that the decision is not really a decision at all? (Cunningham 2003). In this case the context is portrayed as constricting and limiting, if the consumer is unaware of the influence in question. Awareness here is the key difference to other perspectives. One such view of freedom through consumption is that it can be an important creative force, which nonetheless carries with it a burden of choice (Reith 2004, Warde 1994). The individual is free to choose, but must also navigate a plethora of signals and symbols, face numerous choices and stand responsible for them, in accordance with themselves and society around them (Reith 2004, Warde 1994). This interpretation of agency and structure is different from the previous one in that it assumes the consumer is aware of the structural forces that influence the choice.

Gabriel (2013) argues that consumerism has led to social mobility. He describes how consumers have been empowered by the altering of power structures through consumption. Mass-consumption has shifted conspicuous consumption from higher classes to the masses, making them the influential class through the symbols made available to them. Let us look more closely at this position. Gabriel's narrative of consumerism as empowering has some interesting assumptions underpinning it. He describes consumption as something that:

...reinforces participation and equality by making liberty not an abstract right to public discourse but an expression of oneself through deliberate acquisition decisions and a realization of personal satisfaction in and through goods in daily experience (2013 p.52).

First of all, the idea that acquisition decisions are always deliberate is a rather simplistic neo-classical economic point of view. This does not leave room for the importance of internalised norms and habits or for the eventuality that some decisions may be based on lack of choice. Secondly, that goods lead to the realisation of personal satisfaction excludes important debates and insights on the possible false satisfaction of consumer goods (Jackson 2005a) which I will get back to in the section on needs. This example merely illustrates the importance of disassembling the assumptions on which consumption discourses are based. Doing so gives us a more accurate level of insight into the complexities of consumer motivations, which is necessary in order to formulate relevant policy measures for reducing consumption.

Consumption as providing for human well-being is a discourse saturated in conventional economics, and permeated throughout society (Jackson 2005a)². Brannen and Nilsen (2005) argue that the inherent structural constraints that help form consumption as a social institution are in fact disempowering. This is different from the above assertion that certain social institutions such as advertising restrict the autonomous individual. That point of view still considers consumption a source of freedom, if only choice was fully and uninfluenced in the hands of the consumer. What Brannen and Nilsen (2005) argue, however, is that if the only freedom of choice for individuals is based on consumption, this is restrictive in itself. It means consumption becomes the conduit for a host of different societal functions which may have rested elsewhere historically, politics being a notable example. In this scenario, one can again imagine the consumer to be unaware of the restrictions the context is placing on his or her freedom; they may indeed consider themselves fully in charge of their choices. This is another way of understanding consumer motivations, where awareness is not the main point, but the illusion of it is. This might be understood in two different ways; either the consumer imagines to have agency but is instead only influenced by structure; or the consumer has agency within structure but is unaware of the structural influence.

² Whether the perceived discourse of consumer freedom is in fact present in neo-liberal economic hegemony is a question asked by many (Elliott 1997).

What all these different interpretations of the relationship between structure and agency have in common is that they all acknowledge that there is a relationship.

2.3.2. Consumption as social function

Richard Wilk, e.g. Wilk (2002) is one of the more prevalent authors on the subject of consumption as a form of social relation. He defines two theoretical directions within this epistemological strand of consumption theory. Looking at consumption as a form of social distinction is according to Wilk (2002) a position underpinned by an analysis of consumption as a group identifier, drawing on Veblen as well as Bourdieu. One underlying assumption in this group of theories is that collective efforts of social distinction are a human trait, and by extension that consumption is a way of achieving group formation and identification. The theory builds on Veblen by seeing consumption as ‘motivated by social competition and emulation; people use goods for display in modern society because their social roles are no longer strictly prescribed by birth, class, and social standing’ (Wilk 2002 p.6).

Another potential viewpoint is looking at commodities as primarily a form of communication. They carry symbolic value and are infused with meaning. This assumes that human nature is based on communication, that our ‘greatest need is to understand each other and the world’ (Wilk 2002 p.7). These two viewpoints create very specific understandings of consumption practices. However, making a clear differentiation between the two strands is a tenuous exercise at best, considering that consumption as a form of group identification inevitably includes consumption as a form of communication in order to transmit these messages, effectively collapsing the two. Still, the analysis of consumption as a form of communication is an important part of the theory and important in the context of this study.

In other words, the symbolic function of consumer goods fits them perfectly to play a key role on “social conversations” - the continuing social and cultural dialogues and narratives that keep societies together and help them function. (Jackson 2005b p.15)

This emphasises the importance of consumption as a form of social glue, a possible way of consolidating and creating networks and understandings.

2.4. Identity theory

Jackson (1999) sums up the complexity of identity in today’s consumer society. He asserts that the understanding of identity in relation to consumption has moved from discussions

about class, and moved on to identity as being part of social relations, changing and supported by consumption practices:

Rather than inferring identity from “objective” measures of people’s class position, recent work has tended to approach identity as an emergent property of social relations. For Anthony Giddens (1991), for example, “identity” is a reflexive project, shaped by the institutions of late modernity and sustained through narratives of the self that are continually monitored and constantly revised. Consumption can play a vital role in the articulation of such narratives. (Jackson 1999 p. 29)

Keeping in mind the tension between agency and structure one can also use this framework to explore identity creation, which I will get back to later in this section. Let us first look at the relationship between identity and consumption within the theory.

2.4.1. Identity and consumption

The links between identity and consumption is becoming an increasingly important topic of debate within the social sciences (Auty & Elliott 1998, Belk 1988, Campbell 2003, Elliott 1997, Shankar et al. 2009), which has become a complex and varied theoretical field. These links are a crucial theoretical underpinning for this research. From some perspectives consumption is not just the best way, but the only way to create an identity (Shankar et al. 2009), giving the impression of an essential relationship between the two. Commodities and their inherent symbolism are seen as an important resource for creating one’s identity (Dittmar & Drury 2000, Jackson 2005b, Miles et al. 1998) and communicating it (Warde 1994). This can include people, places and objects, ‘consumers use key possessions to extend, expand and strengthen their sense of self’ (Ahuvia 2005 p.171). According to this perspective, one actively creates one’s own self, and parts of this happen through consumption, using symbols to create narratives: ‘the individual has an atomized self that radiates out into the world by means of tangible objects and consumption rituals’ (Ruvio & Belk 2013 p.141), possessions are thus part of one’s extended self (Belk 1988, Elliot & Wattanasuwan 1998). This term gives consumer goods a key position in relation to identity, and asserts that the object becomes not only integral to our expression of identity, but part of our identity itself (Ahuvia 2005). Ahuvia (2005) looks even closer at the emotional attachment that can be found in relations to objects, and claims that by forming an attachment to things we strengthen our sense of self. According to Ahuvia’s work (2005), the two emotions most often

connected with consumption are love and happiness. People associate love with their favourite belongings, and this love links the object to their identity.

Looking at the symbolic properties of goods (Barthes 1973, Baudrillard 1968) is important in order to understand their communicative and social values. Commodities used as symbolic resources for social meanings can be traced throughout human history according to Jackson (2005b). They are inherently socially constructed (ibid.), and the interpretation of these symbols is as important as the symbols themselves, their meanings are constantly negotiated through social interactions (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998, Jackson 2005b). Elliott emphasises the importance of the role of the consumer as ‘an active agent in the construction of meaning’ (1997 p.285). Goods are a combination of different attributes (Gabriel 2013), rather than having a single-clear cut meaning:

material commodities are important to us, not just for what they do, but for what they signify (about us and about our lives, loves, desires, relationships, successes and failings) both to others and to ourselves (Jackson 2005b p.15).

The symbolism inherent in consumption practices may expand to include the consumers themselves, according to Pooley; in order to create these selves, the individual ends up treating him- or herself as an object, something to be considered, constructed and presented (Pooley 2010). Objectification of oneself further feeds into the discourse of the importance of symbolism as cultural capital. The co-production of meaning through consumption thus encompasses yet another dimension.

Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) are more specific on what links consumption and identity, they consider brands to be symbols of identity. They further reiterate that self-construction through consumption is an essential component to understanding the notion of selves and the meaning of goods. Thus the creation of identities is instrumental in understanding the larger world of symbolic meaning of consumer goods as well as vice versa. Cunningham (2003) does not only acknowledge the importance of advertising for consumption practices, she goes as far as to say that the goal of advertising to create a culture which links consumption and identity. According to this claim, advertising should be expected to serve as a key motivation for consumption choices. The theory’s heavy focus on symbolism of goods as part of identity creation seems to forget to ask whether other factors have equal or more influence and how these might work together. Part of the aim of this study

is to investigate whether consumption of goods does indeed consist of the majority of building blocks of identity in young consumers.

Some authors do point out that consumption is not the only factor in identity creation, and an overemphasis on this, by using consumption as a starting point rather than identity, might miss important elements (Shankar et al. 2009). This simply reiterates the importance of identifying the social embeddedness of consumer motivations. Warde (1994) argues that treating consumption as the main source of identity creation is a difficult one. If choice of symbols through consumer goods was the main source for identity building, everyone would be ridden with anxiety over the ever-expanding choice. This again overlooks the structural aspect, both of choices (un)available and normative structures. Shove (2009) asserts something similar in her work on habits and how they reduce confrontation with choice. That being said, Warde, along with Shankar et al., takes a refreshing stance on the relationship between identity and consumption by acknowledging the importance of other factors, a rarity in the existing theory.

2.4.2. Agency and structure in identity debates

A social construction approach to identity creation covers a lot of different avenues to understanding the phenomenon. These approaches acknowledge outside influences as important, including norms, class, ethnicity and so on, some claiming that aspects of structure can create boundaries to the possibilities of identity creation (Kroger 2004). Identities can be created, changed and sustained by the individual according to Warde (1994). This is a complex process, dependent on and limited by personal experiences and situations and larger socio-cultural contexts (Jackson 1999). Breakwell (2010) argues that social identity is constructed externally and then internalised, and at the same time actively monitored. Often a person creates several identities. These may overlap, and they may or may not be contrasting.

According to Shankar et al. (2009), society has changed from a pre-industrial society where identities were simple and fixed, often tied to profession or class (Gabriel & Lang 2008), to a reality where: ‘The worlds that we now inhabit are replete with competing representations of who we can be, or possible selves’ (Shankar et al. 2009 p.76). The symbolic self is becoming an increasingly important social entity with the ‘decline of symbolic structures outside the self’ (Gabriel 2013 p.63). With so much choice and uncertainty linked to identity, it is hard for the individual to maintain a coherent identity (Ahuvia 2005). Identities are fragmented, suited to different contexts, and constantly changing

(Bauman 2001). The transient nature of consumer goods seems to match the constant reproduction of identity in consumer society (Jackson 2005b).

This avenue of the theory gives an impression of identities as based only on individual agency (Kroger 2004). However, although the theory regarding identity in a post-industrial society hints to individual agency as the main motivating factor, the underlying assumption is a necessity to adhere to norms and thus still falls under a structural understanding of the phenomenon. The individual adapts by ‘choosing, altering and modifying their identities in ways that will provide greatest satisfaction within their social and cultural situations’ (Kroger 2004 p.4). This quote illustrates how individual choice works within social context, and again, as with the understanding of consumption motivations, the relationship between structure and agency is paramount.

Certain positions in the literature considers choice an integral part of constructing a narrative of the self (Warde 1994), but choice characterised by a lack of guidance (Warde 1994, Brannen & Nilsen 2002). This position paints the individual as having full agency in their identity choices, ignoring that their very description of choice places their position as agency within structure, even if this structure is either invisible or sought. This echoes consumption theory described above, where the relationship between structure and agency is present, regardless of the theoretical interpretation of it.

Bagozzi (2013) argues that the socially dependent self and the autonomous self are not mutually exclusive, but have a relationship that is constantly negotiated. The essence of identity is a balance between self and other according to Kroger (2004). These positions echo that of this paper in considering individual identities and social identities to be interchangeable and fluid. They also echo certain theories about agency and structure in relation to motivations for consumption, and can be illustrated much the same:



Figure 6: The relationship between individual and social identities illustrated as a spectrum.

If we go further into the theory however, the picture looks more complex. Group behaviour is not the sum of individual behaviour, but of social identity processes within and between groups, according to Bagozzi (2013). Individual and social identities are equally dependent on each other, the individual identity being embedded in the social and validated through it (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998), very similar to agency embedded in structure, only exemplified through a particular social phenomenon, rather than more general debates.

Validation of identities in the social sphere provides us with social categorisation, which again helps us navigate information and adjust behaviour (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998, Vatn 2005). The self is socially defined, and authenticated through conforming to other people's reactions, what Heidegger calls the "they self" (Inwood 1997). We constantly shift behaviour and appearance to fit with the social situation:

Much of what we take to be our personal identities are on public display in some sense, more or less all the time. Whenever we appear before others we have to present them with some tale or self-image (Layder 2004 p.91).

According to Lasch (1979), we struggle to stay visible in a visually saturated and fragmented society, the identities we create to be visible become an important part of our lives, confirmed by being seen by others. We play a role; our identity is a presentation we perform in front of others. Jacques Lacan argues that our relation to others is integral to our very beings; our very perception of our self is based on identification with an external entity:

According to Lacan, imaginary identification occurs in the subject through the unconscious assumption of an external image (initially of the subject's own body as reflected in a mirror) in which he recognizes himself (Chiesa 2007 p.15).

The embeddedness of individual identity in social structures has further importance for our understanding of consumption. Identity as closely linked to group belonging is again linked to what you consume (Ahuvia 2005). Consumption of clothes can be seen as a mediator between groups and individuals, a way of navigating the social landscape (Ahuvia 2005). Jackson (2005a) and Elliott (1997), among others, look at consumption through social interaction: 'We consume in order to identify ourselves with a social group, to position ourselves within that group, to distinguish ourselves with respect to other social groups' (Jackson 2005b p.17). This social interaction through consumption has a long history in consumption theory, where groups are at the heart of the debate.

2.4.2.1. Standing out and blending in

Veblen was the first to coin the term conspicuous consumption, a landmark in the theory of consumption as he offered an explanation of consumption patterns linked to class distinction and social power play (Friedman 1994). Several authors have since built on Veblen's work and expanded on it. An example of an author further developing Veblen's ideas is Bourdieu,

who focuses on ‘relation between group identity as life-style and strategies of consumption’ (Friedman 1994 p.9). He takes the question of conspicuous consumption beyond social ranking and into a system of self-identified groups, which tend to have similar lifestyles, what Bourdieu calls habitus (Friedman 1994).

Other, more recent authors have also used Veblen as an underpinning for their work, such as authors attempting to understand consumption in order to reduce it (Jackson 2005a, 2005b) and authors writing from an economics perspective (Corneo & Jeanne 1997). The theoretical progression of the concept of conspicuous consumption has thus broadened to denote visible and communicative forms of consumption in a larger social setting, beyond that of class division:

Irrespective of the tension between conspicuous and inconspicuous consumption, there is a broad agreement that, in modern society, consumption is in some sense inextricably linked to personal and collective identity (Jackson 2005b p.13).

2.5. Needs seen through individual and social lenses

Basic physical human needs are the same across societies, such as food, warmth and water. Certain basic social needs, such as care and acknowledgement, take different forms or importance but are still present in all societies (Vatn 2005). Literature on needs represents another arena which is divided between individual choice theory and social construction. Needs in the context of consumption tends to be divided between the two, between practical needs or socially constructed needs. This debate is relevant in terms of how to understand motivations for consumption. In relation to identities, needs literature tends to be based in the social construction corner. The main question here (and a part of the debate of individualistic preference theories versus social construction theories) is ‘whether one can talk of functional needs in societies as comparable to, for example, the needs of a body’ (Vatn 2005 p.46).

The role of needs as motivation for consumption comes up repeatedly across consumption literature. It parallels and intersects both individual rationality perspectives and social construction perspectives. The question is mainly one of definition, extensive literature exists on the abstract discussion of differences between needs and wants, and physical and socially constructed needs. I will not go into detail on this debate which has little impact on

understanding consumption patterns.³ I will however remark that elements of this debate may prove interesting for understanding the motivations that lead to these patterns. Looking at what needs and wants drive consumer motivations throws the individual choice theory versus social construction debate in to a stark contrast. This has implications for policy measures that aim toward behaviour change in the face of mass-consumption, as treating needs as given and fixed instead of contextually dependent gives priority to measures that are based on assumptions of individual rational choice.

When considering the importance of distinguishing physical from socially constructed needs in the case of consumption of clothes, the physical aspect becomes smaller than one might think. Although it is hard to separate the two in terms of motivation, a small example might help make things clearer in the labyrinth of overlapping theories. A certain element of consumption of clothing, especially in a country like Norway, will always be physical. A very distinct example of this is winter coats. When a consumer enters a store to buy a winter coat, it can be argued that a large part of that motivation is based on the physical need of protection against the elements, the socially constructed need would here be reduced to what kind of coat. That is until one asks another question; does the consumer already possess a winter coat that satisfies the need of protection against the elements? If the answer to this is yes, then the motivation becomes purely that of socially constructed needs or wants, reducing the physical needs aspect radically in a consumer motivation setting.

From an individual choice theory perspective, the needs and wants that drive choice are already given, they are pre-existing within the mind of the individual and they are not influenced by context (Holland 2002). From a social constructivist perspective, needs and wants are constantly changing and may often represent a more social function than the practical utility of for example a garment.⁴ Consumption can provide symbolic meaning, providing fulfilment of socially constructed needs through consumer goods, rather than practical needs (Baudrillard 1968, Elliott 1997). Dittmar and Drury (2010) talk about how consumption motivations have historically shifted from seeking to fulfil physical needs to

³ These discussions often fail to recognise that there is no practical difference between needs and wants in relation to consumption preferences.

⁴ In both cases the distinction between needs and wants becomes insignificant. A socially based want, say for example to fit in in a group may be seen equally as much as a need from the viewpoint of the individual. The definition becomes blurred, especially if practical issues become part of the discussion. What is more necessary for the individual in their choice of a garment? That the garment is warm or that it is socially fitting?

fulfilling social functions such as expressing identity. This marks a definite emphasis on the socially constructed aspects of consumption in identity creation. To claim that consumer goods have changed from entirely practical to socially constructed needs, however, is very simplistic and does not take into consideration that the two “forms” of needs might happily co-exist. The social context may decide what a practical need is. Because of this it is extremely difficult to differentiate between the two empirically.

The public discourse of what goods are necessities may impact the individual consumer’s view of the same. In this context the extent of goods that fall into this category might influence a propensity towards mass-consumption in a given society. Several authors have touched upon the moment a desire for a good becomes accepted as a necessity in society (Bauman 2001, Belk et al. 2003, Klepp 2008). Klepp (2008) discusses the process of how goods and services considered luxuries historically become internalised as necessities, causing a shift in consumption understanding and practices. Wilk also describes the importance of this shift for patterns of consumption:

transformation of desires into needs takes place through the interaction between individual choices and social rules. The growth of new “needs” is a key aspect of the increases in consumption in modern society, as what were once luxuries (for example air conditioning) become necessities (Wilk 2002 p.10).

The social construction and rationalisation behind what is a necessity is thus a strong driver for increased consumption. These drivers may change, they are normative, and thus are subject to processes of internalisation. Wilk (2002) emphasise the internalisation process of how wants can become needs through norm-creating processes, either by negative sanctions or discussion and deliberation. Here the distinction between needs and wants becomes focused on the processes of internalisation and change. Understanding this change and its drivers can impact levels of consumption.

The theoretical discussion of needs is also relevant to this study when viewed in light of the satisfiers of those needs. There can be a discrepancy between needs and the satisfaction of goods or services employed to fulfil them (Jackson 2005a, Elliott 1997) which carries significance for the social embeddedness of the goods as well as for patterns of behaviour related to them. Jackson (2005a) reviews material and nonmaterial needs and analyses them in view of consumer society, discussing that material satisfiers for non-material needs is a major part of consumer society. Pooley focuses on the consequences for this for consumption

patterns: ‘a kind of unfulfilling fulfillment in which felt needs are only momentarily sated, and require still more short-lived relief in endless cycles of consumption and surface-level reinvention’ (2010 p.76). Psychology oriented consumption theory talks about material value orientation as a psychological outlook leading to a strong tendency to use consumption as a main form of social signifier, and ultimately to unhappiness (Kasser & Kanner 2004, Solberg et al. 2004). Although unhappiness is a difficult term to define, these results indicate that social mechanisms of using commodities to fulfil socially constructed needs play a role in sustaining high levels of mass-consumption by weaving consumption ever deeper into the social fabric. This is also apparent in social constructivist theory, where ‘Consumerism entails a willingness to read meanings in material commodities and to equate happiness and success with material possessions’ (Gabriel & Lang 2008 p.323).

2.6. Consumption of clothes

A lot of literature on consumption of clothing considers it to be more important for women than for men. Clothing and fashion is seen as women’s area (Hansen 2004), although the reason for this is not always explained. This means that research on consumption practices linked to clothing are often focused on women, thus further perpetuating this position. This ‘devalues the significance of dress as a cultural and economic phenomenon’ (Hansen 2004 p.372), and puts limitations on our understanding of consumption of clothing. Physical aspects of clothing as part of identity creation are important for understanding motivations for consumption, although including gender as such an aspect is more complex than merely excluding men from research.

Duffy emphasises the link between clothes and the body: ‘Regarding fashion consumption, one’s mode of dress forms and integral link between individual identity and the body, facilitating one’s performance of identity’ (2013 p.344). Klepp (2008) especially emphasises how the body and clothes co-produce meanings. Hansen (2004) calls clothing a social skin; it faces outwards and inwards at the same time. This understanding of the function of clothing links to the individual and collective identities involved (Hansen 2004). The outwards projection through clothing is influenced by social structures, and often managed through habitual behaviour (Duffy 2013).

Symbolic self-expression through clothing can offer security and connection to society, and needs constant renewal (Elliott 1997). It is therefore a specific example of

consumption linked to identity, and consequently an expression which harbours tension between structure and agency:

In this sense, it is possible to identify a two-tiered model of fashion in which clothing is imbued with both communal and individualistic meanings despite the contradictions inherent in both types of meaning operating simultaneously (Miles et al. 1998 p.90).

Clothes are an example of a system of signifiers that changes continuously, which means that concepts of newness might be an important signifier and motivation for consumption patterns (Coskuner & Sandicki 2004). It is not only the type of clothing that is important as a motivation within the fashion system, it is also the newness of the clothing (Coskuner & Sandicki 2004). The pace and instability this implies aligns with the problems of creating a stable identity in a postmodern world, and the importance of social validation in doing so:

the role of fashion as a means of constructing a relationship between personal, individual concerns and social ones: the need to find stability in what is an essentially unstable world. That is, the idea that society is a product of each individual being party to a common set of knowledge; a vision of society based upon the concept of interaction or reciprocal effect, In an increasingly commercial society where the pace of life becomes more and more intense, Simmel argues that fashion provides the only apparent means of recovering oneself, of stabilizing the assault upon the senses that is characteristic of modern life (Miles et al. 1998 p. 90).

There are different aspects to what the consumer considers and attribute of new clothing; it is both a tangible and intangible phenomenon, according to Coskuner and Sandicki (2004). There is the material aspect (being newly produced, having an innovative design), but more important is the intangible aspects, such as social visibility and fashion. As far as visibility goes it is exposure of the clothing to the “other” that matters. In other words clothing can be “new” upon several occasions insofar as the “viewers” have not seen them before. The practical necessity of buying new clothes (because old ones are unusable) is less of a motive for clothes shopping than symbolic ones; ‘The purchase and consumption of new clothing contribute to moments of celebration, prompt feelings of power and status, and render excitement through exploration and play’ (Coskuner & Sandicki 2004 p.286). The newness of the clothes is part of an interactive experience including trying on the clothes, talking about them and showing them to others. Old clothes, on the other hand, signify boredom (Coskuner

& Sandicki 2004). Some go even further, associating shopping experiences with magical journeys, or even a fix (Dittmar & Drury 2000).

Dittmar and Drury's study from 2000 show a host of emotional and socially founded motivations linked to excessive consumption, such as feel-good factor, excitement, but also more identity-specific motivations such as 'makes me feel more like the person I want to be' (p.113), 'expresses what is unique about me' (p.113). Impulse shopping is also often referred to as being connected to feelings of luxury and treats by their respondents. Another recurring theme is the use of clothes shopping as a compensation for shortcomings in self-image, the authors consider this a discrepancy between the perceived self and the ideal self.

2.6.1. Consumption as ritual

Consumption has become a purpose of its own, not just a means to an end (Bauman 2001), Consumption in society is more than the symbolic value of the goods purchased, the act of consumption has become an end in itself (Dittmar & Drury 2000). The need for social assertion in some cases are closely linked to the shopping experience itself, the approval and the interaction with shop assistants is mentioned as providing positive self-esteem (Dittmar & Drury 2000, Lee 2012). The shopping experience in this sense can become akin to a ritual (Dittmar & Drury 2000). A closer description of the idea of consumption as ritual comes from Elliott and Wattanasuwan, they talk about four types of activities that:

...transfer meaning from consumer goods to the individual: exchange, possession, grooming and divestment rituals. Each ritual presents an opportunity for the individual to affirm, assign or revise the meanings derived from the mediated experience of advertising and construct an individual meaning for themselves (1998 p.141).

This has important significance for consumption of clothes. Consumption of clothes is a very good example of consumption of an experience as well as consumption of the actual goods. Looking at perceptions and interlinkages of the two will provide new insights into clothes as part of social relations. A ritual such as shopping can also reinforce group influence on the individual, provided the activity is done in a group (Coker et al. 2013). Hansen (2004) considers clothes a lived experience which combines wearing and viewing; 'clothing, body and performance come together in dress as an embodied practice' (p.373).

2.6.2. Clothes: physical and social comfort

A gap in consumption theory related to clothing has been identified by Ingun Klepp (2008), who talks about the importance of comfort in creating consumption habits. She argues that the concept of comfort is used as a justification for other either hidden or less socially acceptable motivations for consumption of clothing. The basis for this argument is several qualitative studies among women, where a recurring motivation for choices when shopping for clothes was that of feeling comfortable or feeling right in the clothes. The author relates this to historical developments of consumption practices in Northern Europe, emphasising how the word comfort has become an unconditional, self-evident reason for choosing a garment, linked to discourses of the autonomous individual. When this is listed as a reason, no further motivation is needed. Whether this motivation is listed in place of something different, such as influence from people surrounding the individual, or cultural factors such as fashion, may not be evident to the person themselves. The word comfort can have several meanings at the same time; it can be contradictory, subconscious or conscious:

Instead one can see *well-being* as an efficient way of implementing norms in ways that do not appear to conflict with the idea of the individual. If this is the case the body must have learnt to feel discomfort when norms are broken at the same time as the norms themselves have become invisible (Klepp 2008 p.18, emphasis in original).

Here Klepp understands the consumer motivation of well-being as a norm which places individual agency within a structural context. The important point here is that the individual perceives only his/her individual agency; their subconscious places them within the structural sphere by telling them they are not comfortable, while they themselves perceive this as their own choice. Klepp also discusses the dilemma of conflicting norms; to fit in and to stand out. She argues that the symbolic meaning of clothes can be contradictory without this posing a problem in the mind of the consumer. Comfort in relation to clothing can be both physical and mental according to Klepp (2008), meeting bodily needs or socially constructed needs accordingly. These cannot necessarily be easily distinguished from each other. In this assertion she brings together conflicting theories of practical versus socially constructed needs through clothing. Clothes here can serve as both, reiterating my stance mentioned above that for understanding consumption patterns, the two are on an equal footing.

2.7. Young people and consumption of clothes

2.7.1. Young people and groups

Consumption provides the day-to-day framework by which young people construct who it is they are amongst their peers and this has an indirect and yet fundamental influence on self-conception (Miles et al. 1998 p.94).

Meanings of consumer goods infused by young consumers specifically is under- researched. The fragmentation and uncertainty of today's society is even stronger for the young entering into adulthood, with many and confusing choices and possibilities. Giddens (1991), however, considers contextual fragmentation to not necessarily add to confusion or insecurity in identity creation, but rather to provide the individual with the ability to create their most suited identity. Miles et al. assert that 'young consumers are more adept at, and more willing than adults, to experiment with their identities' (1998 p.83). Adolescence is the main period for forming identities, according to Kroger (2004).

Although the importance of surrounding society in individual identity creation is sound in a theoretical sense, this might not be the case in the mind of the consumer. In a study done by Miles et al. (1998) among young consumers, advertising was considered by the respondents as having little influence on their choices. The same went for their social network. Friends might own similar things, but respondents would not acknowledge their influence. They expressed a wish to be different, and considered their individuality important. A few respondents however acknowledged the importance of the symbolic effects of their purchases in identifying them as part of a group.

This (...) neatly illustrates the paradox that seems to underlie youth experiences of consumption: the idea that everybody's individual taste somehow transforms itself into communal taste, that the group context merely provides an arena for personal expression, despite the inherent realization that the group context is a crucial factor in influencing consumption patterns (Miles et al. 1998 p.89).

This is one of the few examples in the theory of the conflict between individuality and belonging. The question arises from this viewpoint of the importance of a stable identity (as perceived by the individual) in a fragmented society:

This reinforces the argument that peer influence has a major impact upon young people's lives and as such young people endeavour to deny, perhaps a little too heartily, its role. After all, to claim that his/her identity is in anyway unstable is in itself threatening to an individual's sense of self (Miles et al. 1998 p.92).

The lack of stability in young people's live is also dwelled on by Brannen and Nilsen (2002), who draw on discussions of greater societal change, such as the de-standardisation of stable, prescribed stages in life, to argue how the period of adolescence has not only become longer but more unstable.

2.7.2. Young people and clothes

Miles et al. (1998) also found that clothing was the type of product most associated with pleasure. The symbolic value of clothing was important for identity creation among the youth.

Clothes are perhaps the most demonstrative and expressive form of consumer good and were picked out by young people as being especially pleasurable. (...) In this sense, consumption appears to give pleasure to young people when it also involves elements of display and negotiation (Miles et al. 1998 p.86).

The complexities of the discussion arising from this study illustrate the importance of understanding the complex connections between the above consumption theory. Materialistic value orientations come in to play here, so does the discrepancy between reality and ideal selves, and the importance of symbolic meanings:

Consumer goods, and most visibly clothing, play a key role in projecting who young people are to the outside world. The crucial point is that such a projection reflects how young people as individuals *want* to be seen, something that might in fact, be quite different from who they actually are. Herein lies the tension between the meanings endowed in consumer goods by their owner and those meanings given by significant others. Such meanings are not straightforward. Wearing or consuming a particular item does not guarantee satisfaction in a communal sense. What it does is guarantee

the personal feeling that such satisfaction is attainable through consumer goods (Miles et al. 1998 p.91, emphasis in original).

This quote illustrates not only the complex motivations that are at play in the mind of young consumers, but also the underlying discourse of consumption as a means to fulfil different social function.

2.8. Possibilities for change

Although exploring this in-depth is beyond the scope of the paper, theories surrounding the mechanisms of changing consumption behaviour is an important tangent to keep in mind (Jackson 2005b). The insights into norm creation, creation of knowledge and creation of behaviour patterns also give knowledge how these can be changed, especially insights that help us understand the internalised nature of consumption practices. Wilk, for example, distinguishes between deeply imbedded forms of consumption and forms ‘that are subject to question and debate, and are more easily changed’ (2002 p.11). This paper being set in a context of environmentally and socially damaging mass-consumption practices (Brulle & Young 2007, Gabriel & Lang 2008, Jackson 2005b) makes it part of a discourse on understanding in order to change: ‘Understanding (mainstream) consumer behaviour is a pre-requisite for understanding how to motivate or encourage pro-environmental consumer behaviour’ (Jackson 2005b p.9). Prevalent in all the above theoretical discussions is the embeddedness of symbolic consumer goods in larger social structures, something that has implications for how change can be encouraged:

the project of sustainable consumption can perhaps be seen as the goal of shifting the symbolic basis of social conversation from material “stuff” to some other kind of non-material resources (Jackson 2005b p.75).

Understanding what social functions clothes consumption fulfil might enable us to find other ways to fulfil these functions in a way less based on false signifiers (Jackson 2005b). In addition, if we can understand the relationships between structure and agency that inform motivations for consumption of clothing, policy measures may be focused on the structural constraints to behaviour change.

Chapter 3: Methods and methodology

In this chapter I will begin with a short review of questions of subjectivity and ethical considerations. I will then outline relevant methodological theory, before outlining the methods employed in this research. I will then briefly discuss the method of analysis and lastly questions of validity and generalisation.

3.1. Subjectivity: epistemological questions of research

This study is conducted through qualitative research methods, the nature of which makes it necessary to delve into some of the more underlying questions of research and its epistemology. The level of subjectivity considered acceptable in scientific research is often questioned in relation to social science (Cassell 2002, Hoggart et al. 2002). Any sort of subjective expression in scientific enquiries is often stigmatised from a positivistic point of view (Cassell 2002). This discussion, on the most basic level, comes down to how we define science, and particularly social science (Cassell 2002). From Hollander's (2004) position, social constructivist views of social science entails that there is no absolute truth to be found, a stance that reflects the complexity of the subject tackled in this study.

This research is undertaken with awareness of the inherent subjectivity of the researcher (Cassell 2002, Hoggart et al. 2002, Cloke et al. 2004). The researcher influences the process regardless of his or her stance on subjectivity (Cassell 2002). Even the most scientifically rigorous of research projects will be inevitably selective in topic, phrasing of questions, sampling, who chooses to participate, and how findings are interpreted (Cassell 2002). The researcher is never fully objective, but 'an active player in development of data and of meaning' (Legard et al. 2003 p.139). By acknowledging and scrutinising the subjectivity of the researcher, this will not be problematic for collecting and analysing data (Hoggart et al. 2002, Cloke et al. 2004). In this study the subjectivity of both researcher and participants is a key feature, as the method of data collection is focus group interviews, a qualitative method chosen for its potential for understanding complex, social interactions (Finch & Lewis 2003, Hoggart et al. 2002, Morgan 1996). Including the role of the researcher in the analysis of these interactions gives a better understanding of their dynamics and motivations. According to Legard et al. (2003), the interviewer has an active role as a research

instrument, a key component in the research process, rather than an unbiased bystander. Analysing reactions to the researcher's actions, questions or demeanour becomes meaningless if these are not visible to the reader.

Cassell (2002) talks about how research designs often do not take into account the confusing reality they are trying to make sense of. Too much emphasis on "well-designed" studies can limit the knowledge garnered by placing too many restrictions on how to collect data, and can seem disconnected from complex connections. Part of this discussion is the validity of data obtained in a qualitative and openly subjective manner. I will not go into this in-depth, but claim, in accordance with Legard et al. (2003), that the data obtained still give valid insight into the topic researched in the world "outside" the interview setting. I will, however, emphasise the necessity of transparency and self-reflection on the part of the researcher in this situation in order to allow for the best possible understanding of the data (Hoggart et al. 2002).

Qualitative methods, just as quantitative methods, raise questions of honesty. When data is based on what participants express in an interview situation, issues of honesty, whether conscious or subconscious, become important. What do the participants choose to disclose? Honesty and truth have many dimensions in an interview setting, participants can straight out lie, or they can subconsciously try and appear a certain way. The social setting might also influence what parts of the "truth" is being expressed or not. When grappling with these questions, the real question to be asked is whether there is an underlying truth at all? From a social constructivist point of view of understanding methodology, there is no such thing as a real truth to be found in a qualitative research method setting. Attitudes and meanings are created through social interaction. The questions outlined above regarding truth are not problematic from this position, they constitute data instead (Hollander 2004).

3.2. Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the design and execution of the research. The potential participants were informed from the very beginning that participation was voluntary and anonymous (Cloke et al. 2004, Hoggart et al. 2002). Informed consent can be a contentious issue when it comes to focus groups, especially ones recruited from pre-existing social groups. Group pressure can push people to participate, and the researcher has to make sure each individual is in fact informed and willing to participate (Hoggart et al. 2002). In this study there was a certain danger of peer-pressure during the initial recruitment

as it was done in a classroom setting. This was counteracted by giving information about the study and its purpose at several stages of the recruitment process, and reassurance of voluntary participation. In some groups individual email contact was part of arranging times for the focus groups. In these cases the participants individually confirmed their interest in participation. All participants who chose to participate were given more information at the time of the focus group conversations before they all consented to participate and to be recorded. Anonymity is another difficult issue in the case of focus group interviews, as there is no guarantee that the other members will keep confidences shared in the group (Hoggart et al. 2002). In the case of this study this was a small risk, as the topic was not a sensitive one. During the interviews any questions from the participants were met with openness on my part to ensure transparency.

3.3. Methodology

3.3.1. Focus groups

The qualitative and complex nature of both the subject studied and the study itself, warrants in this case a close look at the methods used and their empirical and theoretical consequences. In order to gain further insight not only into the respondents' opinions, but also into the social relations that help form them, the method of research in this study will be focus group interviews. Focus groups can be used both for collecting individual data in a group setting and for collecting data on the group interaction, looking at the construction of meaning, assumptions, power relations and public discourse on the topic (Hollander 2004). In this study the findings are a mix of both, as separating the individuals from their group setting, and vice versa, is impossible. The group interaction provides deeper insight into attitudes and practices (Morgan 1996), as well as beliefs and values (Hoggart et al. 2002). When focus groups are used as a method of research, the inner dynamics of the groups are rarely dwelled on by the researcher according to Hollander (2004), and important data might be overlooked. In this study the inner dynamics of the groups are an interesting and integral part of the findings. This was one of the main reasons this method was chosen in the first place. Focus groups as a method lends itself well to investigating attitudes and views on more intangible topics, where the group can work together to dissemble their own understanding of the topic (Lewis 2003). This will be useful in this particular study, as the more intangible aspects of consumer motivations might be clearer through group discussion than expressed individual opinions.

Some consider focus groups a source of richer data than individual interviews. The individual interview involves only two people and therefore limited interaction. Focus groups, however

...provide possibilities for multiple interactions. The researcher hears not only what people say, and how they say it, but how informants interact, whether views are challenged and how people respond to challenges (Hoggart et al. 2002 p.214).

In the case of this study, such multiple interactions will give insight into some of the more subconscious aspects of consumer motivations:

In responding to each other, participants reveal more of their own frame of reference on the subject of study. The language they use, the emphasis they give and their general framework of understanding is more spontaneously on display (Finch & Lewis 2003 p.171).

In the focus group setting, individual opinions can become more specific and more refined through discussions and clarifications, as they will be challenged by the other group members (Finch & Lewis 2003).

3.3.1.1.Relations

While the subjectivity inherent in the production and interpretation of intensive data is criticized by some, a common response is that the (intensive interview and) focus group is so useful “precisely because of its subjectivity - its rootedness in time, place, and personal experience” (Hoggart et al. 2002 p.219).

This insight into sources of motivations and thus behaviours is the main strength of focus groups (Morgan 1996). It may help identify hidden motivations for consumption and communication through consumption that will be paramount for this study. This will be an opportunity to study some of the complex social processes involved first hand: ‘Interaction among group members can draw new insight into informants' beliefs and values. This is because it can indicate points of dispute, as well as agreement’ (Hoggart et al. 2002 p.215). Morgan (1996) also mentions how variety of opinions, consensus and disagreement become apparent through this method. Thoughts and opinions are here subject to a dynamic process of

evaluation, and are dynamic in themselves (Hoggart et al. 2002). The participants become active in creating the data to a unique degree, creating a semblance to a natural environment where they would influence each other (Finch & Lewis 2003).

He felt that a carefully constructed group discussion could replicate social relations and interactions. This is because communication within the group becomes multidimensional, intra-personal, interpersonal and transpersonal. This means that dialogic interaction can have meanings for an individual, between individuals, and for the group as a whole. As a result, group responses are more than the sum of individual responses; during conversation one set of ideas can set off other thoughts (Hoggart et al. 2002 p.213).

By acknowledging the importance of the role of the researcher in qualitative research, new challenges open up in dealing with the relationships that occur in an interview setting. Being the participant that the researcher is involves a set of complex tasks at the same time; listening and understanding, relating to the topic, deciding on follow-up, paying attention to body language, dealing with interruptions, and managing equipment, among other things. It is a very active role (Legard et al. 2003). Keeping open questions is difficult during this process, as is avoiding leading questions while at the same time making clear question formulation (Legard et al. 2003). This is especially hard in a dynamic and evolving setting such as a focus group. In order to create reciprocity between interviewer and participants, disclosure on the part of the interviewer may lead to the participants finding it easier to open up (Hollander 2004, Legard et al. 2003). It can however, like every other interaction, influence answers in different ways (Legard et al. 2003). Matching interviewer and interviewee in terms of experiences and culture might be problematic in the sense that shared experiences might cause false assumptions of understanding. The participants may assume the interviewer will know aspects of their answers and refrain from a full explanation (Lewis 2003).

3.3.1.2. Power relations

Status and power relations may be an important part of focus group interactions between participants. These may be related to race, gender, class, age, sexual orientation and many others (Hollander 2004). These relations are complex and not always readily apparent. In the case of gender and power relations, these are not necessarily activated only when both genders are present, the relations are underlying even if a group is homogenous (Hollander

2004). This study will have a mix of both genders in each focus group, making it a potential contribution to this debate. Another relationship in the interview setting which is often discussed in terms of power relations is that between the researcher and the participants. It is often assumed that power lies in the hands of the researcher. This, however, may not be the case (Hoggart et al. 2002). The reasons for different power structures may shift according to each situation, in the case of this research, the entry point into groups or similarities in age or profession may lead to different dynamics that will have to be acknowledged and handled in the situation. The conversation might have ramifications outside the focus group context, for example on social relations after the fact. It is hard to both notice and untangle these effects, and they are rarely discussed in terms of focus group theory. The direction of the conversation influences what might be brought up. Likewise topics that are brought up early might create a norm of what is “appropriate”. This makes it interesting for the interviewer to pay attention to who is leading the discussion and what kind of discussions are prevalent (Hollander 2004).

3.3.1.3. Natural situation

The focus group setting is of course much shorter in time than long-term social interaction, and more staged, but even though it may not be a fully natural setting, it is still naturalistic (Finch & Lewis 2003). Morgan (1996) compares it to a meeting, rather than a natural conversation.

This stronger social context offers an opportunity to see how ideas and language emerge in a more naturalistic setting than an in-depth interview, how they are shaped through conversations with others. It reflects the social constructions – normative influences, collective as well as individual self-identity, shared meanings – that are an important part of the way in which we perceive, experience and understand the world around us (Finch & Lewis 2003 p.172).

One might come even closer to the natural setting by using pre-existing groups as basis for the focus groups. Pre-existing groups will take with them the secrets and roles that are part of everyday life (Hollander 2004). In a focus group setting, social interactions and processes take place within the research process, including construction of knowledge (Hoggart et al. 2002). This makes such a method highly appropriate for the topics this study aims to investigate, with focus on interaction and social functions.

3.3.1.4. Group composition

The theory also gives some clear suggestions as to the size and composition of the groups and discusses the implications of these choices. It is a recurring conclusion that six to eight participants will often yield the most fruitful discussions (Finch & Lewis 2003). The composition of participants is a more complex issue, and the theory does not give any clear answers, again the research in question needs to be the main indicator. On one hand, diversity in the group is important in order to create a discussion of different opinions, while homogeneity can create feeling of safety and thus an inclination to open up (Finch & Lewis 2003):

for this process to work effectively, participants need confidence in the process. This is dependent on a positive group dynamic. Hence, many commentators emphasize the benefits of bringing together individuals with a shared interest in the topic and/or a similar social background (Hoggart et al. 2002 p215).

On the other hand, too much shared experience could lead to an assumption of opinions being implied. In addition, talking to perfect stranger might be liberating (Finch & Lewis 2003). In the case of this study the diversity of the group needs to be finely balanced, as a varied discussion is a goal, while at the same time the study aims to understand existing social patterns and co-construction of meaning. Therefore pre-existing groups might be the most fruitful in terms of understanding these issues (Morgan 1996). Researching in your own culture gives insight to analyse and interpret, but may also make you blind to certain aspects, and the researcher needs to take this into consideration (Hoggart et al. 2002).

3.3.1.5. Sampling

Sampling is again subject to the specifics of the research project in question, but specific sampling is most often used for focus groups (Hoggart et al. 2002). Some studies have applied a principle of segmentation for their sampling, by dividing the groups into categories. The usefulness of this approach again depends on the topic and whether a comparative dimension might be desirable (Morgan 1996).

Recruitment of participants is a contested process when taking subjectivity into account. The recruitment is inevitably influenced by research agendas and the positionality of the researcher (Hoggart et al. 2002). Theoretical concerns will be the starting point but the willingness and ability to participate from the sampled group will influence the possibility of

following a prescribed plan. One of the things that may influence the decisions of participants to partake is whether they see the research as interesting (Hoggart et al. 2002), which in turn may mean they participate from a shared point of view with the researcher or a personal interest in the subject at hand.

3.3.1.6. Structure/ standardisation

Another issue yet more challenging, in focus groups in general and this study in particular, is the level of structure imposed by the moderator, especially in view of the goal of achieving some semblance to a natural group setting. The moderator both restrains and facilitates in a focus group setting (Finch & Lewis 2003). They decide what questions are asked, who gets to voice their opinion, what strands of discussion to continue, and they lead the group in keeping with the research topic (Hoggart et al. 2002, Morgan 1996).

The consistency of questions between groups is a topic of discussion in terms of standardisation, with various degrees of standardisation being advocated by various scholarly viewpoints. Some authors argue that standardisation as a concept goes against the idea of qualitative research, although it can lead to easier comparison between groups (Morgan 1996). Most important for these issues of moderator structure and standardisation is that their level should be thought through and linked to the relevant research goals (Finch & Lewis 2003, Morgan 1996).

3.4. Methods and challenges

I will now present the methods I used and the challenges that arose during this process.

3.4.1. Focus groups

One of the main challenges that arose during the focus group sessions had already been anticipated through the theoretical aspects of the topics discussed. The intangibility of internalised motivations (Finch & Lewis 2003, Hollander 2004) made discussing the more subconscious processes of consumption and identity creation very difficult. The outcomes of these challenges will be covered in the analysis chapter. To further understand hidden tensions experienced in consumer motivations, this research aims to allow for various social processes that may influence consumer motivations to come to the forefront, by keeping the focus group interviews open-ended.

3.4.1.1. Description of focus groups

All the focus group interviews took place at Nydalen upper secondary school, in classrooms used by the students. The interviews lasted from approximately one hour, to an hour and a half. The groups consisted of between five and eight participants, following the size suggested by much focus group theory (Finch & Lewis 2003). The two main study directions from which the participants were recruited were sales and transport and study specialisation:

Sales and transport: A three year course focused on sales, communication, marketing and economics with the possibility of specialising in sales and service or tourism services in year two (Nydalen vgs 2014a).

Study specialisation: A three year course focused on academic specialisation, with the option of specialising in science or social science and economics (Nydalen vgs 2014b).

Focus group number	Number of participants	Study direction	Year
1	5	Tourism services	2
2	5	Study specialisation	2
3	8	Sales and transport	1
4	5	Sales and service	2

Table 1: Overview of focus groups

Focus group 1 consisted of five participants, three female and two male. They were all from the sales and transport study direction, with focus on tourism services, and in their second year of upper secondary school. The ages and place of residence in the city for each participant can be found below. In this group there were two pairs of good friends, and everyone knew each other from being in the same study direction in the same year. There was no-one dominating the group, everyone was a bit reserved, leading to, at least seemingly, even power relations. Participant 2 could be said to be dominating on a very few occasions.

Participant number	Gender	Age	Place of residence
1	Female	18	Oslo East
2	Male	17	Oslo East
3	Female	17	Oslo North
4	Female	17	Oslo East
5	Male	17	Oslo East

Table 2: Group 1

Focus group 2 consisted of five participants, two male and three female, all from the study specialisation direction. The group were all friends and from the same class. The group was sometimes dominated by participants 2 and 3, but in general everyone equally shared their opinions.

Participant number	Gender	Age	Place of residence
1	Male	-	-
2	Male	-	-
3	Female	17	Oslo West
4	Female	18	Oslo NE
5	Female	18	Oslo NE

Table 3: Group 2

Focus group 3 consisted of eight participants, with a majority of female participants, seven, and one male. They were all from the sales and transport study direction. This was the only group from the first year of upper secondary school. The group being larger than the others was challenging in allowing everyone to speak. Participants 3, 4, 5 and 6 were good friends and tended to dominate the discussion, especially participant 5. Participants 1 and 2 were also friends.

Participant number	Gender	Age	Place of residence
1	Female	16	Oslo North
2	Female	16	Oslo Central
3	Female	17	Oslo NE
4	Female	17	Oslo NW
5	Female	16	Oslo NE
6	Female	17	Oslo East
7	Female	16	Oslo North
8	Male	16	Oslo East

Table 4: Group 3

Focus group 4, in opposition to group 3, consisted mainly of male participants, and one female. This provided yet another dynamic in terms of gender. This group was, like group 2, from the sales transport study direction, with focus on sales and service, year two. The group were all friends, from the same class. In this group the discussion ran easily, with a few clarifications from me. One of the participants dominated the discussions and sometimes took charge of the others, participant 3.

Participant number	Gender	Age	Place of residence
1	Female	17	Oslo East
2	Male	17	Oslo East
3	Male	17	Oslo NE
4	Male	18	Oslo West
5	Male	18	-

Table 5: Group 4

3.4.1.2. Relations

Deciphering internal group relations during the discussions was a challenge. This is an important set of data for understanding the social functions of clothing, as well as for contributing to focus group theory. Collecting all data on social interactions was however impossible. It was a challenge to note down body language, subtle changes in tones and looks, keeping track of who was dominating the conversation. This had to happen while at the same

time following up on threads, keeping in mind topics to bring up, ways to phrase questions and other tasks that fall to one person when there is one researcher (Legard et al. 2003). Although I did collect as much data as possible during this challenging process, the social interactions taking place made me all the more aware of my own role.

During the interview processes I became aware of my own interaction with the groups in several ways. I had anticipated that what clothes I wore might influence their responses because the topic of discussion was clothing, and attempted to dress in a neutral style (in as much as that is possible). Still, the discussions that arose made me self-conscious in that regard. I realised that these groups had different cultural meanings and references than me, possibly as a result of the difference in age. One of the groups started describing what you should not wear, and what they described was the kind of clothes I would wear. This made me aware of the difference in attitude, insight, and knowledge belonging to this particular cultural sphere.

The challenge of asking questions that are open and not leading (Legard et al. 2003) led to a specific challenge in the first focus group interview I conducted. The shortness of asking simply “why” led to one of the girls acting uncomfortable with being asked this repeatedly, as if she was being put under unwanted scrutiny. My motivation was merely to get more in-depth understanding of some of the statements she made, in what I considered a rather interesting line of enquiry. The “objective” method employed here might have led to a more guarded interaction with the participant. It is hard to say if data would have been different, but I did change my tone and phrasing slightly after this experience, for example asking “why do you think that is”, in a more casual tone. These sorts of challenges were constantly present throughout the process and I continually tried to address them and learn from them.

The differences in group dynamic between the groups also led to different interaction on my part. In the case of focus group 1, the group dynamic was tentative. The group was more reserved with their opinions and as a result no larger discussions emerged naturally from the questions, at least not in the beginning of the interview. A pattern started emerging of going around the group to answer my questions individually rather than discussing them with each other, even when prompted. This made my role more active, and also made me more attentive to the sort of questions posed, trying out which may lead to a more interactive discussion. Here it helped that the group members were friends, one of the most in-depth discussions came from prompting them to discuss each other’s clothing styles.

In focus group 2 the discussion ran free from the very beginning, covering most of the ground on their own, also coming back and asking follow-up questions of each other. In this case, my role was more about encouragement and direction every now and again. This made me aware of a different challenge; the impact of smaller actions on my part, like nodding, smiling, saying yes and laughing, all of which would be encouragement of the opinions expressed or directions followed in the discussion at the time. It made me question whether I should show appreciation of prejudices in order to keep the discussion going regardless of whether I personally agreed. This brought to my mind an unexpected element of ethics, which in turn made me take a closer look at my own behaviour, down to the smallest prompts, and I tried to keep these as open as possible.

Another expected challenge linked to reciprocity was how much information to give prior to the interview, and also how much information to give about myself and my opinions during the interview. It led to reflection on both ethical and practical aspects of expecting feelings, values and opinions from others without displaying your own (Hollander 2004, Legard et al. 2003). On two different occasions I was asked about my thoughts on clothes consumption and experiences from when I was the same age as the participants. Although I realised being forthcoming about this could help in driving the discussion (Hollander 2004), I tried to keep my answers brief, as my answers could direct the answers given (Legard et al. 2003).

3.4.1.3. Power relations

Although gender issues appear in the theory as potential drivers of power relations in a focus group setting, this was not readily apparent in the focus group interviews in this study. Even though all the groups were mixed in terms of gender, gender did not seem to determine the dominant member of each group. In group 1 the slightly more dominant person was male, group 2 was dominated by a male and a female, group 3 by a female and group 4 by a male. Gender issues can be said to have been more apparent in groups 3 and 4, the groups with a clear majority of one gender. But this is very difficult to conclude as this dynamic might just as well stem from the personalities of the male and female who were in minority, respectively.

As the groups were mixed in terms of gender a certain aspect of comparison was out of reach of this study. It would have been interesting to contrast and compare both mixed and homogenous groups, both in terms of methodological issues and clothing interests, but this was outside of the scope of this research.

3.4.1.4. Natural situation

According to Hoggart et al. (2002), a formal and unknown location might lead to formal answers in a focus group situation. Familiarity, on the other hand, might lead to a more relaxed atmosphere (Hoggart et al. 2002). In the case of this particular study, familiar locations, i.e. classrooms in the school the participants attended, were chosen as the interview site. This might have led to a more informal atmosphere as described above, and might also have added to creating a “natural” social situation (Hollander 2004), by placing the participants who were already in existing social groups within the space these groups existed in.

3.4.1.5. Group composition

Recruiting based on existing groups was also an attempt at recreating something like a natural situation (Hollander 2004). The situation is of course different in that is instigated by me, and the topics are of my choosing. In that sense it can be considered a sidetrack of normal interaction. It is however still “naturalistic”, if not a fully natural situation (Finch & Lewis 2003). This creates other concerns, like the ramifications of the focus group interaction outside the focus group setting (Hollander 2004). The focus group discussion might for example influence the relationships in the group outside this specific setting. A follow-up on this is outside the scope of the study, but would be interesting in studies with a longer time frame.

The use of existing social groups was successful as it helped create and fuel the focus group discussions. Existing friends used shared stories as examples and their friendship seemed serve to make them feel comfortable in the interview setting. Although familiarity carries the risk of respondents wanting to maintain a certain identity (Hollander 2004), but this helped in getting data on how relations influence consumer motivations, as discrepancies between identity in front of friends and the importance of group influence became apparent in several cases.

In focus group 2 all the participants were good friends. In the case of this group their relationship led to more openness and a free-flowing discussion, as anticipated by Morgan (1996). In the case of group 1 however, the presence of friends did not guarantee openness in the first instance, although it is hard to say whether it did the opposite. The presence of friends did however allow for ways to generate discussion as the interview progressed, for example

by having them describe each other's style of clothing. This way the participants reacted to each other's statements and once the discussions had started the group seemed to relax more in the focus group setting and also brought up earlier topics adding new thoughts. The familiarity of the respondents allowed for this approach.

The group interaction displayed in the different groups provided some insight relevant to understanding the social co-production of meanings and institutions. In some instances the discussions made them reflect on the meaning of clothing beyond what they have done before. The group interaction also displayed reproduction of existing group identities through the immediate and consistent identification of other groups, and thus one way focus group interactions can co-construct meaning (Morgan 1996). Although group identification as a topic will be covered in depth in the analysis chapter, this mechanism makes it clear that a focus group setting like this reproduces social interactions that exist in "real" life, and displays the social dynamics involved in consumption motivations.

3.4.1.6. Sampling

The study faced some particular challenges in terms of recruitment of both schools and participants to the project. This meant that the sampling choices changed according to availability and time (Hoggart et al. 2002). There were several challenges linked to sampling in this case. In the first instance, the choice of using upper secondary schools was based partly on the importance put on the age in question in relevant consumption theory (Miles et al. 1998, Kroger 2004), partly on the availability of several existing group structures in one place. Once the process of contacting schools had begun, several challenges presented themselves. One was the challenge of finding Oslo schools willing to participate. Oslo was chosen as the focus of the study for several reasons; a) it was practical geographically as I live in Oslo, b) Oslo has a high number of schools to choose from, c) the size of the city provides variety socioeconomically. The last reason I was hoping would contribute to a certain comparative element in the study. In the first instance six schools with an even geographical spread in the city were approached through letters and emails and followed up over the phone. None of these six chose to be part of the study, four declined and two never responded. The declines were, however, informative, several stated that they were often approached regarding research projects, as many as several a week. This gave me further insight into the challenges of choosing schools centrally located, and as a result I widened my approach, contacting a higher number of schools, including a few outside the city centre. One school responded in

the affirmative, Nydalen upper secondary school, in Northern Oslo. Regardless of trying different tactics with the other schools approached; emailing, calling, turning up in person, going through a gatekeeper, this was the only school that responded positively in the time allotted for field work. This was a significant and instructive experience. It led to a change in the intended research design, which in the end proved very interesting.

The positive answer from Nydalen upper secondary school was facilitated by a gatekeeper; a head of department who was familiar with social science research from previous studies and also enthusiastic about it. This was paramount for the access I eventually had to the school and students. Although there is a danger of gatekeepers screening participants according to your agenda and thus influencing the sampling (Hoggart et al. 2002), we discussed the sampling thoroughly so that potential classes were selected according to my wishes.

The lengthiness of the process so far meant that widening the search yet again was difficult as the exam period was fast approaching. I therefore decided that the availability of different study directions and students from different parts of Oslo being present within Nydalen could offer a comparative element in itself. I therefore changed the research design to include the comparisons possible within this one school. This meant there were ample comparisons within the data set even if restricted to one school; between two different study directions, between groups with different gender compositions, between genders in general, between different residence locations in the city, which meant I felt there was no need to further seek out schools, as this would add yet another comparative element.

The specific groups were chosen through taking volunteers in different study direction classes. This ensured that the participants were part of the same social group, in this case their school class, but with varying degrees of friendship or closeness within the focus groups.

Originally, the study design included individual interviews with some of the participants in the focus group as a comparative element to group interaction. This, however, proved difficult, as few participants were willing and out of those who did volunteer only fifty percent came through to the actual interview. Different approaches were tried to change this, asking in person or over email, allowing them to decide time and place, accommodating their wishes. Unfortunately the low number of interview conducted in the end (three) was not considered sufficient to add a comparison to the data collected through the focus groups and this element was dropped. Again, considering the number of comparative elements already

present, the rich data set from the focus groups were deemed sufficient to provide insight into the research questions.

3.4.1.7. Interview guide

In this study, the interview guide has been continually revised during the data collection. The process of research as cycle, going back and forth, was especially important, as was finding a level of structure and standardisation fitting the qualitative nature of the research, which led to keeping this open and fluid (Finch & Lewis 2003, Morgan 1996). The introduction of new topics and angles originating from focus groups, also led to revisiting literature to include these new topics. This has been a valuable process, adding new angles and insights that were unforeseen from the original literature review. This was expected, especially because of the combination of the in-depth qualitative characteristic of the focus groups and the complexity of the topic studied. There has therefore been a process also of revisiting interview guide between each focus group session. The interview guide was open to change in order to focus on the qualitative aspects of the data rather than standardisation (Finch & Lewis 2003, Morgan 1996). It was dynamic in each interaction, and this manifested in terms of introduction of new topics, such as for example the emphasis on celebrities as an influencing factor in the first (and second) focus group. This added a new way of looking at the influence of advertising and broadened the potential popular culture influences not mentioned in the theory.

3.5. How the analysis is undertaken

The very definition of analysis is that of an interpretation, an interpretation which is filtered through the view of the researcher. It is always biased and selective, according to Hoggart et al. (2002). Using qualitative methods means that the study is constantly evolving. Concepts and directions are continuously evolving, and therefore the analysis of data needs to be continuous as well (Hoggart et al. 2002). The whole process of this study was continuous, and data was continually analysed and reconsidered as new data was created and as the literature was revisited. I started the analytic process immediately after each focus group session, by looking at what key words and topics came up, and this allowed me to review my interview guide and my focus throughout the process. This was challenging in terms of keeping the focus groups still open and not too focused on the last instance of data collection, but keeping the research questions in mind helped with this. The data was transcribed and analysed

through key words or phrases and associations connected to these. The process was not computerised, but done associatively by working through the material and identifying key words and themes. From these I drew relational code maps, in a free, associative manner. The subjective nature of such analysis and coding has to be recognised, as must the interpretations and findings I infer from it (Hoggart et al. 2002). The analysis was done on the basis of the opinions vocalised during the focus group interviews, without assuming agreement or disagreement on the part of any silent participants.

Using audio recording as a way to capture focus group interviews gives a rich dataset (Hoggart et al. 2002). It also requires the researcher to be alert and take notes of who is talking when, body language and social interactions that will not be apparent in the recording (Hoggart et al. 2002). The study was undertaken with this in mind, the interviews were audio recorded with consent, and notes were taken on interactions, clothes and body language on the side, as interactions are as important to analyse as the statements (Hoggart et al. 2002). The recording was selectively transcribed (Hoggart et al. 2002), but due to the rich nature of the data set, very little was left out of the transcription. In order to fully understand discussions taking place in focus groups, the context of extracts should be clear. This will give insight to the discourses that inform the discussion, but it will also make the extract meaningful and understandable for the reader. Analysing statements based on their context was therefore an important part of this study, and extracts will be kept as intact as possible within the text without taking away from the structure of the analysis.

Focus group conversations can be analysed on the basis of the group as a whole or the individual statements within a group (Ritchie, Spencer & O'Connor 2003). In this study, the group entities are used as a main unit of analysis. This is done in order to understand their collective motivations, mainly because of the weight put on the social interaction of the group in the research design. Individual statements are however sometimes brought to the forefront when most relevant. Sometimes individual statements are analysed within the group dynamic.

3.6. Validity and generalisation

Generalisation, or external validity, is a concept much debated in qualitative research theory. In quantitative research, generalisation is closely linked to representativeness of the sample (Lewis & Ritchie 2003). Sampling based on representativeness is rarely appropriate for qualitative research (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam 2003). Generalisation or external validity of research projects means it is possible to either transfer findings to parent population; transfer

it to other contexts; or to generalise on a theoretical level. In qualitative research generalisation is focused on contributing to theoretical explanations, more often than the transferability of the research (Lewis & Ritchie 2003).

Although the possibility of generalisation is contested in qualitative research, Lewis and Ritchie (2003) claim it is possible, and can be strengthened by certain measurements. The use of original data is one of these measurements, as is trying to encompass diversity in participants, and displaying the research methods used (Lewis & Ritchie 2003). All these measurements have been adhered to in this study. The study does not lend itself to generalisation in the classical sense (Hoggart et al. 2002). It will however contribute to theoretical explanations. The topic being to further understand the complexity of consumer motivations, the findings will be useful for wider consumption and identity theory and policy even if they are specific in terms of sample. There may be aspects of consumer motivations left out from the specificity of the sample, but this does not retract from the legitimacy of the study's findings.

The research design for this study has from the very beginning been based on non-probability and purposive sampling, the latter of which is often used in conjunction with focus group research (Hoggart et al. 2002, Ritchie, Lewis & Elam 2003). The goal of the research is to look at the complexities of consumer motivations, and to add in-depth understanding to existing debates. With an aim like this, selection of participants should be based on the subject and on their ability to add insight into the topic (Hoggart et al. 2002, Lewis & Ritchie 2003). This was carefully considered in the case of this research. The sampling criteria changed during the process due to non-responsiveness from schools contacted (Lewis & Ritchie 2003). The outcome of the non-responsiveness was that the comparative elements planned in the study changed from comparisons between schools to comparisons between study directions. As the criteria for sampling were fairly open from the beginning, the change in responsiveness did not detract from the variety of the sample, it merely changed the type of diversity between respondents. The size of the sample was also impacted by the non-responsiveness. This was partly anticipated, as selection of focus group participants will inevitably be dependent on their willingness to participate (Hoggart et al. 2002).

The validity of the research is further strengthened according to criteria listed by Ritchie and Lewis (2003). The study allowed respondents to fully explore their views during the focus groups interviews. The interpretations represented in the analysis are supported by

evidence and to the best of my abilities the findings are displayed in a way that is true to the data.

Chapter 4: Findings and analysis

In this chapter I will present and analyse the findings of the research. The structure of this chapter will roughly follow the theory chapter. There are exceptions to this structure, for example certain overlaps in themes, where the findings are so intertwined they are hard to separate thematically. Certain sections from the theory chapter, such as the theory focused on young consumers, will be spread throughout this chapter, as it is made intrinsically relevant by the age of the respondents. Some topics are so intertwined with others they resurface several times, such as communication, needs and certain clothes specific theory.

The chapter will open from a social construction perspective, as social construction as an underlying framework for understanding identity creation and motivations for consumption was prevalent throughout the findings. The social construction of norms found in the study will be outlined as examples of this. The chapter will then deal with findings relevant to consumption theory, before analysing findings relevant to theories on identity creation. Lastly, findings relevant to specific clothes consumption literature will be analysed.

In the following discussion chapter, the data will be examined according to the research questions. Therefore, some of the data in this chapter will be discussed in-depth, in instances where the topic is relevant to the literature and not easily divided into the later parameters of research questions.

4.1. Social construction of consumption practices: norms and sanctions

It was clear throughout the focus groups that norms were an important part of navigating choices for consumption of clothes. In addition, styles of clothing were demonstrated to serve the function of group identification, which in turn helps with social navigation. In group 4 this navigation was expressed by respondent 5 when describing skaters as a social group: *It's okay that they have that style because then it's easy to recognise, like...skaters*. This respondent felt that recognition of groups through styles of clothing was positive and helpful. This example shows an awareness of how identification allows for navigating his social context.

Normative aspects of consumption practices were also evident when focus group 2 discussed whether it was important how their group of friends dressed. Participant 5 gave an example of how she would act at a party if participant 4 was wearing *really ugly clothes* (Box 1).

Box 1

Group 2 - study specialisation:

5: If I was going to a party or something where I myself had cared how I looked...

Researcher: Mhm

5: Then I think I would have cared if I asked [names 4] along and she was standing there in really ugly clothes, then I think I would have been like...maybe walked a couple of meters away

This is a good example of someone applying sanctions on not following norms established for clothing style in this particular social context. If one of her friends hypothetically does not act according to what she considers acceptable behaviour, the participant will not be seen with her in the context of the party. This will potentially be hurtful or embarrassing for her friend, who might be more careful to follow dress norms the next time such a situation arises. What clothes to wear, and by extension consumption practices, are thus subject to norms perpetuated by actors.

The discussion relayed in Box 2 illustrates group dynamics and clothing norms by describing what behaviour is considered inappropriate. Respondent 4 brought up her fear of being overdressed for the social situation she is in.

Box 2

Group 2 - study specialisation:

4: But I'm like, what I think is very like, I'm very careful not to overdress when I'm going to a party, because I'm, I think it's almost the most embarrassing thing that can happen it's like, my nightmare is to show up at a party being overdressed...I, I can't handle it, so I don't really dress up all that much, but it's like, it's kind of, it's not like I'm showing that I don't care but if you turn up to a party overdressed, then people think like wow, relax, you have dressed up way too much, It seems like you are a bit too eager, so I'm, it's my worst nightmare

(...)

5: (Interrupts) Trying too hard is not acceptable

(...)

4: (Interrupts) It's the most embarrassing thing that can happen in the whole world

5: And you can see that with people, it's like wow you tried...a bit hard

She had very strong feelings about what she considered a faux pas and twice described it as *almost the most embarrassing thing that can happen*, and also as her *worst nightmare*. This is a clear indicator of the importance of following clothing norms for this participant. She emphasised that this reaction was not about showing people that she does not care, but rather about avoiding being considered too eager to dress well. It became apparent that more people in the group consider overdressing, or trying too hard, to be socially unacceptable. This dressing norm is focused on dressing down rather than up, and is clearly a very strong one in this group. Both participants 4 and 5 indicated that breaking this norm would bring on negative reactions, at least in the mind of their peer group, further exhibiting the strengthening of norms through negative sanctions.

The focus group interviews also provided understanding of how consumption patterns and normative behaviour in relation to consumption of clothing have become habitual, as well as insight into internalisation of habits. When focus group 3 were asked about what they thought about when shopping for clothes, respondent 8 described how he would find something he thought was *nice*, then he would consider what clothes he already had at home that would go with it. This means he would not only be motivated by the look of the clothes, but also the clothes he already has. His existing style of clothing will thus perpetuate itself. When the discussion went further, two of the other respondents in the group reflected that *you go back to what you already have* (respondent 5), and that they would choose *things you already like* (respondent 4). This shows the tangible aspect of norm creation, the clothes already hanging in the wardrobe are part of deciding what will be bought next. What respondent 4 expressed also shows that the original motivation for liking something might be hidden from the consumer at the point of purchasing something new, as what you “like” is already established. The reasoning, what you like, is clear, but the reason you like it, the underlying motivation, is hidden. In this case the consumer is unaware of the hidden nature of consumption motivations. I will get back to the role of hidden motivations shortly.

Respondent 5 in focus group 2 gave additional insight into internalisation of clothing habits by describing a conscious process to internalise new garments into her clothing style (Box 3). The internalisation process described here is interesting because of the awareness displayed by the consumer of what she was doing. The respondent needed time to get used to the clothes as part of projected identity before being sure of acceptance in the group. The feelings expressed by this respondent suggests that the process of internalising clothes as part of your style is more challenging if the clothes are “different”.

Box 3

Group 2 - study specialisation:

5: But I'm more like, or I think, ehm, have noticed that when I have bought clothes that have been a bit...different, or I have felt they were, if I'm a bit insecure about what I think and dare wear it or if I kind of think that if I wear this it will be noticed and that is a bit uncomfortable, then I have sort of worn them...when I was going to the supermarket and stuff, to get used to the (several people laugh) new clothes and stuff

She described a process of “testing” out the clothes in situations that to her seem less socially significant. The respondent is here fully aware of her own role in becoming used to clothes of her choosing, after which process her motivations to buy similar clothes in the future might be based on this internalisation. This is an example of the consumer being aware of the process of creating her own consumption habits, although whether the original motivation for the purchase is known to her is not clear from the conversation.

4.2. Structure and agency in consumption practices

4.2.1. Consumer perceptions of agency

The study provided ample evidence of the perceived individual agency in consumption choices. However, closer analysis of this perception often disclosed a more complicated picture. Participant 2 in group 2 discussed group identification from an individualistic perspective. He considered social norms for group identification to be a personal choice: *It is pretty subjective, if you choose to notice it then maybe there is [different styles of clothing]. (...) But if you're not a person who thinks a lot about it then I don't think it is a problem like, can wear whatever.* To this participant, clothing styles are visible only if you choose to notice them. This means he acknowledges the existence of clothing norms but considers the individual free to choose whether to follow them; he perceives the individual as having agency and autonomy. Regardless of his individualistic outlook on clothing styles, the fact that he does acknowledge their presence suggests this understanding of clothing norms to be an instance of agency performed within structure.

The rest of the group also seems to put emphasis on group divisions of style being seemingly unimportant, as shown in Box 4; *no-one cares about that really.* They do however care if someone stands out.

Box 4

Group 2 - study specialisation:

4: *No one cares about that really, or like, it is more that you notice wow she had a cool style or*

2: *Mhm*

4: *Wow he had a nice shirt one of those wow he had a Polo-shirt or he had on a shirt from Dressmann (someone laughs), no-one really thinks about it particularly. Some people might think that yes he wears a lot of Polo and stuff, that's like*

5: *Yes*

4: *[Names classmate] for example, he sort of always wears Polo-shirts (several people laugh) and that's sort of fine, no-one cares, but then if someone else doesn't, then like, that doesn't matter.*

The group's spoken consensus was that you notice peoples' style but it does not have bearing on your social status, like their classmate who *always wears Polo-shirts*⁵. From their perspective, it is noticed if you stand out, but if you do not stand out, that is fine. As in the example above, their notice of their classmate's style shows they are aware of the clothing norms surrounding them, but consider themselves as autonomous. This places them either in opposition to the structural context surrounding them, or as showing agency within it. The tension displayed by their contradictory remarks are in accordance with Miles et al. (1998), who has found that young consumers are less willing to acknowledge outside influence on their consumption choices.

4.2.2. Habits and hidden motivations for consumption

The research displayed a complex picture of the respondent's awareness of the origins of their consumption motivations. Throughout the focus group conversations the difficulty of expressing motivations behind consumption practices was prevalent. Statements like *but I don't know what makes us like the clothes we like*, in this case expressed by participant 5 in focus group 2, cropped up repeatedly, in several groups and under different topics. In focus group 1 I brought up the topic specifically by asking whether it was difficult to say what the true motivation behind action is. The majority of the group agreed it was difficult. From this they reflected further on their own accord, as displayed in Box 5.

⁵ See Appendix 2 for overview of brands mentioned by the participants.

Box 5

Group 1 - tourism services:

4: *But you can also know that it is, or, it can also be because you don't know yourself, maybe, what the motivations are*

R: *Mhm*

4: *You just...buy based on feeling*

2: *When you're in the shop, you don't think about whether you need it or not, if you just see it and then if you want it, you just buy it. That could be one of the reasons*

This discussion sheds light on the difficulties faced by the consumer in describing the motivations for their actions. The group are not able to unearth their motivations, a fact which in itself tells a story about the strength of the normative aspect of consumer patterns and the internalised nature of the motivations behind these patterns. This makes the shopping experience easier to navigate, as the different motivations are already internalised as habits and do not need to be debated during each shopping experience, the consumer can *buy based on feeling*. The participants did however touch on the result of the internalisation of habits when participant 2 said that in the shop *you don't think about whether you need it or not*. In this sense he considers the internalised habit a reason for why it is hard to know the motivation behind action, as exemplified above. In this case the consumer is aware of the motivation being hidden, but is no more able to unearth it even with this knowledge.

4.2.3. Complexity of motivations for consumption

As respondent 2 in focus group 1 described his thought process when buying a t-shirt recently, we gain some insight into the complexity of motivations, hidden and apparent, which was part of this action. An example of the tension between structure and agency is also revealed. It was simultaneously a spontaneous act and an act based on a pattern of behaviour. The spontaneity of the action stems from the spur of the moment decision described by the respondent. In the mind of the consumer this was a moment of individual agency. This spontaneous choice is however influenced by the fact that he was stopping by the store as a matter of habit, and the statement that he only buys clothes if they are on sale. The price of the garment was the first and foremost motivation in the respondent's mind, but it became clear, after probing from his friend, that the motivation went deeper than that.

Box 6

Group 1 - tourism services:

R: What have you bought the last two weeks, have you bought any clothes the last two weeks?

2: T-shirt

R: What kind of t-shirt?

2: A normal, plain t-shirt, black, from Weekday

R: Why did you buy it?

2: Because it was on sale (everyone laughs)

R: Is that often a reason to buy clothes?

2: I don't buy clothes in Norway. If it is, I only buy if there's a sale

R: Okay. Do you keep track of whether there's a sale?

2: No, I don't, I just, if I just, suddenly...yes it was totally random that I bought that t-shirt, I was just stopping by the store and there was a sale

(...)

R: So what did you think when you saw it, you saw it was on sale and...?

2: I thought that then I want it

R: Just because it was on sale?

2: Yes

1: That's not what you were thinking

2: I of course (laughs), I thought it was cool too

R: Okay (several people laugh)

2: But I bought it because it was on sale. If it hadn't been on sale I wouldn't have bought it

If the consumer's choice was based only on the individual preference of a low price, he could have bought any t-shirt from any shop. The respondent was however already in his self-professed favourite shop when he spotted it, an internalised habit according to his other communications. The simplicity of the price-based explanation turns out to be part of a more complex set of motivations. The group found it obvious that there were other reasons than price for his decision, and called him on it. This may mean that the rest of the group are aware of different motivations at play from their own experiences of shopping. In addition to being on sale and in his favourite shop, the respondent found the t-shirt *cool too*. This motivation is

not only more convoluted, but also shows potential outside influences at play. For something to be considered “cool” there has to be social affirmation of individual consumption choices. The motivation the respondent seemed most reluctant to display is thus the one based on group affirmation. The socially constructed need to be considered “cool” is revealed as an important motivation. The choice that was portrayed to be based only on individual agency is thus a more complex action. The combination of motivations at play here shows the tension between individual agency and structural influence, the latter in this case represented by internalised habits and social confirmation. In addition, all three motivations described by the participant are a mix of structure and agency. Price itself is a structural element which can be seen to be regulated by individual choice and agency. The choice of a favourite shop has become an internalised habit. The definition of a “cool” t-shirt is based on structural influence and social confirmation. Although there are plenty of structural influences present, the choice ultimately rests with the consumer, which makes this yet another example of agency within structure.

Several groups responded in a similar fashion as each other when asked about motivations at play during clothes shopping. Some words were mentioned repeatedly at different points by all groups in relation to motivations for buying or wearing clothes; *nice*, *comfortable*, *fits*, and *look good*. Let us look more closely at the motivations brought up by group 4 when directly asked what they thought about when buying clothes. The respondents listed the following motivations for buying clothes; a) *size is important, that it fits* (respondent 1); b) the looks of the clothes, and lastly; c) the price. The price was, according to this group, only considered if the other criteria were met. The main motivations listed are subject to tension between structure and agency, between internal or external influences, although the respondents did not express awareness of this tension. Some motivations may seem to be related to practical, bodily needs and others to structural influence, based on socially constructed needs. If we analyse these motivations by considering agency as possible within structure, it becomes apparent that all the motivations are a mix of both. The physical fit of the clothing (a) is a motivation subject to both the actual physical fit, and how the clothes are supposed to “fit” (i.e. loose, tight), which is dependent on the social context and style. Within this tension, the choice of purchasing the clothes is ultimately the consumer’s, although with what degree of freedom is uncertain. The looks of the clothes (b) are subject to existing clothing norms and the identity the consumer wants to portray, be it group or individual. The way the clothes look is often listed as important, but without any elaboration, or specific description. That the consumer likes the way the clothes look is a recurrent motivational

factor that is rather vague and gives a lot of room for individual interpretation, which might be the point. The consumer may consider this to display agency, while it might mask the structural impact of norms deciding what “look” is socially accepted or used for identification with different styles or groups. Finally, the price (c) is subject to both structural forces and the consumer’s choice. These motivations are thus an example of structure and agency overlapping and interacting, and also of agency within structure.

In Box 7 below, another example of shopping motivations is presented, expressed by focus group 1. This excerpt includes the motivations *nice*, *comfortable* and *feeling it*, in addition to *fit* as discussed above. These are also a mix of agency and structure, and examples of the obscure nature of motivations in the mind of the consumer.

Box 7

Group 1 - tourism services:

R: *What do you think about when you buy clothes?*

4: *If it's nice (several people laugh)*

2: *Yes, or... you try on the clothes and then see if it fits you or not, if I'm feeling it (laughs)*

R: *Okay, if you feel...?*

2: *Like, yes if it fits me*

3: *(interrupting laughter)*

4: *When you feel comfortable in the clothes*

2: *Yes*

The repeated use of the word *comfortable* in relation to motivations was anticipated from the work of Ingun Klepp (2008), and appeared several times throughout the research. Feeling comfortable in the clothes might be to feel physically comfortable, psychologically comfortable, or both, although this is rarely specified and the word is often used interchangeably by the respondents. Whether or not the person is *feeling it* is even more abstract, a state of mind where the person does not know what might be the motivation behind this feeling, but follows the established habits of negotiating consumption of clothing. When prompted, respondents found it hard to describe why a piece of clothing was nice, the most common response to this question was exemplified by respondent 5 in group 1: *it just is*. This is thus another example of the hidden motivations that form a great part of every-day consumption practices. These startlingly few and uniform answers may be motivations that are vague enough to cover several other motives, or it may speak to very similar prioritisation

in this group of young consumers. As motivations these are characterised by being non-specific, changing and highly subjective.

4.2.4. Practical needs and socially constructed needs

The difference between practical and socially constructed needs as motivations for consumption came up at different points of this study, but some discussions still provided a more in-depth understanding of the relationship between the two. One of these examples came from group 1 discussing winter clothing. Winter coats being considered a practical garment was an anticipated result of this study. Group 1 confirmed this when asked (Box 8).

Box 8

Group 1 - tourism services:

R: Are there any types of clothes which it is more important that are practical than others?

2: Yes, coats

(...)

R: Do you think it's cool [to wear denim or leather jackets in winter]?

4: I think it's a bit stupid really, because you are asking to get sick

R: Mhm

5: They probably want to be noticed

1: Yes, but...

2: (Interrupts) And hats that don't cover your ears (several people laugh)

3: Yes, that's so funny to watch

1: Yes, but...

2: I use it myself though, and yes, I think it's cool

The group further reiterated this by saying that people who wear inadequate jackets in winter were *stupid*, and that they do it to get noticed, showing a negative attitude towards people who put style over practicality. Interestingly respondent 2 brought up another example of inadequate winter garments, hats that do not cover the ears, but right afterwards admitted to wearing them himself because he thought they were *cool*. This demonstrates that respondent 2 has clear knowledge of the impracticality of this hat, and also finds the fact that the garment is solely based on socially constructed needs amusing. The fact that it is cool, or in other words communicates what he wants it to, supersedes the physical impracticality of the garment. This can be considered an example of a false satisfier, where the need of keeping warm in the winter is not fulfilled by a consumer good purchased on the basis of its symbolism.

One specific trend that came up in discussion in group 2 was that of the “sporty” look, consisting of running tights and brightly coloured sneakers, particularly Nike. This specific trend highlights juxtapositions between style and comfort, between socially constructed and practical needs. Even though this style portrays a personal trait, or a look, sporty, it does not mean that the person is planning on doing any exercise. The majority of the participant expressed that they did not think that the people who would wear this to school wore it to be comfortable while exercising, but to look like they were “sporty”. In other words the style is meant to portray that you are sporty, but it has become a style in its own right, separated from the original practical application of the clothes in question. The clothes have transformed from having a practical application to a social one, although certain practical aspects of the motivation for wearing these clothes inevitably remain; they are still comfortable to wear.

Focus group 3 brought up an interesting example of the difference between physical and social comfort (Box 9).

Box 9

Group 3 - sales and transport:

8: *And when I'm at home, then like get home from school I still wear the same, if I'm not going out, it's like, it's all from day to day really*

6: *You don't wear sweatpants at home?*

4: *(Interrupts) You don't change when you get home?*

6: *Oh my god*

4: *Seriously, the first thing I do is to change into sweatpants*

3: *(Interrupts) I change straight away*

7: *(Interrupts) Yes, me too, the first thing I do, I change straight away*

2: *(Interrupts) The first thing I do is, whooo. (Several people laugh) Just shed this and shed that and shed everything*

5: *That's true*

2: *And then I look totally messed up, but I don't care because it's comfortable*

Respondent 8 mentioned how he would wear the same at home as to school, which elicited a strong reaction in the rest of the group. This discussion is interesting for several reasons. First of all it is a very illustrative description of how the clothes worn every day in school are apparently not that physically comfortable, although the word comfortable was repeatedly used by different respondents in different groups as a motivation for their choice of clothes. The first thing these students do is to immediately *shed* the clothes they have been wearing in

favour of something more physically comfortable. The use of the word “shed” indicates that changing their clothes has a profound physical impact on their bodies. It can also mean they shed the performed identity they had put on for school. In the privacy of their own home little suggests that this is an impulse driven to satisfy comfort based on social affirmation, as exemplified by respondent 2 who said she at this point does not care that she looks messed up.

The second interesting thing to note is that respondent 2, someone who throughout the interview was quite adamant her style can be described as *I don't care*, also performs this “shedding” of her clothes in lieu of something comfortable when she gets home. This, to me, is a good example of how “not caring” means you will nonetheless follow at least a minimum of norms.

A different impact of the physical fit of clothing on the consumer was discussed by focus group 2. Wearing tighter and more fitted clothes leads to a more alert attitude according to respondent 2. When wearing tighter clothes to class, he felt he was *able to pay better attention*. If he wore sweatpants and a hoodie, he described his attitude as more laid-back. This means his clothes impact him first physically, then in turn psychologically, as tighter jeans and a shirt made him feel more alert. This finding represents another addition to understanding the relationship between clothes and the body, not mentioned in the literature.

Another interesting example came to light in focus group 2. They brought up a social and physical process that can be seen to have bearing on the creation of habits for consumption (Box 10). This particular process, which adds empirically to the existing literature, sheds new light on how physical needs impact consumer habits in young consumers. In this case the turnover of clothes consumption necessary from physical growth has led to a psychological need, which in turn has led to a habit. From the respondents' description, this habit seems hard to break. They also described consumption motivations being influenced by the change in physical needs. Now that they have to buy their own clothes they have to put more consideration into their choices. This has implications for our understanding of the creation of habits related to consumption, as well as for our understanding of the importance of the period of adolescence in creating consumption patterns. This period is already considered important for the creation of identities by Kroger (2004), but this finding adds to our understanding of why. The example adds a new element to internalisation of norms, these young consumers are not only influenced by social norms; they are governed by physical needs which are instrumental in creating these particular consumption habits.

Box 10

Group 2 - study specialisation:

1: What has been the case for me is that I have grown a lot so I have to... I had to buy clothes constantly before (several people laugh). But now I don't really know what to do because now I have stopped growing

5: Yes, because it's also, I'm used to changing clothes (1: Yes), like every season, and then it's winter and you buy a new jacket and stuff (1: Yes) and then suddenly you stop growing and then

2: Mhm

4: And your parents don't bother to buy a new jacket every year? (Several people laugh)

5: No, I had to spend money on own clothes and then it was like

1: (interrupts) Yes it was

5: Wow I have to make do with the same jacket for six years instead of one

4: Yes, I'm not used to not buying every year

This finding thus adds understanding not only to how adolescents interact with consumption of clothing and co-produce meaning based on needs both physical and social, but also how this impacts long-term habits.

4.2.5. Outside influences on consumption

Among other things, parents came up as an outside influence on motivations for clothes consumption. In the below communication, participant 2 of focus group 3 described a direct form of parental influence, where her parent buys clothes for her based on her own preference. However, the influence of the parent does not entice the daughter to buy or wear branded clothes. The daughter claimed she does not like to wear branded clothing and that the influence is more negative than positive toward brands. Here the tension between structure and agency in consumption is again evident. The daughter is aware of the influence and can be said to make autonomous choices despite this particular social influence. The choice is still the consumer's own; the outside influence is not constricting. This example can therefore be said to fall under the category of freedom of choice, although the consumer will still have to navigate the social context.

Box 11

Group 3 - sales and transport:

2: *Both my parents, they're like really, what's it called, brand*

1: *(Interrupts) Brand*

2: *They buy everything, all their clothes, even their jumper, shirt, everything is brand*

(...)

2: *My mother is brand addicted to put it like that. But I don't like it, I just don't think it's nice, when she buys it for me I say I don't want it*

(...)

2: *Yes, she wants me to wear those things, she says yes it's nice, but I don't think it's nice, so you can wear it, but I don't want to wear it*

This is however a specific example, we do not know what other influences might motivate the respondent to dismiss branded clothes. We do not know what other outside influences impact her consumption choices, nor whether she is aware of these.

In focus groups 1 and 2, outside influence often surfaced in the form of celebrities. The influence of celebrities came up numerous times. In group 1 it was brought up as a reason for why branded clothes were popular, while in group 2 they were repeatedly referred to in order to describe either a style or the starting point of a specific trend. The effects of advertising however, were not spontaneously discussed. Respondents in focus groups numbers 1 and 4 found it hard to think of influential advertisements at all, also when probed. One of the respondents in group 4 did however consider advertising influential in general, after being asked directly: *Yes, advertising does have deal of, yes, it has a pretty high degree of influence.*

The importance of celebrities and the media became evident at the end of the discussion presented in Box 12, where focus group 1 was discussing a specific clothing trend. It is interesting to note that the group concluded that this trend is entirely created by the media; otherwise *no-one would have worn it*. From a larger point of view this may seem rather simplistic, but it is telling how little emphasis the group puts on the consumer's role in production of meaning and creation of consumption patterns, leaning towards actions based on structure rather than agency. It illustrates that structure is an important part of motivations for consumption of clothing.

Box 12

Group 2 - study specialisation:

1: *But all, all that stuff comes from the media*

4: *Yes*

1: *If there hadn't been lots of advertising for that no-one would have worn it*

4: *(Interrupts) And it wouldn't have happened. So it is celebrities and the media which controls it*

From this excerpt it also seems as though respondent 4 considers outside influence rather restrictive when she expressed that celebrities and media *controls* the trend in question. This is reminiscent of ideas of the consumer being locked in structure, although this opinion is by no means prevalent in the other focus groups.

One example of the more complex impacts of outside influences came from focus group 3. When discussing trends, they described them as happening quickly; suddenly a lot of people wear one garment or accessory, before it changes again. The group used a Michael Kors bag as an example and described how they saw them everywhere. The suddenness of the new trends described is interesting in that the trends seem, from the description given by the participants, almost all-encompassing, yet the respondents are unable to say how any of these trends started. When asked about the origin of such trends, respondent 2 in group 3 expressed that *people think they [the bags] are nice*, and that people might want the same as others. That people think the bags are nice is a vague reason for the popularity of the bag, as “nice” is a subjective description, which does not necessarily lead to popularity. That people want the same as others is descriptive in terms of the group influence on trends and norms, but not necessarily an explanation as to why a specific item becomes popular. The lack of clearer opinions on this is telling, especially in terms of the internalised nature of many outside influences on the consumer, and the consumers’ lack of awareness of said influence.

As a contrast to the reflections on outside influences on their consumption motivations, most of the respondents in focus group 3 were adamant that their choices were solely their own, as seen in Box 13. This is interesting in terms of ideas of agency and autonomy. Apparent in this quote is that regardless of any outside influence the respondents still consider their choices to be

Box 13

Group 3 - sales and transport:

3: *I buy what I want myself*

5: *(Interrupts) I buy exactly what I want*

4: *(Interrupts) No, I buy what I think is nice*

fully their own. This seems to confirm theory based on the agency perspective only, such as Gabriel (2013), who says that consumer goods are a conduit for personal satisfaction. This means that when it comes to expressing their own preferences, the participants are either unaware of outside pressure, they choose to disregard it, or choose to present themselves as having agency. This is in other words either a representation of a fully autonomous choice, or of agency within structure, with or without awareness of the surrounding structural influence. This was not isolated to focus group 3, although it is the clearest example of this way of thinking. In all the groups respondents would express their perceived autonomy in relation to their consumption choices. Similarly, several respondents in several groups put emphasis on not feeling brand pressure whenever brands were discussed: *I never feel any pressure* (respondent 2, group 2). It might be symptomatic of a wish, whether conscious or subconscious, of neither feeling nor appearing to be guided by pressure. Regardless of the eagerness to seem unconcerned, structural influence or outside influences as perceived by the participants, came through as an important factor in several discussions.

4.2.6. Consumption as social function

There were clear examples of identification of groups as a social function in several conversations. One example was expressed by respondent 3 in focus group 1: *in this year the people who are very sort of vain hang out together and then there are sort of the others*. The vain people have been identified as a group, based on their clothing and inherently a personal trait, vanity. Some other groups were also easily identified based on their appearance; for example *skaters*, mentioned by groups 1, 2, and 4; as well as people from the study specialisation study direction, mentioned by groups 1 and 3.

The girls going to study specialisation were easily identified as a group with a specific style of clothing by several focus groups when asked about trends. The participants in group 2, from study specialisation, did not, however, describe their own style in this way, or at all. Focus group 1 described the study specialisation style as including black jeans and *waffle jackets*. In Box 14, focus group 3 identified study specialisation as the course direction *that is the most focused on clothes*. They wear nicer clothes and *dress up a lot for school*, indicating that in the mind of group 3, the norms among those attending this course direction might be different from in theirs, indirectly confirming that they are members of their own group. They used an example of boys in that course direction who wear suits to school, indicating the *niciest* clothes discussed above. This was expressed with a bit of sensationalism, an extreme illustration of how that group might dress. This is a prime example of clothes used as

identification, a form of communication of group belonging and group identity. The clothes listed to identify a group from a certain study direction are quickly and easily listed, the symbolism easily identifiable.

Another example of identification or distinction of groups becomes apparent through groups comparing themselves with other years in school. Several respondents in focus group 2 expressed the opinion that the people in year one all look exactly the same, wear the same

clothes, and care more about their apparel. They considered this uniformity *weird*, and claimed that year two, their year, are not the same, indicating a potential shift in group dynamics or norms from one year to another. Several respondents in group 2 reasoned that their age and maturity led them to not let clothing style be a main form of social marker, and that they cared more when they were younger. The pattern is the same here as when participants in focus group 3 in sales and transport distanced themselves from the students in study specialisation. Both groups were adamant they cared less than others or less than before. They would identify other groups based on their study direction or school year, but would only indirectly reveal that they were part of such a group themselves. They did this identifying the other group and claiming that whatever symbolism belonged to the group identified did not belong to them. This indicates a prevalent discourse of individualism among the participants. Displaying agency and autonomy is considered important, even when discussing group influences. As seen above, this is another example of young consumers eager to communicate their individual autonomy rather than identify with a group. Similar among all the groups was the ease of identification and identification of other groups, coupled with difficulty or unwillingness to describe their own group. One possible explanation of this is that falling into a group category seems detrimental to the participants' individual agency from their perspective. Alternatively, it might mean that identification is easier from a

Box 14

Group 3 - sales and transport:

5: *Study specialisation*

4: *Mhm, there I think it's more...*

5: *(Interrupts) It's the course that is the most focused on clothes*

3: *Yes, I think so too*

4: *(Interrupts) Yes*

5: *(Interrupts) Who wears the nicest clothes I think*

(...)

4: *Who dresses up a lot for school for example*

(...)

1: *Some of the guys wear suits you know*

distance than from within a group, the complexity of their own identities might make their own habitus harder to describe or delineate.

In this discussion the consideration and deliberation over the issue led one participant in group 2 to come up with some insightful thoughts on individuality and group identification (Box 15).

Box 15

Group 2 - study specialisation:

5: *Even though there are different styles and stuff it is the little things that, that shine through*

R: *Mhm*

5: *So I think that like when I say that the three of us [names 3,4,5] have pretty different style...*

R: *Mhm*

5: *...then my mother would have said that, no you know what you look exactly the same all of you. Or she does say that. So I think it's a bit like...whose perception of what kind of style*

The participant realised that even though they consider their individuality to be communicated through in their style of clothing, people with a different set of cultural reference, i.e. the mother, will not perceive this as individuality at all. Here different points of reference for individual and group identification come to the forefront.

Another social function stemming from consumption, according to Jackson (2005b) is that of position between groups. Respondent number 4 in group 1 described a group on the basis of the price of their clothing by saying: *those who dress very expensively think that they are sort of a bit cooler than everyone*. This indicates that this group tries to distinguish themselves from other groups through what they wear. The general perception of the group is well illustrated by this quote from respondent 2, who considered the price of the clothes to be a marker of groups when it comes to clothing: *There are many who don't choose to spend lots of money on clothes, and you can see that (laughs) from one to the other*.

4.2.7. Material values

An underlying tenor throughout all the focus group conversations in this study, as exemplified above, is a wish on the part of the participants to not seem overly concerned about adhering to outside influence. Whether this is a true representation of underlying attitudes, or a norm in itself is impossible to tell. Group 2 did, however, use an example that clearly illustrated how expressions of material values were received among their group (Box 16).

Box 16

Group 2 - study specialisation:

2: *It is sort of like, you hear it immediately if someone is trying too hard. Even if he has a cool style he can suddenly go, yes, but this I bought yesterday so... (several people laugh)*

4: *That is...*

2: *If he is like that then it is totally out of the question to continue talking to him because then I know that he kind of only has those values close, close to his heart...you exclude that he has a cool style for example*

In this excerpt participant 2 showed obvious disdain towards people who are *trying too hard*. In the view of this respondent, it is not acceptable to express a high level of interest in your clothes and your appearance upon a first meeting, to the extent of excluding any further social interaction. The participant expressed that he does not want to make friends with someone who has material values *close to his heart*. Caring too much about your style means you are not *cool*, regardless of how “cool” that style is. The message given by the participant in this case was that even if clothes are important, an overemphasis on material values means that person loses his estimation.

4.3. Identity and consumption

4.3.1. Understandings of identity

The first reaction from the respondents when asked how to describe identity⁶ was rather broad; *who you are*, by the majority of respondents in groups 1 and 3.⁷ In group 3 participant

⁶ Both in phrasing of questions and in identity related discussion, the word personality would often be a preferred term, and talked about at length. This is interesting when looking at the difference between the two terms. Personality can be said to be a part of an identity, specifically individual identity and personal characteristics. The term identity can be used to describe an individual or a group (Turner & Onorato 1999). Personality can consist of several characteristics to form a character (Oxford Dictionaries 2014b), whereas identity is simply defined as what or who something or someone is (Oxford Dictionaries

5 elaborated that your identity is not just what is on the outside, giving an indication of the more in-depth understanding of identity apparent throughout the study. In group 3 they all expressed agreement that you can show personality through clothing, although respondent 8 felt the situation in which you wear the clothes would have an impact on to what degree it portrays your personality. Group 4 had much the same responses; most of the respondents felt clothes can express personality, although some of the group members were more hesitant. They felt that judging people based on looks can be too superficial, *you never know how a person is on the inside* (respondent 3). The limitations of consumption as a social function comes to light here, or rather how it is interlaced with other forms of communication and identification.

The above description of identity does not say anything about clothes in and of itself, but the use of words that emerged when group 1 were prompted on any potential links between clothes and identity is interesting. Respondent 4 said one would buy clothes *that is you* (sic.) (Box 17). On the surface, this wording, *it is you*, supports the understanding of consumer goods as a main conductor for communicating your identity, portrayed in previous research focused on consumer goods as paramount for identity creation. This also links to the concept of the extended self, clothes do not only represent you but they “are you”. The object, or consumer good, becomes infused with meaning and social value. Respondent 5 further talked about *how you appear as a person*, which is interesting in the context of this paper as it focuses on appearance, acknowledging the outward projection of self. Something similar came up in group 2, when asked the same, where respondent 5 said she thinks *it reflects how you want others to view you*. The constructive element of identity thus becomes apparent, along with the acknowledgement that others are part of affirming and co-creating meaning. This understanding of identity through clothing is based on the individual as basis of analysis, but from a social constructivist starting point, as the social context is equally as important.

Coming back to Box 17, respondent 1 felt you should buy clothes that *explain you a bit as a person*. The idea of using the symbolism of commodities to create and communicate identity is clearly present here, but this one example is not enough to conclude that goods are the main (or the only tool) for the job. The rest of the data presented in this chapter tells a

2014a). The prevalent use of personality as linked to consumption of clothing is therefore pointing to the more fluid of the two.

⁷ Group 2 immediately started talking about clothing, drawing a link between the topic of the interview and my question. In group 3 personality was discussed rather than identity.

more complicated story. In fact, within this particular excerpt (Box 17), more complex links between identity and consumption present themselves.

Box 17

Group 1 - tourism services:

R: If I pose the question what is identity, what would you say?

3: Who you are (everyone laughs)

2: I was going to say the same

3: Yes, exactly

5: How you appear as a person

R: Mhm. Do you feel clothes can have anything to do with it?

3: Yes

R: In what way?

3: It is, or it is your choice how you are going to be, and it is your choice what clothes you buy

1: Mhm

3: You buy those you think are nice and that is

1: (interrupts) That is...

3: That is you

1: Yes, you have, you go, buy what you think is nice and what you feel comfortable in and that explains you a bit as a person

Another interesting element of this discussion is that the words *nice* and *comfortable* cropped up, here in relation to identity, yet reminiscent of the motivations described above. What you consider nice and comfortable becomes part of your constructed identity. This illustrates how ideas of comfort link identity to consumption in the mind of the consumer.

The discussion reported in Box 17 also touched upon a key element in the link between clothes and identity; that of choice. Upon being asked if clothing can have anything to do with identity, respondent 3 in her response makes choice a key link between the two. It is the choice that links the consumption of clothes to the individual and their personality, according to this respondent. This is an interesting response, especially considering it is spontaneous. It reflects the literature on choice biographies and how the consumer can pick and choose from the resource of consumer goods to construct their identity. Although identity is not fully about clothes nor vice versa, as evidenced throughout this study, both are based on a choice made by the individual. Whether the choice is a fully free one, as suggested by the

concept of the empowered consumer, or influenced by context is not certain. Respondent 3 did however portray the choice as a free one, both on the account of choosing your identity and your consumption of clothing. The choice is either just that or the respondent is unaware of any outside influence, a distinction which is hard to identify from this example.

4.3.2. Emotions and extended self

The connection between items of clothing and emotions is interesting in view of links between clothes and identity. The emotional attachment portrayed in Box 18 contributes to the process of including clothes in the consumer's identity, as part of their extended self. Four out of five respondents in focus group 4 also expressed strong emotional attachment to one or more garments, ranging from jumpers to hats, three of them mentioned jackets and one of them a specific brand.

Box 18

Group 3 - sales and transport:

2: *I...I love hoodies and stuff*

3: *I love hoodies and sweatpants (several people laugh)*

5: *My sweatpants, they are important*

R: *Mhm*

5: *They are important in life*

2: *It really is*

Brands were by several respondents in focus group 3 closely associated with identity in terms of self-esteem and feelings of well-being (Box 19). This association is a clear indication of how clothes made part of the consumer's extended self. Not only are brands important for your identity, their role is directly linked to emotions. This not only confirms the existing literature but illustrates how consumer goods are used to fulfil emotional needs. Whether this leads to false satisfaction of those needs by using material goods, or unhappiness based on using consumer goods as a main form of social signifier, is not certain from these examples alone. There are however other examples of the false satisfaction of social needs through consumer goods evident in the results of this study.

Box 19

Group 3 - sales and transport:

1: *Or maybe to impress others*

R: *Mhm*

5: *Or what makes you feel good*

8: *(Interrupts) Or self, or better self-esteem*

4: *(Interrupts) Mhm*

1: *Yes*

4.3.3. First impressions and performed identities

A subject that was repeatedly brought up by the respondents in several groups when asked about links between clothes and identity was first impressions. Several participants in focus group 1 considered clothes to be more important in a first meeting than in interaction with people you already know. They would take more care with their clothes when meeting strangers than what they would wear to school, as the people in school already know their personalities. This ties in with clothes being used for displaying identities. Several of the discussions touched upon the inadequacy of the constructed identity. In some groups the respondents talked about how constructed identities can be misrepresenting. They felt constructed identities can act as a barrier for social interaction, or they only serve their purpose temporarily. The symbolic value of clothing decreases after longer acquaintance. These understandings of identities based on consumer goods can be linked to goods acting as false satisfiers for socially constructed needs, not fulfilling the function intended by the consumer. Respondent 5 in focus group 2 expressed an interesting thought during a discussion about first impressions. The discussion made her think further about how communication through consumption of goods, in this case clothing, might serve as a boundary to other forms of social communication: *[If] I hadn't looked at the clothes I think I might have been, actually been more open to get to know many people I maybe haven't gotten to know.*

The continued discussion surrounding identity and personality in focus group 2 reveals a key insight into the dynamics of clothes in relation to identity. They were asked what clothes say something about if not personality. The first response to this was: *how you like to act in front of others* (respondent 2). The choice of the word “act” here is a telling one, reaffirming the element of performance inherent in the clothes you choose to wear. The views expressed in the group further emphasised how identity and style of clothing are in no way synonymous, although one may be used as an expression and communication of the other. Respondent 4 felt that even though the clothes a person wears does not *necessarily reflect your personality*, it *does say something about you*. What that something is, seemed less easy for the group to dissemble than the fact that symbolism of clothing and personal traits were not always matching. Several respondents in focus group 2 were adamant that boring clothes do not mean a person is boring. “Boring” clothes might hide someone confident or even *crazy*.

Due to a recent media debate at the time of the focus group interviews, group 2 brought up an interesting example of the role of clothes in performing identities; school uniforms (Box 20). The debate on school uniforms provides insight into a way of

understanding the link between clothes and identity by taking away self-expression through clothes and looking at what impact this deprivation has for identity. In this instance the respondent's expression was rather startling, that you *lose your whole identity* by being made to wear uniform clothes. From this isolated perspective, clothes are a very important factor for expressing identity, reflecting the importance of consumer goods for creating identities. The picture is however more complicated than that, as evidenced from both the remainder of the discussion in question and from the rest of the study.

Box 20

Group 2 - study specialisation:

4: Clothes do have a lot to do with identity, I feel, because we had this discussion about whether to start wearing school uniforms

R: Yes

4: And the main argument in that discussion was very much about that, everyone said that, you lose your whole identity, you can't, clothes mean a lot...like [names 5] who says that she judges the first impression, you do do that when you see a person like, yes what is it that he's wearing, it says quite a lot about the person, at least many people think that because nowadays you put a lot of emphasis on what you wear, at least most people do (...)

4: So yes, I think it has a lot to do with identity

3: At the same time...like when you now can say that you judge by people wearing...these and these clothes, eehm, I at least think that a uniform had been...or I don't know. Or that you can sort of judge less as soon as you wear a uniform then everyone is sort of a bit the same.

1: (Interrupts) You are in the same boat

3: Then it's actually, then it actually becomes your personality which counts, then it wouldn't be whether you have the right bag or if you have this or this or this or this. Then it's actually...

5: Because it is

3: ...how you are

There are several examples of uniform clothes coming up during the focus group interviews, without this being associated with loss of identity. Within this discussion, further complexity is unearthed through participant 4 connecting the importance of clothing for identity with first impressions, reiterating how first impressions are considered one of the main social function

connected to clothing for the respondents in this study. Furthermore, the discussion moved from the immediate idea that school uniforms would lead to loss of identity onto a contradictory perspective from one of the other respondents who talked about how a uniform would mean that the personality would then become what counts. This perspective sheds light on how constructed identities can act as a sort of mask. When everyone is *in the same boat*, *who you are* will become evident, suggesting that without the available tools to create and perform your identity through consumer goods, the “real” person becomes evident. The perception of school uniforms depriving the consumer of their identity might also be based on the fact that the uniformity of clothing would be forced on the individual, as opposed to the choice of wearing uniform clothes to display belonging on your own accord.

Providing further insight into constructed identities, focus group 3 described how clothes can portray you as someone other than you are (Box 21).

Box 21

Group 3 – sales and transport:

5: *You can be perceived as someone else*

R: *Yes*

6: *Trough your clothes*

(...)

5: *Through your clothes, and the outside. But then you are someone else...deep inside*

R: *Mhm*

6: *For example like punkrockers and stuff who look really scary, they can be*

4: *(Interrupts) It might be that they are*

3: *(Interrupts) Might be nice and*

6: *Really nice and really funny and*

R: *Mhm*

6: *But you just don't see beyond...the way they...dress...or how they display themselves kind of*

The first sentence from this excerpt is interesting for our understanding of how clothes may be used to create identities. Participant 5 said clothes mean *you can be perceived as someone else*, not a particular version of yourself, but someone else entirely, mirroring ideas of the choice available for consumers to create multiple identities. The quote also displays that the participant assumes that there is a “real” self underneath the display, similar to focus group 2 above. The group brought up *punkrockers* who look *scary* as an example, saying that they

might be *nice* and *funny* beneath the exterior. The last sentence expressed by participant 6 shows that the participant herself is aware of clothing as a conscious, outward display.

Focus group 3 took the link between identity and consumption even further down the route of how clothes can misrepresent identity (Box 22). In this group the discussion about identity very quickly moved on to talk about how clothes can help you hide. Yet again, this indicates an understanding of the

Box 22

Group 3 - sales and transport:

4: *I think you can...hide as well*

6: *(Interrupts) You can hide as well*

(...)

5: *With the clothes you wear, because you really want to appear...*

6: *Something you are not*

social function of clothes as being used for creating identities, but in this case identities that are hiding rather than revealing something. It makes it apparent that the respondents might be aware of the fluidity of the projected self, as they so readily described this phenomenon. This draws into question the effectiveness of clothing for communicating identities, at least in certain circumstances.

4.3.4. Clothes and character traits

The respondents in group 2 use another example to illustrate how first impressions based on clothing does not necessarily match up to later experience (Box 23). In this example clothes symbolise certain character traits. They discuss three teaching interns that have been in their class, and how their clothes gave almost the opposite first impression from the personalities they got to know over time. An interesting aspect of the discussion is how the people with the *nice* or *better* style of clothing are assumed to be good teachers or *cool* people based on their style of clothing. The respondents assume a direct link between style of clothing and ability as a teacher. Ability to conform to clothing norms and interpret current fashion is, at least on the surface, a different skillset than teaching subjects in a school setting. That the respondents are later surprised that a pretty girl with nice clothes is not a good teacher says a lot about how closely linked perceptions of identity are with consumption of clothing, at least in the case of first impressions.

Another conclusion they draw from this example is that the interns who care less about their clothes are more confident in themselves. This indirectly suggests that in this group of consumers, relying on goods to display identity is associated with low self-esteem. This supports theories of how high emphasis on material goods for satisfying social functions

may lead to false satisfaction. In this example the social function intended, to display a certain identity through consumer goods, is not satisfied by the consumer goods, as the respondents stopped reading the identity projected through clothing after some time had passed.

Box 23

Group 2 - study specialisation:

2: *Yes, let's look at the three students in our class then. It's a good example because then you often judge based on clothes and what they're like because they didn't talk so much you know. But then I really thought that that one guy was pretty, he had a lot better style than the other guy, but the other guy was really cooler (5: Yes), as I got to know him (...)*

5: *It's actually, it's a really good example because you have three people (2: Yes) who are totally different, (2: Yes) and that one girl is incredibly pretty and she has a very nice style of clothes, at least I think so (1: Yes, incredibly pretty), but she's not a good teacher, she speaks so quietly*

3: *(Interrupts) She's so pretty*

5: *And then that guy who actually looks kind of strange and weird, he has like that weird beard and like sort of band t-shirts and he is incredible good at speaking to us and is a little more...*

(...)

5: *He's the one who sort of gives the most of himself*

2: *(Interrupts) He has kind of a sloppy style as well right*

5: *So there it was actually, I also noticed that I had a completely different impression of them than what I got when they started talking*

1: *(Interrupts) It's oft, it's often like that if a person wears a bit like no...you can see that he hasn't spent a lot of time getting dressed so it might be they are more comfortable with themselves*

2: *Yes, that's true*

1: *For example that they are...*

5: *Yes*

2: *That they are a bit more confident in themselves*

(...)

1: *They are a bit more laid-back*

Focus group 2 also touched upon what clothing would portray the right personal characteristics appropriate for the situation (Box 24). They drew a direct line between wearing something *classy*, and representing yourself as a *structured* person.

Box 24

Group 2 - study specialisation:

5: *We would do that if we were going to a job interview, worn something a bit simple, maybe a bit classy, that is represented ourselves like a...well I don't really know*

4: *A structured person, someone who doesn't...*

5: *Yes, and we thought that you would be able to see that from our clothes*

This association demonstrates how certain types of clothing are linked directly with certain personality attributes, along with providing insight into the role clothes play in building an identity, and the symbolic properties of the clothes. It also provides insight into how these associations are part of labelling these types of clothing as appropriate for a certain social situation, in this case a job interview. I will get back to clothes as appropriate for different situations shortly. The excerpt demonstrates, yet again, the respondents' awareness of how clothes play an integral part in the presentation of yourself to society.

One of the respondents in group 4 brought up a direct link between clothing style and interests when discussing the style of dancers. This link allows for further understanding the relationship between clothing and expressions of identity. The clothes are not merely symbols to communicate personal preferences, but also personal interests. The combination of garments worn thus identifies the individual as part of a group, which in turn expresses an interest. This is not the only example of associating styles of clothing with personal interests, focus groups 1 and 4 both mentioned *skaters* as a distinct group, and group 3 *punkrockers*, as seen above.

4.3.5. Agency and structure in identity expressions

Respondent 4 in group 1 touched upon the fluidity and changing nature of clothing styles (Box 25). This becomes evident through her thinking there might always be *something else that fits better*, which also implies the multitude of choices to navigate. She considered her own choices to be arbitrary, she just takes *different stuff*, which attests to the willingness of young consumers to experiment with their styles.

This communication can also portray a different view of how personal style is influenced. The respondent said that *it just changes, as new collections come along*, expressing an understanding of style as something that changes on its own, passively influenced by the introduction of new collections. This mirrors

Box 25

Group 1 - tourism services:

R: When did you find your style?

4: Don't think I have found it yet (several people laugh)

I: No

4: Just take different stuff

(...)

4: I think it just changes, as new collections come along

R: Okay

4: Not all the clothes are as nice, there might be something else that fits better

ideas of the passive consumer, locked in a system over which s/he has no control. From this perspective, this consumer's identity as expressed through clothing style has already been internalised. She no longer knows why she chooses *different stuff*, she may well be shopping for several overlapping identities, monitoring the different ones, seeing if something *fits better*, as a matter of habit.

Whether this excerpt shows us a consumer willing to experiment with her identity among a multitude of choices or whether she is solely adhering to structural influence is difficult to say. The theory on consumption and identity provides different ways of interpretation. Both may in fact be equally valid, she may be experimenting within the boundaries of social context. This provides us with yet another window into the tension between structure and agency when clothes are used for displaying identities. It also demonstrates the difficulty for the consumer in understanding and navigating this tension. In this specific case the respondent seems unaware of it altogether.

4.3.6. Identities and context

The importance of social feedback for individual identities is evident from the experience participant 4 in focus group 2 described as an example of not being aware of others' perception of her style of clothing (Box 26). She claimed she did not feel she had a style and was surprised to find she had one day violated it. When she wore a jumper to school that was considered to be different from her usual style, the people in her class all reacted.

Box 26

Group 2 - study specialisation:

4: *Yes, I'm like, once I, I don't even think I really notice what kind of style I have, because you think you have one yourself, like a style, but I don't think, don't think I have a particular style, or, apparently, because there was one time I came to school in one of those jumpers with, it's been very "in" before, one of those, which has a shirt underneath and then a sort of jumper over*

3: *Yes that's true*

4: *So I showed up and it was like WOW when I entered the classroom, what are you wearing (several people laugh), and that is really nice and you look really adult and stuff like that and I just...I have never dared wear it again (everybody laughs), I got like eighteen compliments, like...*

5: *Yes I remember that*

4: *It was totally extreme*

5: *I actually remember that*

4: *Because it was like, they were very nice comments, it was very much like oh how nice you look and how grown up you look and stuff*

5: *(Interrupts) But I was...*

4: *And I just thought like how ugly am I really normally (everybody laughs)*

In this case the reactions were all good, but the respondent still did not dare wear that jumper again, as the reactions were intense and she felt they were also a comment on what she usually wore. This illustrates that consumption choices of clothing are subject to group scrutiny, leading to reactions if you change your style abruptly. Individual choice is thus governed by structural responses. It also raises questions of the possibility of building several identities within one social context, in this case the school.

4.3.7. Different situations – different identities

Using consumption to display identity is clearly influenced by context in the examples below. Here it becomes apparent that different social situations call for different clothing, showing how the individual's expression is still based on agency within structure. The topic of different clothes for different situations is an interesting one in terms of how clothes play a role in creating identities suited to different contexts. In the examples below, the need for

modification according to situation is based on how many people will be there, and what activity is taking place, as seen in Box 27.

Box 27

Group 1 - tourism services:

R: Do you feel you feel more comfortable wearing different clothes in different situations?

2: Yes

(...)

R: I'm thinking about for example if you're in school or if you are out?

1: Yes, it's two different things for me. If I'm at school I can maybe, how should I put it, care less about what I am wearing, but if I'm going out and...let's say out to eat or to a birthday or party or whatever it is I am doing I might dress up a bit nicer, quite a lot nicer than what I do at school

R: Mhm. What does nicer mean?

(...)

4: Care a bit more about what one is wearing...maybe. Because in school you can just put it on and then just sit there (everyone laughs), but if you are going out there are sort of more people who will see you and stuff. Yes.

Respondent 1 said that if she was to go to a party she would *try a bit*, indicating that effort is necessary to fulfil the normative expectations of clothing for this particular situation.

All the groups mentioned that different situations call for different clothes. Focus groups 3 responded positively when asked whether this was the case. They also all agreed that what they would wear at school was different from other situations. Several respondents in group 1 clarified why the clothing norms are different in school and in other situations, it was because of what kind of people you see. These respondents agreed that seeing *the same old faces* (participant 1) was different from situations when from when you might meet strangers. The people they meet at school already have an impression of them, and what they wear to school was thus of less consequence. This of course relates to how clothing serves to provide first impressions as discussed above. Some of the respondents in focus group 2 described how they would put more effort into their clothes if they were meeting old friends, than the friends they see every day. Respondent 3 felt that meeting old friends is a social situation which requires days of planning. She also said she would dress more carefully when going to school than she would if she was with her two closest friends only. The different levels of effort involved in different social situations, or indeed interaction with different groups of friends, as

described by respondent 3, indicates that norms provide the consumer with guidelines to navigate different social situations.

In reference to different situations, respondent 4 in group 2 shared a story about her family at a Christmas party, and she expressed shock when faced with a cousin who had dressed totally differently from her in this specific situation: *I had dressed completely differently from what I would have done if I was in a social setting with friends*, whereas her cousin had dressed more for a situation where she was out on the town with her friends. In the mind of the respondent the norm for what to wear at a family gathering was *decent*. Her cousin, however, wore an *extreme dress*. Respondent 2 had a different perspective on this situation; he said *you don't have anything to prove with family members*, indicating that the opposite might be true in other situations. It also indicates that one of the ways to “prove” yourself in a social situation is to don the right clothes.

4.3.8. Group identity and individual identity

When it comes to the social nature of identities, some of the participants of group 1 agreed that group identity was more important than personal identity when it came to clothes. Some members did however think that dressing the same as your group was *not so cool* and *a bit weird*, echoing the sentiments of focus group 2 above. Although the participants did not reflect directly on the social nature of individual identities, this relationship became more evident through the discussion. They touched upon the push and pull between individuality and belonging when it comes to identity creation as the discussion progressed. Participant 2 expressed how even if people were dressed the same on the surface, the shoes for example did not have to be the same shoe, showing individuality within a group. The group expressed agreement that some group identities allowed for more individuality within the group identity, for example skaters. One of the participants in focus group 4 described skaters like this: *It's like big DC shoes, and like saggy, bit t-shirts, and baggy trousers, that's typical skater look* (participant 5, group 4). Focus group 1 also discussed that skaters all dress the same, but participant 4 still felt they wear a lot of different colours and *everyone is sort of independent from the others* (participant 4, group 1). The participant expressed how it was easier to *see each separate person* in this group than in others.

It is evident that participants both groups 1 and 2 are torn between the strangeness of uniform trends and the room for individual expression within them. Immediately after the question of whether group identities are more important than individual ones the reaction in group 1 is that pronounced group uniformity is a strange phenomenon. Several participants in

group 2 expressed repeatedly that they found uniformity in clothing hard to understand. The complexity of navigating seemingly contradictory group and individual expressions comes to the forefront in these discussions.

4.3.9. Positive and negative views on outside affirmation of identity

During the interviews the groups expressed different opinions on social affirmation of expressions of identity through clothing. In group 3 respondent 5 said that most of the clothes she buys are clothes she has seen on someone else and liked. If others wear the same clothes as her, she said she takes this as a compliment. In addition she appreciates others wearing clothes she thinks are nice. These feelings have bearing on the process of trend creation. She described how she buys most her clothes because she has seen them on someone else. This is a strong statement in terms of the importance of both core groups and the larger social context. She openly acknowledged the influence of her peers on her consumption choices, and considered it to be positive. Her outlook on being influenced by others and influencing others is inherently based on her appreciation of the affirmation of those around her. This is also the case if someone unknowingly buys the exact same garment. She considered this a pleasant surprise, or a confirmation of her taste, whereas others in this group had a more negative outlook on wearing the exact same outfit as another person. Respondent 5 also expressed her role in group affirmation of styles of clothing; she described how it is nice that her friends wear something that she herself likes. This reflection thus goes beyond her being influenced by others and extends to her awareness of being an influence herself. Overall, the example shows a consumer aware of being an influence as well as being influenced, in a positive way. It also shows, quite clearly, one way individuals and groups co-create meanings, by constantly influencing each other's consumption choices and identity expressions.

Other people in the same group had different thoughts on sharing social identities through clothing. Participant 1 in focus group 3 talked about how she feels about people wearing the same clothes as her. She expressed her preference for ordering clothes from the internet in order to find garments that are less likely to be worn by others. She said she does not *like that a person wears what I wear*, and that she would find it embarrassing. For this participant it is clearly important that she is able to show her individuality through clothes, which can be seen as a perception of individual autonomy. This is a possible result of the larger cultural discourse of the individual as unit of analysis. At the same time her wish to wear different clothes from those around her is also an expression of not wanting to break certain social norms. Part of her motivation for not wanting to wear the same as others is that

it's a bit embarrassing, indicating that the reactions from her peer group is important, and that there are norms in place dictating that wearing the same garment elicits negative reactions. This is a very good example of the complexity surrounding consumption of clothes, and the theoretically conflicting motivations which may co-exist quite well in the mind of the individual. The motivations listed above are part of shaping this participant's patterns of consumption; she prefers ordering clothes online based on these social considerations. This shows how this participants' wish to display individual agency within a structural context influences her patterns and practices of consumption

4.3.10. Standing out and blending in

Respondent 3 in group 2 brought out another example of individuality within specific styles of clothing worn by a group she was a member of in lower secondary school (Box 28).

Box 28

Group 2 - study specialisation:

3: And everyone had one like it, everyone had the same bag, only different colours, and I remember that the girls in school were like, in our group of friends that is, everyone had to have the same sunglasses but no-one was allowed to have the same colour, so I was kind of given red (several people laugh) and that was very...

R: (Interrupts) Who was it that decided?

3: ...extreme. No it was kind of the three girls who decided (several people laugh)

1: The cool ones

3: Yes the coolest in the gang, but, god...it's not like that now, but then I was a young, insecure...

She described how everyone would wear the same thing, for example the same bag, only different colours. She went on to talk about sunglasses and how in her group of friends, everyone *had* to have the same ones. This formulation is reminiscent of strong influences or pressures which the individual has no control over, nor perhaps the group. Consequently she described a rather hierarchical structure within the group, where the “leaders” were the ones who designated colour to different people. It is also interesting that the difference in colour was described as a necessity. Although it was clearly important to have the same kind of glasses as a signifier of group belonging, the individual “expression”, voluntary or not, is an important part of the group identification. This marks how the perception of individuality is nonetheless very important in group dynamics, and a good example of agency within

structure, where the individuals are aware of both. The group's reaction to the statement of colours of sunglasses being designated also tells its own story. Laughter erupted at the end of both the statements about the designation and about who decided who got to wear which colour. The laughter is a sign of the ridiculousness of such behaviour, as perceived by this group, and how they want to be perceived. They do not want to acknowledge the group identity, even though it is clearly there.

In both focus groups 1 and 3, colours were brought up as an example of personal style and became key in discussions about blending in and standing out. In focus group 1, respondent 5 was more eager to assert his individuality, to *get noticed a bit* by wearing colours, while most of the other respondents disagreed and expressed their preference for darker colours. When further prompted about their preference, some of the underlying reasons came to light. Respondent 4 attached an adjective to the darker colours, *neutral*, and presented a specific motivation, that of a wish to *blend into the crowd* and *not stand out so much*. Here the motivation is clearly to seek social confirmation by doing as others do and choosing colours for her clothing that are more likely to be accepted by the largest number of people, in the specific cultural context around her, rather than asserting her individuality. The respondents in focus group 3 had very similar opinions to those in focus group 1 when it came to colour choices for clothes. Subtlety in colours was listed as a preference by respondent 5: *I'm more about subtle tones, black, white, beige, grey*. Several of the respondents focused on what they do not prefer, that is bright colours, or *flashy* colours such as orange. Respondent 6 pointed out that everyone in the group was wearing dark colours at the time of the group discussion, *there's no one here who wears bright*. Although this is slim grounds for any form of generalisation, the discussion itself supports the observation in saying that dark or light colours are a general preference of these particular groups. This preference exhibits a wish to blend that is stronger than the wish to stand out, at least as far as colours go. Interestingly, several of the participants who said they prefer colours that do not stand out were adamant that they do not care what other people think in relation to their consumption choices.

In Box 29 we find another very straightforward example of group identity and group identification, the former clearly delineated and easily recognised by members of the group. At the same time the style associated with this group of dancers, *streetwear*, is, according to respondent 2 in group 4, also defined by the emphasis put on individual expression within the group setting. There is an interesting sense of self-contradiction between the emphasis on *what expresses you*, and *we have almost the same kind of style*. It is unclear whether the term unique refers to individuals or the group, but the contradiction of the quotes still illustrates a

tension between wanting to belong to the group and wanting to stand out, which in the mind of the respondent does not seem to be a problematic contradiction.

Box 29

Group 4 - sales and service:

R: But like you also talked about, as dancers you might wear, maybe one type of clothing?

2: We wear a lot like streetwear, I don't know

(...)

2: And we try to be...unique, to sort of

(...)

2: Not follow the mainstream

R: Mhm

2: Not do what everyone does, or wear what everyone wears, but wear what you want, what expresses you. For example some people wear like chains, I don't know

R: Mhm

2: I have them, but they're at home. I don't know, some wear bucket hats, that fisherman's hat, mmm, some wear bandana, I don't know

R: So it's like you can sort of recognise people who have the same interest as you from their clothes?

2: Yes, we have almost the same kind of style

The discussion also touched upon the importance of symbolism for choice of consumer goods. In this case the bucket hat serves as a symbol of the group, easily recognisable, but laden with meaning, past and present. It identifies the group, it symbolises their philosophy when it comes to clothing, it links them to their interest in dancing, and it carries with it meaning from the use it had originally. The symbolism of this particular garment thus goes beyond group identification and gives us insight into the complex social functions that influence consumer motivations.

Expressing how their clothes reflect their own identity seemed a tricky exercise for all the groups. In focus group 2, one of them was described as *normal*, or rather having a normal style of clothing. Normal is a description that is difficult to use for analysis of clothing practices, I take it in this context to mean she does not specifically stand out. This is an example of a strong normative aspect of clothing, the clothes that allow you to blend in. The group concluded that clothes worn by many can hardly say anything about personality; *wearing jeans and a jumper like so many others...that is very difficult to, I don't know how*

jeans and a jumper reflects your identity (participant 3, group 2). This indicates that the more proliferated the clothes, the less they are able to communicate individual identity for the wearer. This may mean that if clothes are proliferated they lose some of their symbolic or communicational value. It may also mean that the symbolic value of the clothing is to communicate that you blend in. Respondent 5 in focus group 2 used Acne scarves as an example of just this; she described them as being worn by those who *have a strong need to be like everyone else*.

All the above examples illustrate a complex relationship between individual and group identities, and how the consumers might be confused regarding how to navigate this relationship.

4.3.11. Conspicuous consumption

The tension in the relationship between individual and social self is present throughout this study and is in focus also when the respondents were discussing different ways of displaying status and wealth. One of the important findings of this study is the role of brands, not only as a resource for displaying identities, but as a symbol of wealth. Some respondents in group 1 considered brands to symbolise higher monetary value. Participant number 5 in this group felt that the people wearing brands *want to demonstrate that...I have a lot of money*, and that they show their wealth by *having a high level of consumption*. In focus group 2, respondent 2 referred to expensive jackets as making someone *not better directly, but maybe indirectly*, because the person *might be a bit richer or might have a bit more money*. He also considered this association to be an *automatic thought*, suggesting the connection between brand and money to stretch beyond him specifically. The direct link displayed between the characteristic “better” and “richer” is also telling of the social value this respondent places on branded clothing. Similarly, respondent 5 in focus group 2 considered the status of brands to be directly linked to their price. Using brands to symbolise class division as theorised by Veblen seems from this to still be a motivation for conspicuous consumption of brands today. Displaying wealth through consumption is however not the only function of branded clothing in the mind of the respondents in this study. Participant 5 in group 2 countered the discussion about expensive clothing by claiming that she *wouldn't have considered it to be about the money, it is more about the status the clothes*. Participant 1 in group 1 also considered status to be the main motivation for wearing branded clothes. Here a more nuanced picture emerges, linking the symbolic value of branded clothes to status rather than wealth, although the former might be a result of the latter.

When group 3 were discussing brands, respondent 5 used an example providing further insight into the relationship between wealth and conspicuous consumption. She felt that one would feel more brand pressure if your parents cared about brands. She also mentioned that it would matter what kind of job your parents have, *if they can actually afford it*. The parental influence on brand consumption is in this case two-fold. One aspect is the influence on preference of branded clothing coming from the consumer's parents. The second aspect is the structural impact of income on ability to buy certain types of clothes, which in turn refers back to ideas of class and wealth in relation to identity in consumption. The use of brands is definitely an example of conspicuous consumption, as the display of the brand aims at being visible and recognisable, although the example here is based on the means to consume conspicuously, rather than classic conspicuous consumption theories. The ability to purchase certain status clothes does not necessarily mean the goal of conspicuous consumption is to display class.

Several respondents in different groups described brands as a way of expressing autonomy and individuality. In this case the brands allowed the wearer not mainly to display wealth, but the higher prices of the branded clothing allowed access to individual expression by exclusion. This is an interesting example of conspicuous consumption to display class, but through a more indirect route. It is not the class itself that is expressed; rather a certain class has more access to unique individual expression through clothing in the eyes of some of the participants. This fits with the concept of conspicuous consumption as a way to express identity rather than class. In the box below (Box 30) respondent 5 in group 3 considered buying branded, and implicitly expensive, clothes as a way to emphasise her individuality. She felt purchasing expensive clothing might make it less likely that others will be able to afford the same thing.⁸ Again the respondent considers expensive garments to be a way to express individuality through clothing. The high price of the clothing is a means to an end. The same respondent also expressed some, at least theoretically, conflicting attitudes regarding her individuality conveyed through dress. She said she wants to have *some of it a bit to myself*, but at the same time she does not *care if someone else has it*. Again there is tension evident in the respondent's announcement, between appearing unconcerned and wanting to stand out enough to spend a lot of money to do it. The latter is however confirmed by acts of consumption, according to the respondent herself.

⁸ This perspective is interesting in relation to the discussion in Box 32, where the group describes how even the most expensive brands are becoming mainstream.

Box 30

Group 3 - sales and transport:

5: *But it is fun if...that you have something of your own which no-one else has*

3, 4: *(Simultaneously) Mhm*

5: *That's also why you...think I buy some brands sometimes*

4: *Mhm*

5: *Because it's not certain that everyone can afford it*

R: *Mhm*

6: *That's true*

4: *That sounds...*

5: *(Interrupts) It sounds very superficial to just, oh, must have brands, but I don't have to but...I like it, and it's how I...And then others might not be able to afford it, then I can maybe have some of it a bit to myself, but I don't care if someone else has it*

Focus group 2 talked a lot about what brands did to change the symbolic meaning of hooded sweatshirts, *hoodies*. Sweatshirts and sweatpants were garments that came up often. They are distinct in the sense that they were used as an example to illustrate both exclusive styles, particularly in relation to brands, and “normal” or careless style. Participant 2 in group 2 described how hoodies with a brand were different from those without. A *nice* hoodie is the same as a branded hoodie, according to this respondent. Hoodies without brands were a different matter: *if I wear a totally normal grey hoodie, I just look really lazy*. The lack of a brand is associated with laziness, attributing the wearer with negative personal characteristics. The social meaning of the hoodie is in this example completely altered from the symbolism of the brand, even though the garment is otherwise the same. This perception of branded clothing became reinforced later in a discussion had by the same group. The group was talking about a classmate, using his clothing style of wearing sweatpants and sweatshirts every day as an example of a careless style. They were asked if it would have made a difference to find out that the clothes he wore were branded, but not visibly so. Respondent 1's initial reaction was that it would not make a difference, although on further reflection the majority of the group agreed that branded clothes, even with smaller brands, *look cooler* (respondent 4). In the mind of respondent 2 in this group, the symbolism of brands would act as a comforting buffer or guard against social scrutiny: *they feel a bit more comfortable having a brand on their back or chest...instead of buying clothes from H&M for example*. From this perspective buying clothes from cheaper stores such as H&M does not elicit the

same psychological comfort as a visible symbol of status on the clothes. This is a good example of the importance of the symbolism inherent in brands and its consequence for potential consumer motivations. It also provides insight into the social function of such symbols. From the point of view of this young consumer, brands represent a safeguard in social interaction by communicating his status. Adding further nuances to the symbolism of brands is the understanding that brands and status are not necessarily synonymous. Some have high status and some not, according to respondent 3 in focus group 3.

4.3.12. Popular/ unique

Winter coats or jackets seem to be a sort of flagship garment for purchases that are related to status, according to the respondents in this study. They are recurrent in several discussions, and the same brands were often mentioned. Respondent 2 in group 2 remarked on this, saying that the trends of winter jackets have had very little variation. The same brands of jackets were mentioned by groups 2 and 3, and described in group 4. In group 4, three of the respondents immediately answered *coat* when asked what their most expensive garment was. An example of the brands of jackets mentioned most often can be seen in Box 31 in a discussion in group 2.

Box 31

Group 2 - study specialisation:

4: *...that fur, like Woolwich, Parajumper or Canada Goose has been a bit like that is something you are supposed to have because...*

2: *(Interrupts) Yes it gets like that*

4: *...everyone has one, but I, who first of all is pretty against fur and who doesn't want to spend eight thousand on a jacket has been a bit like, yes everyone has one and I have thought it's been a bit weird, but it's the way it's been. It's not like I have felt the pressure, but I might have thought it was a bit...I don't know, it might be I would have thought it was cooler to have a jacket like that, but it's sort of, I don't know how to explain it*

Respondent 4 in this group considered these brands, jackets which have a fur lining on the hood, to be *something you are supposed to have*, and the reason for this she claimed was that *everyone has one*, displaying the reproducing nature of trends through social affirmation. Personally she claimed she does not want a jacket like that, and that she finds it *weird* that *everyone* does. The reasons for this she listed as being her aversion to fur and the high price of the jacket, eight thousand Norwegian kroner. She also claimed she does not feel the pressure,

but that it was hard to explain how these jackets were *cooler*. The way she described this clothing norm sheds light on the specificity of what garment was necessary to adhere to it. It is an established norm, which neither she nor respondent 2 could explain the origins of. This is yet another example of how the internalised nature of the norm makes consumption choices, in this case the choice of winter jackets, easy to navigate. The most interesting aspect of this pervasive norm to buy a specific winter coat is that the garment seems to be simultaneously considered a status symbol but also worn by “everyone”.

The discussion in Box 32 described a process of how certain garments with a high profile linked to high status moves from being considered desirable to becoming too *normal* to maintain the same symbolic status value. The price of goods has in other examples above been associated with high social status. In this case, despite the price being very high, the good has still become *normal*, and *everyone has it*. Even though the monetary value of the Louis Vitton bag in question is high, the symbolic value of the bag has dropped low, as described by respondent 2.

Box 32

Group 2 - study specialisation:

2: *What I think is a bit crazy is that those Louis Vitton bags that cost like ten thousand and stuff have become like totally normal*

4: *Yes*

R: *Mhm*

4: *Normal thing*

2: *That the value has dropped so low sort of*

R: *Mhm*

2: *When everyone has it, then it isn't that at all*

One of the examples brought up by focus group 2 is a recent trend to wear a particular scarf by the brand Acne. Respondent 4 said she would not mind buying such a scarf, but as they have become worn by *everyone* she no longer considered it. In this case the popularity of the garment in question has, far from enticing this particular consumer to buy the product, rather made her reluctant to buy it. The tenuous relationship between individual expression and group belonging is again displayed.

Focus group 4 discussed the motivations for buying specific popular coats, see Box 33. This discussion gives us a deeper comprehension of the reasoning behind consumption of an expensive status garment worn by “everyone”. The group were hard pressed to explain

why the high price of the jackets in question is accepted as a must-have in their social environment. Respondent 4 felt it had to do with the fur lining on the hood, but was again unsure about why the fur was a necessary feature of the jacket. The reasoning that the fur is there for warmth was challenged by two of the respondents. In the end, respondent 4's comment about status seems to be the most convincing motivation for buying this garment, as the more practical reasons suggested were considered unconvincing by the group members.

Box 33

Group 4 - sales and service:

R: Mhm. Why are the coats so expensive?

4: Ehm, fur and stuff costs a lot

R: Why does it have fur on it? (Several people laugh)

4: Good question really

2: (Interrupts) Because it's warm

4: It's, it's a typical status buy to buy a coat like that

R: Yes

3: It's apparently a fur coat, it's pretty warm

(...)

4: (Interrupts) But when you have fur lining on the hood, that doesn't make any difference really

3: (Interrupts) But really, it makes you really comfortable

2: (Interrupts) Yes, I agree, I feel, I feel it doesn't help

4: No that's true

4.3.13. Conspicuous consumption related to place

The difference in styles between parts of the city came up repeatedly, often as a description of a style of clothing. Focus group 1 used "West" as a style, but also as an identity, to "be West". To be West was by the participants of focus 1 associated with being posh, which shows the association between consumption practices and distinction of class. The same group also felt people from the West side were more *fixed about what to wear* (respondent 4). This is carried through in the discussion had by group 4. Respondent 3 in this group gave a lengthy description of the differences between West and East styles of clothing. The group described West side style in almost the same way as focus group 1 described what people from study specialisation wears, using "waffle jackets" as an example. This style thus seems to have

strong signal effect and is easily recognisable. It was further described as *classy* and including brands. The East side style was described as more *chilled out* including garments such as hoodies and sweatshirts, and not *about brands*. The styles are described as *classy* and *swag* respectively, both value-laden, descriptive words that point towards a certain lifestyle in addition to clothing style. When discussing certain chains of clothing shops, *Cubus and BikBok and all that*, respondent 3 in focus group 4 described their clothes as having the same style as *West side people*, but not with the same precise garments. This is another example illustrating how the clothing style West is determined by brand. The clothes in other shops have a likeness in style, but lack the right label.

Donning the West style, however, does not mean you necessarily are from the West side of the city. Through the description of generic East and West side styles, the groups illustrate how the style is not necessarily about the place anymore. It has become a description and style no longer dependent on where in the city you are from. The association with the place, or rather the side of town, is carried with the style wherever it goes. Nydalen upper secondary school is an example of the mobility of these styles, the participants in several groups said they felt the styles were mixed at the school.

Some respondents in group 4 said that although this is what it used to mean, there is no longer a direct link between this style and the geographical denomination of it. The style West is, according to them, moving East in the city, as well as spreading.

Box 34

Group 4 - sales and service:

R: So do you notice that people who wear West side style clothing are often from the West side? Or is that not necessary?

(...)

4: It started like that, but now many have, now everyone tries to wear it, so it's not special anymore, to wear Polo and stuff I think, now anyone can wear it, before it was only the people from the West side

R: Mhm

4: And now the people from the East side have jumped on the bandwagon. I think at least

In focus group 1, the participants did not fully agree on whether people can be identified as coming from East or West Oslo according to their clothing style. Participant 1 felt you could tell by the clothes where people are from, whereas respondent 3 felt the geographical divide was no longer apparent, only the difference in clothing style. The wording used by respondent

3 when she described this process is telling. She described how *everyone* in a specific Eastern part of Oslo *are West now*, suggesting that the consumers in East Oslo have made the West clothing style part of their extended selves, it has become part of them. The style is thus removed from its geographical origin and has been fully internalised elsewhere.

Box 35

Group 1 - tourism services:

1: I think it also means a lot where in the city you're from.

(...)

R: Do you feel you can tell from looking at people?

3: No, not any more, it's not like that anymore. I live at [names Eastern part of Oslo] and everyone there are West now. Or yes...

1: But I mean the difference between East and West

3: But what I mean is there isn't as much...anymore, not anymore

The spread of the style means it is no longer a “special”, style of clothing reserved for a more privileged West end population. By this description the people of the East end have had something to do with that by choosing to *jump on the bandwagon* according to group 4, moving conspicuous consumption from one group to another, or from a higher class to the masses. The move also represents another example of how groups, rather than classes, are what is being distinguished. The excerpts above also illustrate some of the complexity of identification of groups according to place and style. The focus on how the identifiable East/West divide is changing reveals how these categories are changeable and in flux.

4.4. Consumption of clothing

The three main findings of this study related specifically to consumption of clothing were issues of difference in gender when it comes to motivations for consumption, newness of clothing, and consumption as an activity in its own right.

4.4.1. Gender and clothing

Certain consumption theory authors claim that consumption of clothing is more important to women. Several discussions touched on different attitudes between men and women when it came to caring about style, to what degree they care, and what buying patterns they have. A lot of opinions were expressed on the difference between the genders. For example, one of the respondents in

Box 36

Group 4 - sales and service:

3: *To be honest, girls shop more than boys*

R: *Mhm*

3: *It's, it's kind of, it's, it's a set response... it's an obvious answer*

group 4 was adamant that women care more about clothes, and shop more than them. Interestingly this opinion was expressed in a group dominated by men who had as much interest in and opinions on clothing as the women in other groups. What comes to light in this excerpt is the discursive aspects of gender and clothing in this cultural setting, *it's a set response* as respondent 3 expressed it. Although Hansen (2004) claims that female consumers are more into fashion, the results of this study on that subject are therefore inconclusive. What did emerge was complexity of conflicting attitudes on the subject, also evident through the interaction within the group. Several comments were made between male respondents on their interest in clothes or style, sometimes referring to a *girly* way of speaking or thinking, particularly in group 2. The participation in the discussion and the interests and opinions did not differ greatly between men and women in subject matter. When directly asked about whether men and women express different things through clothes, the participants in focus group 1 (Box 37), were hard pressed to describe the difference. Not being able to express the difference is again example of how these things have become internalised. As the discussion went on however, a difference in clothes preference emerged between male and female. The respondents emphasised the tightness of clothes as the largest difference in men's and women's clothing. Women were mentioned to wear more fitted and tight clothes, men more baggy.

Another form of co-production evident here is the visual co-production of meaning brought on by the interaction between bodies and clothes, meshing the physical and symbolical. Whether the difference between the genders, although physical, is the reason for the difference in clothing described here is hard to tell. The description given by the participants gives no reason for this difference, physical or social. The reasons for the difference in clothing norms for genders thus seems to be hidden to the respondents, yet

another example of an internalised practice with impacts on consumer patterns which goes unquestioned by the consumers.

Box 37

Group 1 - tourism services:

R: Do you think there's a big difference between what boys and girls try to express through clothes?

3: Yes

2: Yes

3: I think so

R: What are the differences? (Everybody laughs)

3: I have no idea. It's just the sort of thing you can see

R: mhm

3: Or it isn't like that for everyone... or I don't know, it's not like, all boys don't wear the same or all girls don't wear the same

(...)

R: What is a boy sweater?

1: I don't know, what is a boy sweater? (Everybody laughs)

1: What is it sort of, I don't know

3: It might be a bit more, I don't know, a bit more baggy

2: (interrupting) Yes they are a bit big

3: Not tight-fitting and stuff

4.4.2. Newness

Newness came up as a potential important motivation for turnover of clothes in two of the focus groups. In focus group 4 it came up when the group was discussing how often they went clothes shopping, and participant 3 discussed the topic at length (Box 38). Implicit in this excerpt is the idea that you need to be updated; as an individual you need to be up to speed as far as clothes and style are concerned. Respondent 3 referred to periods where he feels *like I don't have clothes*, in reference to a psychological need for new clothing, rather than a practical one. He also talked about being bored of his clothes as a motivation to buy new ones. Here it is clear that the clothes are not physically unusable, but socially or psychologically problematic.

Box 38

Group 4 - sales and service:

3: *Ehm, to be honest, for my part, it's like, there's a period where I feel like I don't have clothes I, or like if I get bored of my clothes*

R: *Mhm*

3: *Then it's like I don't want to wear those trousers or that jumpers, then I feel that I need a new one... and then it's like a period comes where I buy new clothes. And then it's like also when winter comes you buy new clothes. And the transition to summer, you don't want to wear what you wore like last year*

R: *Mhm*

3: *You kind of have to have a bit, let's say, new, or how the new style is. You kind of follow, or nowadays, all young people nowadays follow the style, how the style is*

The respondent also listed new seasons as a motivation for buying new clothes. There is a practical aspect embedded in the idea of seasonal turnover, reminiscent of the practical aspects of physically growing in adolescence, as discussed above. The motivation expressed behind a wish to buy new clothes for summer is, however, seemingly unrelated to practical needs of seasonal change, as the respondent expressed it as a want. It is a socially constructed need to follow the *new style*, and thus high turnover of consumption of clothing can be said to be mainly influenced by norms, rather than practical needs. The last sentence expressed by the respondent gives full insight into the social aspect of the motivations behind “new” clothing. *How the style is* is clearly the main motivation behind a high turnover in consumption of clothing, from the perspective of this young consumer. He also provides insight into the discourse on consumption prevalent in his peer group when he claimed that *all young people nowadays follow the style*. This means high turnover in consumption of clothing, from his perspective, is a deeply embedded social issue, rooted in discourse.

Later on in the discussion while discussing trends, the same participant delved further into his understanding of clothes that are no longer new, reiterating how associations of boredom are important: *And then it's like after a while it sort of gets boring, that it's sort of passed, and then like, the date on this is expired sort of, have to find something new that, that's how it works nowadays, to be honest* (participant 3, group 4). He expressed that the dates on clothes “expire”, giving the impression that clothes are goods with a use by date, a time limit on their “freshness”. He again emphasised that buying new clothes is *how it works*

nowadays, giving the impression of a consumer at the hands of structural influence, one simply has to follow this consumption practice.

The appeal of new clothes can also be related to visibility, according to Coskuner and Sandicki (2004), which is confirmed through understandings of first impressions, discussed above. The importance of the clothes being “new” to whoever views them, makes first impressions an important aspect of how clothes feel new when viewed by strangers. The participants’ putting emphasis on first impressions, thus highlights the symbolic importance of newness of clothes.

4.4.3. Consumption as ritual

In this study, the social aspect of shopping as a ritual and forum for co-production of styles of clothing became apparent in groups 3 and 4. These were the two groups asked about shopping with friends⁹. An example of this can be seen in Box 39. Several of the participants responded that they prefer shopping with friends. This makes shopping a social event, as illustrated by the words of participant 2 in group 4: *when you go with friends you can talk to them, like you, you can relax too*. The social aspect of the event described below provides affirmation of choices in the form of tips, advice and knowledge of confirmation from friends, as anticipated by several authors (Dittmar & Drury 2000, Coker et al. 2013, Lee 2012). The discussion brings out examples of authentication of self through the reaction of others, as well as the reaction of the individual to conform to the opinions of others. On one account the findings in this study differs from the expectations in the literature; the affirmation from friends seems more important than other social interactions with for example shop assistants, as the latter is not mentioned at all.

The activity of shopping with friends described by the participants highlights the different roles consumption of clothes play in social interactions and vice versa. The statement by respondent 2 in this discussion that bringing friends is preferable when shopping otherwise the activity becomes *boring* is a telling one. It indicates that shopping is indeed seen as a social experience rather than a necessary chore, an end in itself, and that it is expected to be fun.

⁹ This question was included in the interview guide before the conversation with focus group 3 took place.

Box 39

Group 4 - sales and service:

R: Do you normally shop alone?

4: No, normally with friends

3: I shop alone sometimes, just, just sometimes. Otherwise it's with friends

(...)

R: If you're with friends, is it like, do you go shopping just to shop, or?

4: Ehm, it might be that you are with a friend who's buying something, and then something spontaneous happens, and you buy it

(...)

2: Yes, I think, or, when I bring friends, then it's because, because I don't want to shop alone, because it's, it's boring

3: Mhm

2: And if you, you can ask... like tips and advice

(...)

2: And when you go with friends you can talk to them, like you, you can relax too (inaudible)

3: (Interrupts) Get advice

2: Advice, tips, if it looks good, or what they think

R: Yes, do you normally ask your friends when you?

5: Yes

4: Yes, it's good to get confirmation before you buy a garment, so, yes, I at least normally ask before I buy

R: Mhm

4: Not that it matters all that much but, it's good to know

In group 3 the respondents were split on the issue of whether they preferred to shop alone or with friends, with about half expressing they liked to go with friends, and half that they liked the freedom of shopping alone. Shopping alone, according to this group, offers a certain freedom and individuality, no-one else's opinion has to be taken on how to conduct the activity. However, when talking about the virtues of including friends in the shopping activity, the word *cosy* (participants 3 and 6) was used to describe the interaction. As with the group above, the action of shopping thus becomes a social activity, one that has positive attributes. Within this interaction asking your friends' opinion is also part of the activity.

The majority of respondents in both group 3 and 4 emphasised that they do not care if the asked opinion does not coincide with their own. In fact, five of the respondents in group 3 pointed this out. This is yet another example of the urge to show individual autonomy while talking about group influence. The social aspect of the ritual of consumption of clothing is nonetheless clearly apparent in these two focus groups.

4.5. Possibilities for change

In order to gain further insight into possibilities for changing consumption patterns beyond a deeper understanding of the social functions involved in consumption, all the groups were asked toward the end of the interview how they thought change was possible.

Some respondents in focus groups 1 and 4 expressed the opinion that prices had to be increased in order to reduce consumption, a classic economic fix derived from individual choice theory. Several of the groups interpreted the question in a more personal, practical way, looking at their own practices, rather than societal structures. In focus group 3, the question of how to make society consume less clothing was answered with suggestions of giving clothes to charity, swapping clothes or giving clothes away to acquaintances. The majority of respondents in focus group 4 felt recycling of clothing is important. This provides insight into the impact of these consumers' consumption practices on turnover of clothes and understanding of the clothes' environmental and social impact. Nevertheless, these attitudes are juxtaposed with the earlier focus on newness, for example in focus group 4, which places practices of recycling in conjunction with practices of high turnover of clothing.

Box 40

Group 1 - tourism services:

R: Let's say that one should for example... buy less clothes. What would you, how would you go about it so that society for example would buy less clothes, generally?

(...)

3: It is, people buy a lot of new clothes now, because there is more and more coming. If people were to stop, or buy less clothes they would have to not make, or they can't, they would have to reduce production, I think, because there is a lot of new stuff coming now

R: Why do you think there is a lot of new stuff coming?

3: Because people buy (several people laugh)

When asked about potential change towards less consumption, one of the respondents in focus group 1 was prompted to think beyond her original understanding of structurally

driven consumption patterns (Box 40). She first displayed a perception of the clothing industry as driving the demand for clothes, saying people buy because the clothes keep coming. For people to stop buying, there would have to be less production. When I further prompted her by asking why there was so much production, she thought about it and further reflected that the supply might be based on demand, rather than vice versa. The conversation shows an interesting perspective which, with very little prodding, was altered. The initial response gives us insight into the discourses of clothes consumption prevalent in this group of consumers.

Some of the discourses that are underlying in these answers are more useful for our understanding of potential change than the responses themselves. The immediate focus on the respondents' own, personal practices when it came to environmental issues, such as recycling, was prevalent in this study. This perspective is mainly useful for potential change in that it provides insight into the individualistic focus when it comes to environmental issues and clothing.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In this chapter the findings of the study will be discussed according to the research questions. While there were some discussion elements included in the analysis chapter, this structuring will give insight from a different perspective.

5.1. RQ1: What are the roles of consumption of clothing in the creation of individual and group identities?

The roles of consumption in constructing and maintaining individual and group identities uncovered in this study were many and complex. The main findings include the ways consumption of clothes is used for identity building, and the degree to which consumption of clothes is used for identity building. Both facets displayed tension between different roles played by clothes, and different degrees of importance of clothes for identity.

Parts of the findings show how consumer goods are deeply embedded in the construction of identities. The expression of using clothes that “are you”, the internalisation of clothes into the respondents’ extended self, and the emotional attachment to the clothes displayed in the research all attest to this. In one of the focus groups, evidence of the emotional attachment to consumer goods presented by Ahuvia (2005) came to light when they associated their clothes with the word love. These findings also indicate a tendency of self-objectification, in associating clothes with ones extended self. The assertion that young consumers consider clothes to be a pleasurable form of consumer goods (Miles et al. 1998) also seems supported by this evidence. Some emotional expressions were related to branded clothing, adding the symbolism of brands to identity creation and the extended self. In addition to the symbolism of brands, the respondents often described clothing styles in relation to personal characteristics, such as *good teacher*, *laid back*, *scary* and *organised*. This was also true for interests, like dancers and skaters. These aspects of the symbolism of goods add another new dimension to our understanding of the social functions of consumer goods. It is a good example of the social construction of symbolism of goods, as outlined by Elliott and Wattasanuwan (1998), and Jackson (2005b). The social function of clothing is thus embedded in many aspects of identity creation, both for individuals and groups.

The symbolism of consumer goods did in many cases prove to be grouped together in styles of clothing, according to the participants of the study. One of the more easily identified styles of clothing was “West”, a good example of a clothing style carrying symbolism beyond

individual garments. This example demonstrates how symbolism of clothing becomes integral in the identity of its users, and part of their extended self, as well as a specific group identity. At the same time the geographical association originally attributed to this style of clothing is, according to the respondents, being disconnected from the style. No longer does dressing “West” mean you are from Western Oslo, it has become a style in its own right, it means you “are West”, rather than from the West. This group identity was previously reserved for a certain socio-geographic part of the population, but has now become a style that the consumer can choose to belong to, exemplifying the consumer’s agency in using consumer goods to portray their chosen identity or group belonging.

There are however limitations to the free choice and agency of consumers in portraying their identity through consumption. Although authors such as Breakwell (2010) claim that the consumer today can build several, fluid identities through consumer goods, certain findings in this study suggest that the social context might limit the possibility of doing this. The reactions to participant 4 in group 2 breaking her established style of clothing at school, unbeknownst to herself, is also an example of how the social context places restrictions on freedom of identity construction for the individual. The findings in this study make it clear that possible styles of clothing and identities are dependent on the social situation, social groups, number of people and what activity is taking place. Using structure and agency as a way of analysis is thus valid in an identity context, especially in relation to the link between consumption and identity.

Focus group 2’s discussion about school uniforms provides an insight into the complex role played by clothes in identity creation. The group initially claimed that the use of school uniforms would deprive the individual of all identity, giving an impression of clothes as being paramount for individual identity creation. Their later assertion that using school uniforms would allow them to get to know each other better gives a new nuance to this picture. It shows the constructed nature of the role clothes may play in identity creation. Performative and constructed aspects of identity through consumer goods were repeatedly discussed with great awareness by the respondents. This constructed nature might detract from getting to know the real person behind the clothes, according to the research. Several similar examples of clothes as a barrier to getting to know people serve to make this a substantial finding in terms of our understanding of the role consumption plays in identity creation. This came very clearly through in group 2, where respondent 5 claimed she would get to know more people without judging them first by their clothes. The connection between symbolism of clothes and personality traits was sometimes expressed as strong and sometimes

as weak by the respondents. The personality traits that were positively connected with clothes were, however, often less direct, such as considering a trendy style of clothing proof of good teaching skills; while associations, such as *boring* or *crazy*, were not considered possible to discern from clothing alone. According to the respondents, certain types of symbolism of clothing do allow consumers a façade to hide behind it, although perhaps not for longer periods of time.

The importance of first impressions of, or by, others unearthed by the research is another aspect of the constructed nature of identities through clothing. In some instances it is also an example of clothes functioning as barriers. The element of time as an aspect of identities communicated through consumption is a new finding. It indicates a transient role for clothes in identity creation, at least in terms of the strength of the symbolism of the clothes. According to these findings, the symbolism of goods can be said to be the most effective during the initial period of meeting someone. The role of this initial symbolism does, however, not indicate that clothes do not have a role in the continuation of expressing identity. That it does became clear through examples such as the inclusion of consumer goods in participants' extended self. One specific instance of this is the reaction from school fellows when respondent 4 in group 2 wore something unexpected from her established clothing style. The respondents' views on first impressions did however give the notion that the strength of the symbolism of clothing wanes, or changes, after the initial social function of communicating an identity. There was an overall opinion among the respondents that there would be something beyond this initial façade, supporting Shankar et al. (2009) in concluding that consumption is not the only aspect of identity creation. Therefore, an identity based on consumer goods might not always be effective or desirable. These seemingly contrary findings exemplify the complexity of the role of consumer goods for identity creation; it is important, yet not always successful or long-lasting.

The numerous examples of unsuccessful long-term constructed identities displayed in the research indicate that such barriers may be an example of false satisfaction of socially constructed needs or norms through consumer goods (Jackson 2005a). The motivation for some consumers to use clothing as a façade to hide behind was by some respondents speculated to be linked to issues of self-esteem. They considered consumers who construct a barrier between themselves and their social context in the form of consumer goods to be less confident. This further strengthens the findings in this study of clothes used as a sort of mask or shield projected to the world, and the ineffectual communication resulting from it. Young consumers use clothes as a tool to project an identity to the outside world, according to Miles

et al. (1998), but the projection is based on what the consumer wants to be seen, which can be different from their actual selves. The socially constructed need to communicate an identity through clothing alone is unfulfilled because the peer group surrounding the individual is aware of the personality behind, an awareness repeatedly displayed in this research.

The role played by consumption in identity creation is intricately intertwined with the social nature of identities, according to the findings of this research. Examples of the importance of social affirmation in the construction of group and individual identities through consumption were plentiful. A few illustrations of this are; the importance of outside influence on identity creation through clothing; identification of groups through clothing; socially constructed needs as motivations for clothes consumption; and clothing norms. Throughout these examples, the tension between agency and structure in identity communicated through clothes was often apparent. Some respondents expressed their wish to stand out, for example through buying clothes from the internet so that others would not have the same garment, or through wearing bright colours in a social environment where dark colours were the norm. The socially constructed need to stand out can be seen as a possible example of the struggle to stay visible, an important role of consumption in a postmodern society according to Lasch (1979). In both cases the individuality is a reaction to, and reacted to, by the surrounding social context, and thus still part of agency in structure. This is one of several examples of agency in structure being the conceptualisation of the tension between agency and structure applicable in most cases in this study.

The respondents displayed varying feelings about social confirmation of their consumption choices. As a specific example, some considered having the same clothes as others to be a positive affirmation, while others felt it was problematic for their expression of individuality to have the same garments as others. In both situations, the symbolic meaning of the clothing was based on the reaction from their social environment, either through social confirmation, or individuality communicated through opposition to uniformity. The different outlooks simply confirm the complex social functions at play, and how several norms and motivations might co-exist. The participants clearly experienced the relationship between individual and group identities as paradoxical, the group context is as much an arena for individual identity expression as vice versa. The constant negotiation between the autonomous and social self (Bagozzi 2013) is thus readily apparent. Nevertheless, the importance of the relationship between individual and group in co-production of symbolic meaning of clothes is clear, as expected by Elliot and Wattasanuwan (1998).

Examples of identification of groups through clothing were present throughout the findings, in line with the expectations of Jackson (2005b), and Wilk (2002). A few recurring examples of groups were used by many respondents, such as study specialisation, West and skaters, with clearly marked styles and inherent symbolism in their clothing. What stands out as rather surprising is that most respondents could not, or would not, identify their own groups through clothing. The closest example of an identification is indirect; one of the respondents in group 2 showed awareness of how her group of friends could be identified from the outside when she talked about how her mother probably thought she and her friends all dressed the same, although they themselves distinguished individual differences. The ease of identification of external groups and the struggle of identification of own groups can mean different things, for example that group belongings are many and overlapping and therefore hard to distinguish. It can also be yet another reaffirmation of the need to appear autonomous; identifying openly with a group might be problematic for their projected image of themselves. Whenever identification of other groups was juxtaposed with something, it was the opinion that other groups cared about what to wear or what trends to follow, but the participants in question did not. This was interestingly sometimes expressed as a group, for example by claiming their year in school or their study direction was the one with full freedom of clothing styles. Throughout the focus group conversations the comparison between their own social environment and other years and courses tended to carry a sense of being superior as perceived by the participants, either more mature or more open-minded. This can also be considered an example of distinguishing your group from others (Jackson 2005b), another element of the complex social functions that consumption serves in relation to identity.

Conspicuous consumption is another important element in our understanding of the role of consumption for identity creation. The concept of conspicuous consumption provides further understanding of the tension between agency and structure in identity. Different motivations for conspicuous consumption became apparent in the research. There is clear evidence both of class and wealth, and group and individual identities being a motivation for conspicuous consumption in this study. The motivation to display class and wealth was expected from the literature (Friedman 1994). The motivation to display individual group identities was also partly expected (Jackson 2005b). The complex relationship between the two perspectives in creating motivations for consumption was however not expected. Some of the respondents who associated wealth with conspicuous consumption did not necessarily express that the consumer's wish was to display wealth. In these cases wealth served as a tool to display status or individuality. The use of brands is a consumption practice which came off

as especially important in terms of conspicuous consumption in this study. Brands were used as examples for communicating wealth, status, group belonging and individuality. The existence of a brand on an otherwise identical garment completely transformed the symbolism of said garment, from a sloppy sweatshirt to a cool jumper. Here the brand literally becomes the symbol of the garment, the garment itself matters less. The associations connected to the brand thus become connected with the person, confirming Elliott and Wattasanuwan's (1998) assertion that brands are integral to identity creation, and a tool for associating that identity with whatever the brand symbolises, be it wealth, status, belonging or individuality.

A new challenge in terms of conspicuous consumption presented itself during this study. The use of expensive goods to display class, wealth or individuality became problematic in several instances where the signal goods in question became too popular to stand out. In the study there were several examples of garments or accessories which started out being exclusive and conspicuous, such as Michael Kors or Louis Vitton bags, but which became so popular they became an example of blending in rather than standing out. Being exclusive or conspicuous thus becomes impossible to communicate once the good is too proliferated. The symbolism of the good changes from exclusive to normal, meaning other goods will have to be sought in order to communicate the same exclusivity, potentially driving the need for a higher consumption turnover in order to achieve this. Another case specific finding was that the high price of certain brands did not guarantee them staying conspicuous, as the majority of the consumers did not mind the high price. As opposed to certain other findings in this study, for example the unsatisfactory function of identity through consumption of clothing, motivations based on conspicuous consumption are inherently based on the belief that the intended social signifiers can only be communicated through goods. This is in line with Miles et al. (1998). The tension between luxury and mainstream goods, and their movement from one to the other, presents an interesting dichotomy which is not covered by consumption literature from the viewpoint of the consumer. Gabriel (2013) argues that a shift is occurring in purchasing power, from higher classes to the masses, making conspicuous consumption available to all. This mechanism seems to be complicating the possibility for anyone to display wealth through clothes. As soon as an item considered exclusive has become sufficiently proliferated in the consumer group in question, the exclusive value sinks. This seems again to support the thesis that conspicuous consumption is no longer about expressing class distinction (Jackson 2005b).

5.2. RQ2: What factors influence clothes consumption practices and patterns for consumers and how do the factors interact?

In addition to the motivations of creating and communicating identities, a range of other motivations, some closely interrelated to identity, became apparent in the study. Several of the motivations for consumption were intangible in the mind of the participants, and acted as internalised norms or habits. These underlying motivations were some of the factors that came up most often as influencing consumption choices. The study provides ample empirical evidence of the importance of norms and social institutions for navigating consumer choices of clothes. The clothing norms unearthed in this study include what clothes to wear for different situations, such as at school, at home, with friends, at parties, and at job interviews. Other norms were related to what to wear when interacting with different groups, for example friends from lower secondary school, family, and strangers. Different situations and groups call for different symbolism in clothing, according to the respondents, for example in job interviews it is important to wear clothes associated with being structured. One norm that was emphasised was the importance of not being overdressed. This relates to later expressions of the wish to not care about clothes norms at all. Norms often came up in relation to shopping habits, and mainly as a hidden influence, fully internalised. One example of this was respondents who shopped on the basis of what they already liked. The habit of what you like has thus been established and reduces confrontation with choice, as Shove describes (2009). The amount of choice the consumer faces when shopping is therefore less, and navigating this confusion becomes easier (Warde 1994). The initial motivations or criteria for what clothes fall into the category of “like” is in this case hidden from the consumer, as discussed by Giddens (1986). Some respondents reflected directly on the intangibility of their motivations, showing awareness of these mechanisms, although not the origins of the motivations themselves.

There were a few examples of awareness of habit creation, the most interesting one adding understanding to the importance of adolescence in creating clothes consumption practices. This particular example adds new empirical evidence to consumption theory. The physical need of growing children and adolescents leading them to need a high turnover of clothing has in this example created a habit that becomes hard to break when they stop growing. This happened without the awareness of the consumers. This is an example of the physical link between adolescence and creation of consumption habits, hitherto overlooked. This knowledge provides useful insight into the creation of clothing norms which happen at an early age. A more expected result is the importance of adolescence as a period of

experimentation (Miles et al. 1998) and identity creation (Kroger 2004), which is empirically strengthened by the study.

A few outside influences came up during the discussions, in addition to internalised influences in the shape of norms. After being directly asked, advertising was mentioned as important by one group. The mention of advertising is congruent with the expectations from several authors in consumption and identity theory (Elliott & Wattanasuwan 1998, Jackson 2005b, Warde 1994). Cunningham (2003) expects advertising to be the main link between consumption and identity. However in the overall data of the study, there is a considerably smaller emphasis on advertising than these authors conjecture, the answer from this one group was the only direct confirmation of this influence. These findings are more in line with Miles et al. (1998), who do not expect advertising to be a main influence in young consumers specifically. The other outside influences that directly came up were celebrities, parents and peers. The first two of these were openly acknowledged as influences, the latter was sometimes acknowledged, sometimes not. This is an interesting finding in terms of adding to debates on structure and agency, as it provides insight into what kind of outside influence is readily understood and openly acknowledged by young consumers. The emphasis on celebrities is a finding rather specific to this study, as the issue is little mentioned in the literature on the subject. One group considered celebrities and media to control certain trends; *otherwise no-one would have worn it* (respondent 1, group 2). Some trends seemed so sudden and all-pervasive to the respondents, they could explain it in no other way, if at all.

The differing levels of acknowledgment of the influence of peers on consumption decisions can be seen as a result of relationships between different motivations. Displaying autonomy and outside influences, as mentioned above, were motivations that often seemed in conflict throughout the research. Looking at these motivations from a perspective of tension between agency and structure is therefore a good lens for analysis for motivations beyond identity. The findings show that the conceptualisation of agency within structure could be applied in most cases. Some examples showed that the respondents were aware of outside influence, such as seeking their friends' opinions when shopping. In other instances the respondents displayed only awareness of individual agency even though they were discussing situations of agency within structure, such as buying a t-shirt because it is "cool". The emphasis on individual agency was at times so important in the mind of the respondents that they found the concept group uniformity hard to grasp. In many cases the apparent lack of awareness of outside influences was put into question, especially when topics of group influence were discussed and the respondents made a point of bringing up their individual

autonomy. A discourse of individual autonomy thus came to the forefront. The respondents might be aware of this contradiction, but did not consider this problematic themselves. This is in line with research done by Klepp (2008). One example of how the respondents did not find it problematic to harbour two different motivations for consumption simultaneously was the description of dancers as a group. They were described as unique and uniform at the same time; a description theoretically conflicting from the perspective of authors advocating either agency or structure as the way to understand consumer motivations. Yet it is not problematic in the mind of the consumer, further strengthening the possibility of agency in structure as a viable model. The perception of autonomy is thus a prevalent trait in the mind of the young consumer, and not necessarily in conflict with their understanding of outside influences, as theorised by Holland (2002). This research more specifically confirms the assertions of Miles et al. (1998); that young consumers are more eager to display individual autonomy in questions of consumer motivations than other age groups.

Using theories of agency and structure to analyse the findings exposed different interpretations of how agency and structure influence identity creation and consumer motivations. When respondent 4 in group 1 said she tried different things in terms of clothing style, this can be interpreted in three ways. The first interpretation has her experimenting with her identity in a multitude of consumer choices, the second has her using her agency to experiment within a structural context, and the last can be interpreted as her being stuck in structural influence with the impression that her choices are her own. As either complete agency or structure as concepts are problematic on their own (Giddens 1986, Vatn 2005), I must conclude that this is yet another example of agency within structure. The complex mix of motivations illustrated by another participant's single purchase is also a good example of the tension between structure and agency. In this example, the three apparent motivations for a purchase were the low price of the garment, the habit of going to a particular store regularly, and that the garment looked "cool". All these different motivations are a mix of individual agency and structural influences, as discussed before. This example aptly displayed the complexity of the relationship between consumer motivations; the three above motivations are all a combination of autonomous choice and social context. The price as a motivation is framed by the economic context, the choice of store by internalisation of habits, and the definition of "cool" by the cultural context.

Another dichotomy in terms of the relationship between motivations for clothes consumption that became apparent in the study was practical and socially constructed needs. Socially constructed needs and practical needs, as motivations for consumption of clothes,

tended to appear together and often not distinguishable from each other in the mind of the participants. The motivations the participants mentioned when discussing shopping for clothes were a mix of socially constructed and practical needs. Physical fit and comfort were mentioned on the part of practical needs, but these motivations were often discovered through further discussion to be ultimately ruled by socially constructed needs. One example of this is the participant in group 4 who considered the fur trimming on the most popular brands of winter jackets to be a practical feature, a notion which got shot down by the rest of the group. The socially constructed need to follow a pervasive trend was here justified by a practical aspect which turned out to be less practical after all. The same is the case in group 2, where one participant found hats that do not cover the ears to be ridiculous in terms of practicality, but he still used them based on his socially constructed need to be “cool”. In general the motivations, especially the social aspect of them, tended to be hidden from the consumers themselves, as seen in the case of identity creation. The complexity of hidden motivations as expected by Giddens (1986) is confirmed through this study, especially the idea that the consumer choices could be reasonably explained by the participants while the underlying motivations remained hidden. This is perhaps the reason for why many motivations were “disguised” as being based on practicality or individual preference in the mind of the participants, when really social in nature.

One topic in relation to physical and social needs was unexpected. Physical needs being different in adolescent years than from adult years is not an aspect of consumer motivations discussed in literature on consumption. This difference sheds new light on the process of social construction of needs. In this case the changing practical need drives a process that is opposite of the process of wants becoming internalised as needs, as discussed by Klepp (2008) and Wilk (2002). What has been a physical need for new clothes due to changing bodies becomes a want, as the physical aspect of the need disappears when the consumer stops growing. At the same time, the want might become internalised as a socially constructed need in the process.

Comfort as a motivation for consumption is an example of reasoning hiding real underlying motivation (Giddens 1986), in being a socially accepted motivation which seldom prompts further inquiry (Klepp 2008). This study supports this as a prevalent reason on the part of the consumers, which makes it hard to discern the true motivations for consumption. Both physical and social comfort were apparent as reasons for consumption of clothing, although the first was often advocated to, either consciously or subconsciously, hide the latter. Social comfort also showed itself to have impact on physical comfort, through clothing norms

or conventions dictating that they wear tight-fitting clothes. A majority of respondents expressed that they did not care about clothing norms or outside influences, but in group 3, social comfort gave way to physical comfort when they got home and changed their clothes. All the participants who described the process of changing their clothes upon arriving home were women. One person in this group claimed he did not, the only male. This might be related to a description of different physical fit in male and female clothing. Another finding which sheds light on how physical comfort may be disregarded in lieu of social comfort was based on gender, and the difference in clothing norms that was attributed to each gender. Although the respondents were hard-pressed to describe the difference in dress between the genders, group 1 did, after further discussion, express that the norms were based on physical parameters; women's clothing is tighter, and men's clothing more baggy. The reason for this difference was not unearthed, although the physical aspects of gender difference are important for our understanding of co-production of meaning between clothes and bodies (Klepp 2008), and vice versa. The tighter clothes worn by women, according to the respondents, may be considered less comfortable physically, yet the norm is followed in order to achieve social comfort. Another finding, which adds to our understanding of the co-production of meaning between bodies and clothes is the description by participant 2 in group 2 of how tight, and physically uncomfortable clothes made him feel more alert and awake. Here the physical aspect of clothing impacts states of mind in the consumer, a co-production beyond the visual.

The socially constructed need to keep up with trends and have a high turnover of new clothes is another important motivation for consumption of clothing according to some of the respondents. For young consumers to follow the shifting trends is a matter of course, according to respondent 3 in group 4. This shows a discourse of high turnover in clothing which certainly has an impact on potential behaviour change. Socially constructed needs to purchase new clothing often were justified by an understanding of clothes as having an expiry date; after a while they became boring and useless, not from practical considerations, but purely social. This is an off-shoot of a motivation for consumption identified by Coskuner and Sandicki (2004); the consumer becoming bored of their clothes. The findings in this study suggest that boredom itself is more a symptom of a discourse of newness rather than a direct motivation for a high turnover in clothing. What may have been considered a luxury at a different time, i.e. buying new clothes at a regular basis, has through this discourse become a socially constructed need, according to the process described by Wilk (2002). The importance of new clothing can also stem from excitement and the social interaction of the purchase, as suggested by Coskuner and Sandicki (2004). There is no direct evidence of that from this

discussion, but the social aspect of shopping discussed in the section on consumption as ritual seems to underscore this as a motivation for a high consumption turnover.

Consumption being an activity in its own right, as emphasised by Bauman (2001), is empirically evidenced through this study. The act of shopping serves as a backdrop for other social interactions, and at the same time the participation of friends in this activity helps shape choices and ideas of what clothes are suitable for the individual. The activity is an example of co-production of meaning as well as affirmation of the social meanings of consumer goods. The importance of the social aspect of clothes shopping became apparent both through the activity being deemed enjoyable as a social event, and by the influence of friends on consumption choices during the activity. The first aspect shows how changing consumption patterns towards a reduction of overconsumption might be considered difficult without finding other activities to fill this social function. The latter aspect shows the importance of friends for consumption patterns and co-production of the meaning of consumer goods, another thing that needs to be taken into consideration when devising policy measures aimed at consumption behaviour change.

5.3. RQ3: How can insights into consumer motivations help us understand barriers and possibilities for behaviour change towards reduction in levels of clothes consumption?

It is abundantly clear from this study that structural context has a large impact on consumption habits in young consumers, and thus that behaviour change needs to be instigated on other levels beyond the individual. The influence of advertising, parents, social groups, public discourse and celebrities in creating consumption patterns all has become clear. This means that policy measures aimed at changing overconsumption need to go beyond trying to influence individual preference and to consider the cultural and social context in which the consumption is taking place.

The importance of clothes for identity creation, although perhaps not as all-encompassing as suggested by some of the literature (Dittmar & Drury 2000, Jackson 2005b, Miles et al. 1998), still influences strongly the possibility of behaviour change in consumption of clothing. The depth of association between identity and consumer goods, as exemplified by self-objectification and goods as extended self, has to be taken into consideration when behaviour change is contemplated. The social function of communication and identification through goods (Wilk 2002) is not easily done away with, although it is possible to imagine it can be done with a drastically lower turnover of clothes consumption. The symbolism of goods is after all a social construction, as described by several authors (Elliott &

Wattasanuwan 1998, Jackson 2005b), and can therefore be transferred onto other objects without the discourse of newness being necessary to serve the function of communication. The proof of false satisfaction of needs through consumption gives hope of the possibility to transfer the functions to more sustainable signifiers (Jackson 2005a). The discussions on clothes as a barrier to interpersonal relationships are especially interesting in relation to this question. If the social function of communicating identities through clothing is indeed a false satisfier, either by portraying a false identity (regardless of whether this is the consumer's goal) or by not functioning as intended, will it be conducive to change? Does this barrier then actually inhibit social interactions, and will lack of this barrier be a social incentive to change clothes consumption practices? Or is the constructed nature of the barrier what makes it so desirable in the first place?

Several underlying social and cultural discourses beyond specific norms were identified during the course of the research; a) an individualistic discourse of autonomy and agency in consumption practices; b) that young consumers have to follow trends; c) that media controls trends; d) that fashion is a women's domain; and e) that socially constructed needs are experienced as practical needs. All of these were expressed by one or more respondents, and although it is impossible to conclude that these discourses were internalised by all the respondents, they were certainly present in their social context. Several of these discourses help drive mass-consumption of clothing by influencing the consumers' understanding of their own consumption practices. The individualistic discourse allows the consumer to feel they are in control of their choices, and that consumption is an empowering practice. Interestingly this empowering discourse is contrary to the discourse that trends, as a rule, are followed by young consumers. It is also contradicted by the respondents considering media to be in control of clothing trends. Both allow, however, the consumer to justify their consumption practice in one way or another. Young consumers considering it paramount to follow trends leads to a high turnover in clothing, and is therefore an important discourse to take into consideration.

The discourse of fashion and clothing being more of a women's domain than men's is also present in consumption literature (Hansen 2004). Although the discourse is present in this study, its premise is not supported by the findings. Some male respondents claimed women care more, thus displaying their belief in the discourse. However, they themselves displayed such an interest in the topic as to make their response unsubstantiated by their actions. No women ever mentioned that they considered clothes and fashion to be their domain. This is an interesting finding, especially taking into consideration that the groups were all mixed in

terms of gender, and two of the groups were dominated by one or the other. This gives variety in opinion and power relations in terms of gender, and thus the lack of difference in understanding of clothing norms and of interests is telling.

The last discourse, that of socially constructed needs being experienced as practical needs further justifies a high level of consumption, as practical needs are indisputable, they are needs and thus necessary (Klepp 2008). Disguising socially constructed needs as stemming from the practical, whether conscious or subconscious, is thus a means to maintain discourses of high consumption. These discourses help us understand the potential changes that have to happen at a larger policy scale than the individual in order to reduce consumption of clothing. According to this study, norms that originate in these discourses have a large role in forming socially constructed needs which are perceived as being best satisfied through consumption.

The respondents only questioned the discourses of clothes consumption listed above when prompted, with the exception of individualistic discourses. These were counteracted by other statements although the respondents were not necessarily aware of the contradictions. Social influence and structural influence was however sometimes questioned. One of the respondents in focus group 2 showed an understanding of high turnover of clothing as being led by supply, a structural force over which the consumer has no control. From her initial perspective, it is the responsibility of the industry to produce less clothing if production is to be lessened. When prompted, she did, however, reconsider this position and realised the underlying discourse she had been portraying is in fact a more complex process which the consumer is also part of perpetuating. Questioning these unchallenged discourses can thus potentially lead to a change in the mind of the consumer.

Awareness and understanding of the social context and in turn the pervading public discourses in the mind of the consumer is paramount for behaviour change. The individualistic outlook which clearly shines through in this research means the respondents do not question the larger structural forces within which they exercise their autonomy. This echoes Bauman's (2001) assertion that the conditions surrounding choices are not optional. The hidden nature of motivations for consumption also became very clear in this study, as discussed above. The study shows a mix of subconscious and aware reasoning, but most original motivations were hidden. Regardless of the self-professed opinions of most of the respondents, that they do not care about clothes norms and how to dress, it is clear from their other communications that they do. Realistic measures towards reduction of consumption of clothing thus needs to take all the social functions embedded in clothes consumption into

account. A cultural and social context that is conducive to less consumption will thus look very different in terms of social functions now placed in consumption of goods. These functions and the socially constructed needs embedded in consumption practices need to be placed elsewhere, in other activities, and other forms of communication.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The research reported in this thesis has aimed at investigating the complexities of motivations for consumption of clothing by looking at what factors motivated young consumers in their consumption choices, and the role of clothing for identity creation. A social constructivist rather than individual choice perspective is applied in this study. The influence of social context, in one form or another, was found to be prevalent throughout. The participants' awareness of the influence is another matter. I will summarise the findings according to the research questions.

RQ1: What are the roles of consumption of clothing in the creation of individual and group identities?

The research undertaken provides insight into the dynamic aspects of the relationship between consumption and identity through empirical confirmation of some theoretical premises, as well as adding new findings. The role of consumption in identity creation is clearly evident in the material that forms the basis of this study. The findings provide supportive evidence, conducive with existing theory, of emotions linked to goods, the symbolic nature of goods, and the importance of brands for identity creation. It is also evident that identity is not all about clothes nor vice versa.

Identities, as well as the meaning of consumer goods, are constantly negotiated through social interaction. One of the main findings of this research is the tenuous nature of the role of clothing for identity. It is important, but only to a certain degree, after which it no longer serves that function, and it is not always successful. Many respondents expressed the importance of the personality beyond the clothes. Some considered clothes to provide a mask or a method to hide insecurity, or to portray certain personality traits not necessarily congruent with closer acquaintance. This allows us greater insight into the social functions of consumption, and where they dissolve into other forms of social communication. Part of this insight is provided through the topic of first impressions, which was raised by several groups when discussing the link between clothes and identity. This adds an element of time into the discussion of identity construction, which is not dwelled on in the literature.

Two of the functions of consumption in creating and sustaining identities were expected from the theory; identification of groups and communication through consumer

goods. Communication was an underlying function of consumption throughout the findings. Consumption of clothes was used to communicate group belonging, individuality, or both, as well as specific interests or character traits through specific garments or styles of garments. The symbolism of goods is part of this communication. The study unearthed symbolism specific to garments or brands, and sometimes to styles of garments. Identification of groups based on clothing style was a recurrent theme; several groups identified the same general groups. Some of these were based on study direction, some on interests, and some on geographical location. This identification was also an indirect confirmation of group belonging for the participants themselves, especially through juxtaposing the behaviour of the identified groups with their own.

An unexpected finding, however, was the participants' consistent inability or unwillingness to identify their own group or clothing style, bar one participant, who considered himself part of a group of dancers. Individual autonomy, on the other hand, was expressed repeatedly by many. The relationship between consumption and identity showed evidence of different types of tension; most prominently between wishes to express group identities or individual identities. The respondents often expressed a push and pull between standing out and blending in, with both goals sometimes co-existing in the mind of the individual. In line with the socially constructivist theory, the importance of social affirmation in relation to identity and consumption choices is strongly confirmed through the results of this research.

RQ2: What factors influence clothes consumption practices and patterns for consumers and how do the factors interact?

Some of the main insights into motivations for consumption of clothing came from the points of their intersection, and the tension between them. One such example is the tension between practical aspects of motivations and social ones. The main motivations found in this study can be divided into motivations based on physical needs and socially constructed needs. Motivations for consumption based solely on physical needs were found to be non-existent; some level of combination was always present. Examples of this include; motivations for buying winter garments were based on trends as much as warmth; comfort as a motivation for a purchase was often a combination of physical and psychological comfort; the origins of identified internalised habits, although hard to disassemble, were several times discovered to be based on norms. Motivations identified as based on socially constructed needs or wants were; expressions of identity; the wish to adhere to various established clothing norms; the social

activity of shopping; and outside influences in the forms of advertising, media, celebrities, parents and peer groups. Out of these, some were external social influences, and some were internal, although the difference was hard to distinguish based on the data. Some started as external and became internal, for example norms and habits. Many of these findings are in conjunction with the existing theory, but the intersections between these consumer motivations have until now not been explored empirically. Certain aspects of these motivations are new additions to consumption research, such as the outside influence of celebrities and parents, as well as less emphasis on advertising than in expected from the existing theory. In this list of outside influences, the peer group stands out as being the most contested influence in the mind of the young consumers who participated. A very few participants mentioned the influence of their friends as being positive; whereas the majority repeatedly emphasised that no such influence existed. This is an example of the tensions between certain aspects of consumption motivations apparent in this study, tensions which have impact on consumption practices.

The relationship between individual agency and structural influence is another example of the tension between all motivations of consumption, as exemplified in identity creation above. The analysis of the data produced differing perspectives and opinions on factors that influence consumption, especially in relation to expressions of individuality or belonging. Participants would contradict themselves by naming assertion of individuality as a motivation for consumption at one point of the discussion, and the wish to blend in as a motivation at another. The contradiction was either not apparent to them or they did not experience it as a contradiction. These contradictions illustrate tension between structure and agency and the complexity of motivations at play in a rather confined social context.

Out of the potential conceptualisations of the relationship between agency and structure, agency as taking place within structure was the single most apparent throughout the findings. It could be applied in most cases where there was an instance of tension between agency and structure in the discussions. The ease of co-existence of structure and agency in the mind of the consumer needs to be taken into consideration in consumption and identity theory, and amended accordingly, lest the theoretical discussion stagnates in fruitless debate.

The hidden nature of some of the motivations for consumption also provided important understanding of tension and how motivations overlap and interact with each other. Certain motivations that drive consumption patterns, especially when clothes are concerned, tended to be intangible and hard to describe by the respondents, for example why they like a specific style, or what their reasons were for specific choices when shopping. These were

often internalised habits or norms, where the original motivation for a preference was unclear to the consumer. Some of these norms or hidden motivations spoke of discourses that the participants did not question. These discourses play a large part in driving consumption practices and patterns, and awareness is here a key element in potential change.

RQ3: How can insights into consumer motivations help us understand barriers and possibilities for behaviour change towards reduction in levels of clothes consumption?

This research aimed to identify potential for behaviour change on the grounds that mass-consumption is a large contributor to environmental problems on a global scale, and consumption of clothing represents a substantial part of this contribution.

The overall lesson learnt from this study, in relation to potential behaviour change, is that the complexity of consumer motivations means any efforts at reducing mass-consumption of clothing needs to be equally complex. The underlying discourses unearthed in the data are an example of the embeddedness of consumption of goods in social interactions and functions. As is the many intersections between different motivations, and the tensions inherent in these. This has to be addressed in order for behaviour change to be possible. The false satisfaction of social functions through consumption came through on different levels in this study. The limits of the role of consumer goods in identity creation are an example of this. These functions can potentially be fulfilled, and more successfully so, in other ways. This could potentially include other, more durable, carriers of symbolism, or communication through other means than objects. Where communication and interaction is the underlying motivation for consumption, there is great potential for behaviour change. There is further hope for change based on the importance placed on social interactions beyond consumption which became apparent in the research findings.

The findings in this study partly confirm existing literature, and partly add new empirical insight into the complexities of consumer motivations. They provide understanding of several motivations and aspects of motivations and where they intersect. The findings are specific to the case study, but should still contribute to expand existing theory, as well as offer insights relevant to policy formulation. However, further research will be necessary to build a larger empirical base, and provide further knowledge of drivers behind consumption patterns and practices beyond clothing, and beyond young consumers.

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Appendix 1: Semi-structured interview guide, final version

1. Background. To explore demographics, group relationships.
 - a. What is your age?
 - b. Where do you live?
 - c. What do your parents do?
 - d. Do you work or do you get an allowance?
 - e. Why did you choose this school and this study direction?
 - f. What are your interests?
 - g. How well do you know each other?
2. The school. To explore groups, processes of trends, influences.
 - a. Are there any specific trends in school?
 - b. If so, is it important to follow these?
 - c. If so, why?
 - d. Are there different types of trends?
 - e. How do you think trends start?
 - f. Were trends different in lower secondary?
3. Habits. To explore consumption patterns, motivations for consumption, practical examples to use for further discussion, experiences. Words to keep in mind: process, nice, comfortable, practical needs, winter coats.
 - a. What brands or shops do you like?
 - b. Why do you like these?
 - c. How often do you shop for clothing?
 - d. What have you bought lately?/What have you bought the last two weeks?
 - e. Why did you buy that?
 - f. Do you spend your own money on clothing?
4. Outside influences. To explore motivations for consumption, outside influences. Words to keep in mind: celebrities, media, status, trends.
 - a. What do you think about when you shop for clothes?
 - b. Do you plan ahead before shopping?
 - c. Do you shop with friends?
 - d. Have you noticed any advertising campaigns for clothes lately?
 - e. What would you say influence choices when shopping for clothes?
 - f. What is your favourite garment?

5. Identity. To explore group and individual identities, how they are influenced and their relationship. Words to keep in mind: first impressions, male/female, interests.
 - a. What is identity?
 - b. Can you show personality through clothes?
 - c. If so, how?
 - d. How did you decide to wear what you are wearing now?
 - e. What does it say about you?
 - f. When you buy specific garments, such as winter coats, what do you think about?
6. Groups. To explore influences, social relations, types of identity, reflections on identity.
 - a. Do you notice what other people are wearing?
 - b. If so, why?
 - c. Do you notice what your friends are wearing?
 - d. If so, why?
7. Symbolism. To explore meaning of symbolic goods, social relations.
 - a. What do clothes from _ store/brand make you think about?
 - b. What do these clothes symbolise?
 - c. Does it mean the same for everyone?
8. Change. To explore possibilities for change, consumption patterns, needs, motivations.
 - a. Are clothes practical?
 - b. How many garments would you need if clothes were practical?
 - c. If you were to lessen consumption of clothing, how would you do it?
 - d. Why do you stop using clothes?
 - e. What do you do with them after?

Appendix 2: Overview of brands and shops

Brands

- Acne: Swedish fashion house. Especially known is their scarf, “Canada”, a plain, fringed wool scarf. More info at: <www.acnestudios.com/about>
- Canada Goose: Canadian brand of ‘extreme weather outerwear’, jackets and parkas with coyote fur-lined hoods. More info at: <www.canada-goose.com>
- Luis Vitton: French luxury brand, famous for bags and luggage, among other things. More info at: <uk.louisvuitton.com/eng-gb/homepage>
- Michael Kors: A luxury designer brand, famous for accessories, including bags. More info at: <www.michaelkors.com>
- Nike: American company. One of the world’s largest suppliers of sportswear and athletic shoes. More info at: <www.nike.com/no/en_gb/>
- Parajumper: Italian brand of nylon jackets with ‘removable down-padded lining and a fur-trimmed hood’. More info at: <www.parajumpers.it/en/about-us>
- Polo: A Ralph Lauren collection of short-sleeved, collared shirts with an embroidered pony on the chest. More info at: <www.ralphlauren.com>
- Waffle jacket: Collective term for short, quilted jackets with seams in a checkered pattern.
- DC Shoes: Global brand of skateboarding shoes and action sports apparel. More info at: <www.dcs shoes.com/customer-service-corporate-information-about-us.html>

Shops

- Bik Bok: Norwegian clothes chain which specialises in women’s fashion. They aim to be the first choice among fashion aware girls who follow the latest trends. They update their collections every week. More info at: <bikbok.com/no>
- Cubus: Scandinavian low price fashion chain for men, women and children. More info at: <www.cubus.com/en/>
- Dressmann: Nordic fashion chain for men, catering for all ages, at low prices. More info at: <dressmann.com/no/bedriftssider/Om-oss/om-oss/>
- H&M: Swedish low price chain which ‘offers fashion and quality at the best price’. Has six independent brands under its umbrella, including Weekday. More info at: <about.hm.com/en/About/facts-about-hm.html>
- Weekday: See above.



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