

The Use of Products to Communicate the Self: How Proficient Are Young Adults

Renu Emile

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

.....

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Ethical Approval

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Abstract

That people use products to create, maintain, and communicate aspects of the self is a well established tenet in the behavioural sciences as is the notion of shared understanding of the meanings associated with such products. Consumer researchers who examine facets of the relationship between the self and products (and brands) primarily examine prescribed and specific aspects of the self in relation to prescribed products. Whilst the notion of shared meaning is accepted, few studies examine the proficiency of consumers in their use of products to communicate aspects of the self to others.

This multi-method study examines how the products (and brands) which young adult consumers select from those they own, reflect aspects of their self and the degree to which this reflection is shared by their peers. The findings show that young adult consumers speak of their product choices in terms of both personal and social related aspects of the self. The findings show that young adults are able to articulate how they use products to depict aspects of their self and that they primarily, use products to denote group membership including status (inter and intra group). Allied to this is their conscious awareness that the status element is linked to an experience of ‘power’ in relation to others, and that the use of products to depict aspects of their self requires a degree of self-control, i.e., power over self. Whilst the communication of the social self represents the main purpose, the role of products to communicate individual characteristics is also significant. In terms of shared meaning, successful decoding occurs mainly in the social domain, for example, characteristics such as *cares about personal grooming; trendy and fashion conscious; healthy, fit and active; sociable; cool; confident and enjoys drinking*.

CHAPTER 1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction

That people use products to create, maintain, and communicate aspects of the self is an established notion in consumer behaviour (e.g., Allison, Golden, Mullet, & Coogan, 1980; Banister & Hogg, 2004; Belk, 1978, 1988; Berger & Heath, 2007, 2008; Caldwell, Blackwell & Tulloch, 2006; Crane, Hamilton, & Wilson, 2004; Lamont & Molnar, 2001; O'Cass & McEwen, 2004; O'Cass & Choy, 2008; White & Dahl, 2006, 2007). Though the extant studies are numerous and examine this notion across a variety of contexts and perspectives, researchers primarily examine prescribed and specific aspects of the self in relation to prescribed products. An outcome is that we do not have a good understanding of how people respond when given autonomy to select products and to explain how they engage with products as a means to express aspects of their self. While most studies on the use of products in relation to the self acknowledge the integral role of the 'other' in recognizing aspects being communicated by dint of shared meanings, there is limited empirical evidence in this regard. Studies that make an attempt in this direction typically focus on the notion of decoding consumption symbolism. An aspect not widely researched is the degree to which young adults are able to successfully communicate aspects of their self to their peers. Accordingly, this thesis addresses the questions:

When given autonomy -

What products do young adults select to display aspects of their selves to an audience of peers?

What aspects of the self do they identify?

What themes emerge when young adults talk about products in relation to aspects of their self?

Given that the intent is to communicate aspects of their self, how successful are they?
That is:

Is there evidence of shared meaning between message senders and message receivers?

The first three questions are addressed via a phenomenological based interpretive research design. The final question requires a test of communication using quantitative methods. The intent is to compare two sets of data; to test statistically the match between self-stated descriptors of senders and an audience of receivers who are peers. The study necessitates the data to be collected in prescribed phases. Study One draws upon phenomenological approaches to data collection, and sits within the subjective-interpretive perspective. Study Two, designed to ascertain the degree of shared meaning is best managed via a test of communication effectiveness, and so quantifiable data is required. This phase comprises responses to a self-report questionnaire.

1.2. Background

The notion that people use modes of behavior and objects to communicate their identity to others has a long history. The work of Veblen (1899/1934) and Simmel (1904) was seminal in establishing the formal study of this symbolic role of objects. The work of Gardner and Levy (1955) focused the attention of consumer researchers on this aspect of product use. Since the 1950s, researchers have focused on examining the psychological and social aspects of product use, and have produced a substantial body of knowledge. This is so for a number of reasons.

One is the evolving understanding of the self that has led to varied interpretations of the construct. Until the 1970's, researchers typically conceptualised the self as personality type (e.g., Birdwell, 1968; Evans, 1959; Tucker & Painter, 1961). These studies reflected the emergent focus in psychology on self-identity (the individual's comprehension of him or herself as a discrete, separate entity) by personality theorists (e.g., Allport, 1955; Cattell, 1950; Cattell & Kline, 1977; Maslow, 1957, 1968, 1987; Rogers, 1951). Also, a feature of research during this period is the interest in the use of products to manage the real-ideal self relationship (Dolich, 1969; Hamm & Cundiff 1969; Hughes & Guerrero, 1971; Landon, 1974). Studies from the 1980s onwards influenced by developments in self concept theory, acknowledge that the self consisted of a personal (internal self) and social (external self) dimension, whilst not negating the notion of self-actualisation (e.g., Auty & Elliott, 1998; Hogg, 1998; Hogg & Michell, 1996; Kleine, Kleine, & Kernan, 1993; Laverie, Kleine, & Kleine, 2002; Solomon, 1983). As the knowledge base in this area developed, the self emerged as a more complex, multi-faceted phenomenon comprising of internally

(personal/private) and externally (social/public) oriented dimensions. Even so, because of the general lack of specification of the self, there is no established point of parity in research scholarship.

Another is the scope of the topics studied. The majority of studies focus on the demographic and the social self dimension. Typically, such studies investigate the use of products in the context of *reference groups or communities* (e.g., Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Hogg & Michell, 1996; Leigh & Gabel, 1992; White & Dahl, 2006, 2007); *class, status and lifestyle* (e.g., Lamont & Molnar, 2001; O'Cass & Frost, 2002, O'Cass & McEwen, 2004; Wang & Wallendorf, 2006); *ethnicity and culture* (e.g., Crane, Hamilton, & Wilson, 2004; Lindridge, Hogg, & Shah, 2004); *uniqueness* (e.g., Franke & Schreier, 2008; Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001); *age* (e.g., Auty & Elliott, 1998; Elliott, 1994); *gender* (e.g., Goulding & Saren, 2009; Patterson & Hogg, 2004); and *cosmopolitanism or global affiliation* (e.g., Fung, 2002; Thompson & Tambyah, 1999; Wattanasuwan, 2007).

A number of studies examine evidence of shared meaning: such studies recognize the idea that observers make judgments or inferences about others from the products they see (e.g., Belk, 1978; Belk, Mayer, & Bahn, 1981; Forsythe, 1990; Haire, 1950; Hamid, 1972; Paek, 1986; Shavitt & Nelson, 2000; Woodside, Bearden, & Ronkainen, 1977). Even though studies recognize the significance of the 'other', whether implicitly or explicitly, the empirical examination and the understanding of the 'other' tends to be limited to a single side in the equation of meaning communication - to that of decoders.

1.3. The gaps

Although many aspects of the relationship between product use and aspects of the self have been investigated, most empirical studies tend to use predetermined product categories or brands, for example, automobiles, fashion clothing or accessories such as shoes or sunglasses. Also, if it is assumed that the consumer has an understanding that the products they choose communicate aspects of their self to others, a research issue is their success in doing so. That is, is there a match between what consumers think the products are communicating and how others are interpreting self-related characteristics in relation to their product choices? In other words, to what extent is the nature and type of product related meaning, by virtue of characteristics attributed to the self, shared between consumers and audiences? This thesis addresses these two aspects by identifying the products individuals select to communicate

aspects of the self to their peers, the aspects of the self they think they communicate, and the match with their peers' decoding of self-related characteristics from the products they observe.

1.4. The locus of the study

Participants are drawn from undergraduate students (18 to 21 years of age) at two universities in Auckland, New Zealand. The study focuses on young adults because they are still in transition from adolescence to adulthood; this being a period in a person's life that is most often associated with the development of the self (Johnson, Berg, & Sirotzki, 2007; Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Stokes & Wyn, 2007). Other studies (Galician, 2004; Piacentini & Mailer, 2004) suggest that young people are highly brand conscious through this period of their life and are cognisant of the symbolic value of the products they consume. Such studies suggest that for young adults, the usage of products and shared meaning may be particularly strong, and so one would expect this would be reflected in an ability to interpret products and to use products for purposes of maintaining, communicating or constructing the self, more so than other age cohorts. As age groups and cohorts that lie outside of this age group and specific socio-cultural context are not within the scope of the study, the study recognises that the findings of the study cannot be generalised across age or diverse socio-cultural contexts.

Further, whilst the study recognizes that advertising or media is instrumental in communicating brand meaning, the research does not focus on how these function as mechanisms that underpin the creation or construction of shared meaning. The study relies solely on participants' accounts of self-related characteristics in relation to their product choices. The study does not include any identifiable images or physical characteristics of participants.

1.5. Ontological and theoretical perspective

The study adopts social constructionism as an ontological perspective. Social constructionism assumes that our knowledge of everyday reality is constructed (Crotty, 1998). That is, there is no "singular, stable, and fully knowable external reality. All of our understandings are contextually embedded, interpersonally forged, and necessarily limited" (Neimeyer, 1993, p.1-2). In contrast, the objectivist ontology assumes that a meaningful reality exists in the real world, with verifiable patterns that can be observed and predicted,

whilst a subjectivist ontology assumes that meaning is imposed on an object by the subject, and that reality is subjective (Patton, 2002). In view of the difference in ontologies and associated meanings, the researcher opts for and speaks from the vantage point of social constructionism.

This research is premised on theoretical notions of congruency as proposed in Rokeach (1960), Heider (1946, 1958), Grubb and Grathwohl (1967) and Sirgy (1982, 1985, 1986). Essentially, these theoretical propositions stipulate that consumers select a product whose symbolic value is congruent with how the individual thinks of and expresses aspects of the self; and that congruency between the self and other is based on shared meanings in a given context. Such notions of congruency are reflected in a significant number of studies (e.g., Birdwell, 1968; Cova & Pace, 2006; Dittmar, Beattie, & Friese, 1995; Dolich, 1969; Evans, 1959; Grubb & Hupp, 1968; Hogg & Michell, 1996; Jantzen, Ostergaard, & Veira, 2006; Ross, 1971; Sirgy, 1982; Solomon, 1983; Tian, Bearden, & Etzel, 2001; Thompson & Arsel, 2004; Tucker & Painter, 1961). The study proposes that congruency of meanings associated with a product should exist between the self and the ‘other’ (the audience) for balance in interpretation and successful communication.

1.6. Key concepts and definitions

This section introduces the key concepts informing the study. It provides an overview on the conceptualization of the self in the study; clarifies what a product means for the purposes of the study; and addresses the nature of perceptions the study considers.

1.6.1. The Self

Researchers use a number of terms such as identity, self or self-concept to address the self - a multi-dimensional and multi-faceted construct. Researchers commonly investigate one dimension in conjunction with or separated from another aspect. Though this is reasonable, the problem is the confusion that surrounds the labelling and demarcation of the dimensions and facets (Sirgy, 1982; Toulmin, 1986). Brewer (1991), for example, suggests socio-cultural differences in the understanding of the self. He notes that while Americans conceive of social identities as *aspects* of the individual self-concept, the European conceptualization is different in that it involves *extension* of the self beyond the level of the individual. Consequently, the understanding to the *self* in this study is primarily driven by the paradigmatic approaches

proposed by Reed (2002) and Malhotra (1988). It draws upon a loose collection of socially-oriented perspectives on the self, while also recognizing the thinking and perceiving individual. It conceptualizes the *self* in terms of the conscious recognition of both personal and social aspects of individuals, as seen by themselves, and by others. While the study uses the term *self* all through the thesis, it recognizes that identity could be an alternative term for the same conceptualization. The study offers a detailed view on the construct of the self in Chapter 3.

1.6.2. Assumptions on the understanding of a product

This study considers products as resources that consumers draw upon to construct an account of who they are. It aligns with Dittmar's (1992, p.3) view that "material possessions have a profound symbolic significance for their owners, as well as for other people and the symbolic meanings of our belongings are an integral feature of expressing our own identity and perceiving the identity of others". The understanding of a product in this study is restricted to objects that are tangible.

The study is based on the assumption that while every product may not necessarily be an identifiable brand, brands can be classified into product categories. Having said so, the study does not make any distinction or classification for participants to follow. Even though both these terms - *product* and *brand* - apply all through the thesis, the word *product* is used as an umbrella term throughout.

Further, the study assumes that a product can be both utilitarian and symbolic in nature. This assumption is in keeping with the literature (e.g., Berger & Heath, 2007; Oyserman, Fryberg, & Yoder, 2007; Shavitt, Torelli, & Wong, 2009) which suggests that even products that could be considered highly utilitarian involve identity based meanings. Shavitt et al. (2009), for example, note that a product like dental floss, although not necessarily socially visible, acquires identity based meaning in terms of consumer identification with certain in-groups rather than out-groups. Berger & Heath (2007) note that while a very high-end stove may not necessarily signal identity to most people, yet it may still perform an identity function in terms of categorizing the consumer as a kitchenophile, or even separating the sophisticates from the general population. This study, however, by means of instructions to participants includes only products that are socially visible. However, the research task does not control

the nature and type of products participants opt for, and the extent of the domain of social visibility, whether narrow or broad.

1.6.3. Focus on conscious thoughts, not the unconscious

The research design for Study One ensures a conscious recognition of self-related characteristics in relation to product choices via auto-photography and semi-structured interviews. In other words, participants are able to make conscious decisions of what to include or not to include in their product choices, and to also think of how these products communicate aspects of their selves. The same principle applies to *Study Two* in which respondents consciously describe and evaluate the self-related characteristics of participants from *Study One*. Consequently, both *Study One* and *Study Two* focus on conscious thoughts only.

1.7. The research design

Considering the research questions the study addresses, the phenomenological approach (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989) to research design is considered suitable to address the task of eliciting experiences, meanings and interpretations participants associate with the products they select. In other words, the study acknowledges individual experiences, meanings and interpretations of participants, however, these interpretations, by dint of social interaction, are deemed to be social constructions. The range of research questions, however, necessitates a pragmatic approach, and consequently, the study adopts mixed methods through the two phases of the study. The pragmatic approach is based on the assumption that the research question is more important than either the method used or the researcher's adherence to a specific research perspective, and is formally linked to the notion of mixing-methods (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Creswell & Clark, 2007; Denzin, 1978; Jick, 1979; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). It essentially refers to blending and integrating a range of data and methods to examine and illuminate elements that may be hard to capture by a single method alone. The use of mixed methods bridges the gap and capitalizes on the respective strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies (Bahl & Milne, 2006; Creswell, 2003; Curry, Nembhard, & Bradley, 2009; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Details on all these aspects are offered in Chapters 3 and 4.

The study centers on two tasks. One is to understand individual perceptions - specifically how young adults make sense of, or experience product usage in the context of creating and communicating aspects of their self. The other is to determine their proficiency in communicating aspects of their self to others. The first task requires the collection of each individual's perceptions. The second task is a matching process and so requires data that can be quantified and statistically analysed. Task One is the focus of *Study One* of the study. Data is collected via auto-photography (Heisley & Levy, 1991; Noland, 2006; Ziller, 1988, 1990), and semi-structured interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Patton, 2002; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Participants are directed to photograph products that they consider say something about their self, and then invited to discuss and explain their choices and what the products communicate. The data for this part comprises the photographs and the transcribed interviews; both analysed using content analysis techniques. To examine the propositions set for *Study One*, quantitative and qualitative content analysis techniques are utilized.

Study Two specifically examines the question of whether young adult consumers are successful in communicating aspects of their selves to others, and if so, to what extent. The photographs selected by four of the participants from *Study One* plus the list of characteristics (aspects of the self) identified by each of the four from *Study One* are presented to respondents in *Study Two*. Data is collected via an online survey. Respondents are invited to view the four profiles and to write a brief paragraph describing each of the four people. Once this task is completed, they are then directed to a list of characteristics (compiled from the stated characteristics of the participants in *Study One*), and asked to mark those that they associate with the photographs viewed. The degree to which they are able to successfully select the characteristics identified by the each of the profiles is tested statistically (Black, 2009; Kazmier, 2003; Miller et al., 2010).

1.8. Contribution of the study

The study makes several contributions that are of benefit to academics, to emerging areas of contemporary thought, to the wider community of practitioners and to young adults themselves. These are outlined below.

1.8.1. Academic

The study makes a theoretical contribution specifically to the broad field of marketing and consumer behaviour in the following ways:

- It significantly adds to the body of knowledge as it investigates aspects not hitherto researched. It identifies the product categories and brands young adults in the study are likely to select to communicate self; the associated self-related characteristics they communicate to their own selves and to others, the decoding of meanings relating to selected products by observers, and finally the nature of match between self attributed characteristics and those attributed by observers. In doing so, it specifies the type and nature of shared meaning between participants and their peer observer group.
- The study proposes and observes a theoretical framework based on Rokeach (1960), Heider (1946, 1958), Grubb and Grathwohl (1967) and Sirgy (1982, 1985, 1986). It extends the parameters of congruency theory by including the self, the product, and the other within a single theoretical framework.
- Methodologically, the study reinforces the value of mixed methods. The use of mixed methods enables understanding of all aspects of the research. The study confirms and provides evidence of auto photography as a useful method in terms of application to young adult consumers. The study also adopts an innovative method to check if self-articulated characteristics of senders match those attributed by receivers.

1.8.2. Contribution to contemporary scholarship

From a contemporary perspective, this study is relevant to the new areas of research interest that have developed within the field of consumer behaviour. These are reflected in research interest groups such as those of the CCT (Consumer Culture Theory) group (Consumer Culture Theory Conference, 2011) which is now in its sixth year, and the Gender, Marketing and Consumer Behaviour group (Gender, Marketing and Consumer Behaviour Conference, 2010), now in its eleventh year. These groups are primarily concerned with product choice, meaning, and use in relation to the self or society. This research readdresses the premises of such contemporary thought, widens scope, thereby, opening the door for further advancement of contemporary research and knowledge.

1.8.3. Managerial

The emergence of brand relationship management as a key strategic activity means that brand managers need to have access to a robust knowledge base on how people use brands and products in their lives. One aspect of such use is the symbolic role of products and brands. Understanding this role allows the brand manager to create communication messages that have resonance with their brand users. The intent of this research is to provide information on an aspect of symbolic use; the role of brands in the creation and maintenance of the consumers' self. Such knowledge would enable the understanding of which product categories and/or brands play a key role; how they are used and what aspects of the self dominate. One aspect of this symbolic role is that the market has a shared understanding of brand/product meanings. Whilst this is assumed, the knowledge base in this area is not strong. This study explores this shared meaning, the intent being to identify what is being shared and product categories and brands where consumers show the most proficiency. Such knowledge will provide brand managers with information that can be used to enhance brand representation management.

1.9. Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has presented an introduction and background to the thesis, identified the gaps and the locus of the research, provided a brief on the ontological and theoretical perspective, clarified on the key concepts and definitions, and provided an overview of the research design and the contribution of the study.

The thesis is organized as follows. Chapter 1 introduces and provides an overview of the thesis. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature on self-related aspects in relation to product choice. Chapter 3 addresses the conceptualization of the self in this study. Chapter 4 discusses the research design adopted in the study. Chapter 5 reports on the product categories and brands in Study One that young adult consumers speak of in relation to their selves, and identifies the aspects they recognize in terms of propositions derived from the literature. Chapter 6 examines the common discursive themes across 28 interview transcripts of participants from Study One. Chapters 7 and 8 report on the findings of Study Two on whether young adult consumers are successful in communicating aspects of the self, and the extent to which meaning is shared between senders. Chapter 9 summarizes and reflects on

the thesis, presents theoretical and methodological contributions, considers the implications of the research, the limitations, and areas for future research.

This chapter marks a transition to the next, which reviews the literature, and identifies the gaps and issues pertinent to this thesis.

CHAPTER 2. Literature Review, Gaps, and Issues

2.1. Introduction

A number of interrelated knowledge strands in consumer research have relevance for this study. The first pertains to the symbolic role of products. The second is the role of products in the construction, maintenance and communication of the self, and finally, the role and interpretation of the 'other' in influencing choice and perceptions of products. This chapter presents an overview of these interrelated strands, and identifies issues and gaps the study addresses. Research in the area is extensive - spanning more than six decades. The majority of the studies investigate the relationship between product choice and aspects of the self. The studies are a conglomeration of theoretical approaches, interpretations of the self, research design and methodologies, so presenting a coherent overview of the research is challenging. Given that the majority of the studies focus on linking aspects of the self to product use, the literature review is organised as follows. Section 2.2 provides a historical background on the use of products as symbols. Section 2.3 overviews the symbolic role of products in consumer behaviour, aspects studied, and is structured around time periods. Section 2.4 addresses the symbolic role of products in communicating aspects of the self. Section 2.5 provides an overview of studies on the symbolic interpretation of the self. Section 2.6 addresses the key issues and gaps. Section 2.7 develops a series of research questions. Section 2.8 concludes the chapter.

2.2. Symbolic role of products: Historical background

The use of products as symbols of status and group membership has long been noted by historians. Clothing, jewellery and adornments, and livestock ownership have been commonly used to communicate social rank and power. In ancient Greece, for example wreaths, fillets and elaborate hair styles marked out wealthy young men belonging to prominent families (Cartledge, 1988); the Helots wore dogskin caps and leather wraps, to signify dependent serf like relationships with other communities (Grant, 1992); members belonging to higher social classes used chariots to make grand impressions at funeral and other religious occasions, thus signifying social prestige and wealth, the upkeep of horses itself being an enormous cost in the not so suitable conditions of the region. Paoli (1963) notes the use of purple coloured stripes and palm leaf embroidery to indicate membership of

a particular order in Rome. Privileged members of society wore bejewelled rings on different fingers while ordinary free males were allowed only one ring. Similarly, in ancient China, coloured robes symbolized rank or status - “the robes of mandarins third grade above were purple, fourth and fifth grades, red; sixth and seventh, green; and eight and ninth, blue.” (Benn, 2004, p. 100). The Chinese also used a range of inventively decorated bronzes as memorials of social relationships, especially those between royalty and the owners of such bronzes, the inscriptive work on such castings recording events and honours conferred on subjects, the quality of castings matching the rank of their owners (Loewe & Shaughnessy, 1999). Whether manufacturers marks (trade/guild marks) were used in a similar manner is not recorded however in England by the 19th century, certain marks denoted quality/value e.g., Wedgewood, Mappin and Web and similarly, retailer brands such as Lipton, Fortnum and Mason and Liberties of London (1875) (Jones & Morgan, 1994).

Specific commentary on the use of product was made by Veblen (1899/1934) and Simmel (1904). Veblen formalised the notion that elements of dress, ornament, and appearance are used to reflect wealth and social status with less wealthy and/or lower status individuals emulating the consumption mode of those higher on the social pecking order (Clarke, Doel, & Housiaux, 2003). Veblen’s logic of conspicuous consumption rests on the possession of wealth which in turn structures social position, status, and class difference. Simmel (1904) made similar observations in his theorizations of fashion. In Simmel’s view, while on the one hand fashion is a unifier of social class; on the other hand, it is also a marker of individualization or differentiation, thereby becoming a source of segregation or isolation. Fashion, for Simmel, exists in a society characterized by classes, and symbolizes competing desires – of increased social freedom matched by social subjugation, and of group identity and individual expression. When people belonging to the same class pursue a fashion, they fulfil a demand for social adaptation, and thus express unity with others. However, fashion is also a source of differentiation because fashions pursued by the upper strata are different from those at the lower end. This differentiation is ensured through a cyclical process in which no sooner do people belonging to the lower rungs of the social strata imitate or adopt fashions of the upper classes, that the upper classes abandon them thereby expressing a continual desire for change and contrast. A key feature of Simmel’s work is his recognition of the use of fashion to express individuality.

Bourdieu (1984) offers similar ideas in his concept of cultural capital as central to membership of the bourgeoisie and as a marker of differentiation and distinction.

2.3. Symbolic role of products in consumer research

Marketers have studied the symbolic role of products since the 1950's, ignited in part by the works of Gardner and Levy (1955) and Levy (1959) who recognised the psychological and social use of products. Gardner and Levy (1955) noted how a brand name is a complex symbol representing a variety of ideas and attributes; and highlighted the symbolism involved for consumers in product selections. Similarly, Levy (1959) observed that product consumption is symbolic in nature and communicates aspects such as differentiation, age, class and caste, belongingness and exclusion. Though the use of products to denote status and group membership remained an integral facet, that they could also communicate aspects of an individual's persona to themselves and to others was acknowledged. The emergent focus in psychology on self-identity (the individual's comprehension of him or herself as a discrete, separate entity) influenced the conceptualisation of the self, and in turn, influenced research on product symbolism and the self.

Between the 1950's and 1970's, consumer researchers were directed by primarily two notions of self-identity. One was that the self equated to personality, conceptualised as a cluster of traits (e.g., Birdwell, 1968; Evans, 1959; Tucker & Painter, 1961; Vitz & Johnson, 1965). The other directed by the humanist approaches of Maslow (1957, 1968, 1987) and Rogers (1951) emphasized the role of consumption behaviour in balancing the actual and ideal self, and/or to create or enhance self-identity. Even though a few studies (Green, Maheswari & Rao, 1969; Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967; Grubb & Hupp, 1968; Grubb & Stern, 1971) recognized the significance of social interactions in the concept of the self, the focus in terms of the operationalization of the construct was more on personal aspects than on socially relevant aspects of the self.

Studies from the 1980s onwards, influenced by developments in self-concept theory, acknowledge that the self consisted of a personal (internal self) and a social (external self) dimension, whilst not negating the notion of self-actualisation. Most studies that examine the symbolic role of consumption choices to reflect aspects of the self do so from at least two perspectives - the social-self dimension, and in the context of the personal self.

2.4. Symbolic role of products: Extant knowledge

The social relevance of the self and the symbolic use of products to create and sustain the social self was given impetus by a number of conceptual papers (McCracken, 1986; Sirgy, 1982, 1985, 1986; Solomon, 1983). Sirgy (1982, 1985, 1986) referred to congruity types - while actual congruity involved a match between how consumers see themselves on a set of attributes and how they see a stereotypical user; social congruity referred to how individuals believed they are seen by significant others; and ideal congruity referred to how consumers would like to be seen by others. Solomon (1983) proposed that consumers employ product symbolism for defining social roles and associated behaviour patterns. Drawing upon a range of socially oriented theorisations, the paper discusses how individuals take on the role of the other. Following Solomon (1983), McCracken (1986) proposed fashion as a mode of social communication, involving meaning transfer between cultures and individuals, thus taking an external, rather than an internally oriented perspective on the self.

Since the 1980s, much of the literature on the relationship between product consumption and the self engages with the symbolic value of products to affirm and communicate self related aspects such as the identification or the lack of it with reference groups (e.g., Banister & Hogg, 2004; Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Hogg & Mitchell, 1996; Hogg, 1998; Leigh & Gabel, 1992); class and status (e.g., O'Cass & Frost, 2002; O'Cass & McEwen, 2004); ethnicity and culture (e.g., Crane, Hamilton, & Wilson, 2004; Lindridge et al., 2004; O'Neal, 1999; Penaloza, 1994; Oswald, 1999); age (Auty & Elliott, 1998; Elliott, 1994); gender (e.g., Allison, Golden, Mullet, & Coogan, 1980; Dittmar, Beattie, & Friese, 1995; Fugate & Philips, 2010; Goulding & Saren, 2009; Morris & Cundiff, 1971; Patterson & Hogg, 2004); uniqueness (Chan, Berger, & Boven, 2009; Franke & Schreier, 2008; Fromkin, 1972; Snyder, 1992; Tian et al., 2001), and cosmopolitanism (e.g., Caldwell, Blackwell & Tulloch, 2006; Fung, 2002; Thompson & Tambyah, 1999; Wattanasuwan, 2007) (See Appendix 1 for representative studies). These strands of research are discussed below.

2.4.1. Products as symbolic of affiliation, association or belongingness with specific reference groups

A reference group is “an actual or imaginary individual or group conceived of having significant relevance upon an individual’s evaluations, aspirations, or behavior” (Park & Lessig, 1977). Reference groups shape product meanings via the associations of those who

use the product (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). As particular reference groups tend to have identifiable characteristics and specific forms of symbolic purchasing behaviour (Leigh & Gabel, 1992); the motivation to affiliate with and identify with a reference group is a strong indicator of interest in the products associated with that group and the self one wishes to communicate (Englis & Solomon, 1995).

One of the earliest studies in this area is that of Park and Lessig's (1977) who examined differences between housewives and students on their susceptibility to reference group influence. They found that significant differences exist between housewives and students in terms of the influence of reference groups on product selection, thereby lending support to the idea of communicating social belongingness by means of product choice. Following on, others (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Leigh & Gabel, 1992) noted choices of publicly consumed brands to affirm and communicate a self that identified with a specific social group.

Margaret Hogg, in conjunction with other researchers, across a number of studies (Banister & Hogg, 2004; Hogg & Michell, 1996; Hogg, 1998), confirmed the relationship between social roles, social identity, and consumption constellations. This cluster of studies proposes that consumption choices or decisions ultimately relate to an individual's sense of identification or non-identification with a specific group as opposed to other possible options. The Banister and Hogg (2004) study, for example, noted that clothing was used as a communicative device and communicated both - identification (with groups perceived to be similar) and distinction (from those perceived to be dissimilar and avoided) indicating elements of comparison, conformity, self-regulation or autonomy. Hogg labels the non-use of products *symbolic negation*. Studies by Escalas and Bettman (2005), White and Dahl (2006, 2007), and Berger and Heath (2007, 2008) are also concerned with the symbolic use or non-use of products to denote group membership or non-membership. Escalas and Bettman (2005) propose that the symbolic properties of reference groups become associated with the brands those groups are perceived to use; associations transfer from reference groups to consumers as consumers select the same brands as their reference groups to communicate affiliation or group membership, and thereby to communicate a specific self. White and Dahl (2006) and White and Dahl (2007) extended the Escalas and Bettman (2005) study and examined how a specific type of out-group - the disassociative reference group - as opposed to out-groups more generally influences consumer choices in contexts where self presentation is salient. In

other words, consumers use the communicative value of products for purposes of desired self-presentation in order to affirm belongingness to specific reference groups.

Berger and Heath (2008) investigate whether individuals identifying with a particular group are likely to abandon wearing a particular wristband if it was adopted by a dissimilar social group. The researchers sold Livestrong Wristbands to support cancer awareness and research to one dorm called the Target Dorm and after a one week delay sold the same wristbands to another dorm - the Academic Dorm (perceived as *geeks* and an outgroup by the target dorm). Although evidence from the liking ratings showed that members of the Target Dorm did not dislike members of the Academic Dorm, those belonging to the Target Dorm did not want to be identified as members of the Academic Dorm. The study reported that that when members of the Academic Dorm adopted wearing the Livestrong wristbands, members of the Target Dorm abandoned wearing the wrist bands. In other words, if those considered outsiders adopt products formerly belonging to an in-group, the product may lose its appeal for the in-group and may consequently be discarded. That is, consumers use products to communicate belongingness to specific, desired groups.

While the literature discusses the self in relation to reference groups in terms of products associated with specific reference groups, a parallel stream of research discusses the self in relation to brand communities, sub-cultures of consumption, consumer tribes or brand tribes (Cova & Pace, 2006; Cova, Pace, & Park, 2007; Cova, Kozinets, & Shankar, 2007; Kozinets, 2001; Maffesoli, 1996; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Thompson & Arsel, 2004). These similar terms refer to groups of people "who share their interest in a specific brand and create a parallel social universe ripe with its own values, rituals, vocabulary and hierarchy" (Cova et al., 2007, p. 314). These communities are identified by a sense of consciousness or belongingness to an in-group; the practice of rituals and traditions associated with the brand, and a sense of obligation to the community and its members (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Such groups are impassioned by a specific brand as is evident in the Harley-Davidson (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), the Apple with Macintosh (Belk & Tumbat, 2005), or the Nutella (Cova and Pace, 2006) community. Irrespective of whether consumers identify with reference groups or communities, in both cases, consumers use products to affirm and communicate their selves in terms of identification with a social milieu, which in turn serves to strengthen interpersonal ties, and also expresses individual choice at a personal level.

2.4.2. Products as symbolic of class, status and lifestyles

Status is defined as “a group member’s standing in the hierarchy of a group based on the prestige, honor, and deference accorded to him or her by other members” (Burn, 2004, p. 10). Often product or brand consumption is used as a means to affirm status (Lamont & Molnar, 2001; O’Cass & Choy, 2008; O’Cass & Frost, 2002; O’Cass & McEwen, 2004; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999; Wang & Wallendorf, 2006). Eastman, Goldsmith, and Flynn (1999, p. 43) define status consumption as the, “process by which individuals strive to improve their social standing through conspicuous consumption of consumer products that confer or symbolize status both to the individual and to surrounding significant others.” Some researchers suggest that status correlates with class, corresponding lifestyle, and goals (Coleman, 1983; Holt, 1997; Thompson & Haytko, 1997).

Even though status figures in a variety of contexts in the marketing and consumer behaviour literature, only a few studies specifically examine product choice to communicate status. Vigneron and Johnson (1999) propose the consumption of luxury brands as symbols of wealth and status. They suggest that consumers use characteristics such as quality or technical superiority, hedonic values or perceptions of a sensory or aesthetic nature to communicate status of an individual. Similarly, O’Cass and Frost (2002) note that symbolic characteristics of products such as sunglasses or fashion clothing, are strong predictors for status. In a study with Generation Y young adult consumers, O’Cass and Choy (2008) observe that depending on the brand’s association with symbolism and prestige, and the involvement with and the willingness to buy, fashion clothing becomes a means of self-expression and status. Following on, O’Cass and McEwen (2004) suggest that individuals enhance their image, through overt consumption of possessions, to communicate status to others. The same idea is reflected in Lamont and Molnar’s (2001) study which shows that African Americans use high end branded products such as watches, cars, beer to communicate status related aspects of their selves. Similarly, Wang and Wallendorf (2006) find that individuals persistently aspire for better possessions to signify status through symbolic possessions.

2.4.3. Products as symbolic of ethnicity and culture

Ethnicity refers to the identification with one’s ethnic group. It is a sense of “common ancestry based on shared individual characteristics and/or shared sociocultural experiences”

(Driedger, 1978, p. 15). Often consumers make product choices as symbols of ethnic and cultural related aspects of the self (Crane, Hamilton, & Wilson, 2004; Lindridge et al., 2004; Oswald, 1999; Penaloza, 1994). Penaloza (1994), for example, identifies the usage of food, clothing, automobiles, and foods as a means of symbolic cultural expression of the self. Similarly, Lindridge et al. (2004) note products such as clothing, food, and alcohol as indicative of ethnic and cultural related aspects of the self. Oswald (1999) observes the symbolic value of products such as daishikis, pita bread, and other consumer goods to construct and communicate a sense of Haitian-American ethnicity and culture related aspects.

A cluster of studies specifically focus on ethnic and cultural apparel to communicate ethnic and cultural related aspects of the self (e.g., Chattaraman & Lennon, 2008; Crane, Hamilton, & Wilson, 2004; Forney & Rabolt, 1986; O'Neal, 1999). Chattaraman and Lennon (2008) demonstrate that consumption of cultural apparel relates strongly with ethnic identification of the self. O'Neal (1999) observes African American women professionals' use of cultural dress to define and express their ethnic heritage and culture. Forney and Rabolt (1986) note that greater use of ethnic dress ties in with stronger expression of ethnic identity. Similarly, Crane, Hamilton, & Wilson (2004), in a study with participants of Scottish ethnicity note that those who find their Scottish ethnicity to be salient in the definition of the self put more effort in the symbolic use of Scottish dress. That is, they focus on the symbolic appeal of the ethnic dress to communicate a specific ethnicity.

In other words, consumers use the ethnic and culturally symbolic value of products to affirm and communicate ethnicity and culturally related aspects of the self to their own selves and also to others.

2.4.4. Products as symbolic of age, gender, uniqueness, cosmopolitanism or global affiliation

While on the one hand individuals use products to primarily express their selves in terms of social categorisations, on the other hand, individuals also use the symbolic value of products to communicate constructs of age or gender, personal orientations such as uniqueness, or even cosmopolitanism or global affiliation. This section provides an insight into these areas.

2.4.4.1. Age

Most often, studies examine the relationship between age and the developmental aspect of consumption symbolism (e.g., Belk, Bahn & Mayer, 1982; Belk, Mayer & Driscoll, 1984; Chaplin & Roedder John, 2005; Mayer & Belk, 1985; McCracken & Roth, 1989). More specifically, such studies focus on whether there is an age related pattern of comprehending or decoding product symbolism. Very few studies specifically examine the relationship between age and product choice. Elliott (1994), for example, explored the symbolic meaning of six major brands of sneakers for 53 children aged 15 or 16 years, and 82 university students aged between 19 and 24. The study found that meaning of fashion brands differs between age groups. Similarly so, Auty and Elliott (1998) in a study with students aged 18 to 35 found that perceptions of branded jeans differed according to age. These studies suggest that consumers attribute age related meanings to the product choices they make, and are likely to use products to affirm or communicate the same to their own selves and/or to others.

2.4.4.2. Gender

Gender in the marketing and consumer behaviour literature tends to signify the biological sex, gender roles, or the degree to which an individual identifies with masculine or feminine personality traits (Caldwell, Kleppe, & Henry, 2007; Kolyesnikova, Dodd & Wilcox, 2009; Palan, 2001). Much of the empirical literature on the use of products to communicate gender within the wider field of marketing studies is in the context of advertising and media, and as such is an analysis of representations engineered by media practitioners.

Only a few empirical works outside the realm of advertising and media studies examine gender related aspects in consumers' product choices (e.g., Allison, Golden, Mullet, & Coogan, 1980; Dittmar, Beattie, & Friese, 1995; Fugate & Philips, 2010; Goulding & Saren, 2009; Morris & Cundiff, 1971; Patterson & Hogg, 2004; Vitz & Johnson, 1965). A cluster of studies specifically examine gender related stereotypes in the symbolic value of products; such stereotypes, as these studies suggest, are appropriated by consumers to communicate specific gender related aspects of the self. Vitz and Johnson (1965), for example, demonstrate the symbolic value of products to communicate masculinity or femininity. They found that masculine males were likely to smoke cigarettes with masculine images; and feminine females were likely to smoke cigarettes with feminine images. Similarly, Allison et al. (1980) observe that masculinity and femininity are perceived as separate constructs, that

consumer behaviour is influenced by perceived gender image of a product. Products such as a pocket knife, tool kit, shaving cream, cuff links, and a briefcase, were found to have a masculine image, whereas products such as a scarf, baby oil, hand lotion, bedroom slippers, gloves, and sandals were found to have feminine images. Morris and Cundiff's (1971) study shows males are inhibited in buying hair spray because of the perceived feminine appeal of the product. In other words, they are reluctant to buy the product as it does not communicate the desired gender related aspects of the self. Dittmar et al. (1995) suggest that men tend to buy items that are instrumental or leisure related to express independence and activity, whereas women tend to buy products that express appearance and emotional aspects of the self. Along similar lines, Fugate and Philips's (2010) study focuses on gender related aspects in product consumption. Products such as beer, car, SUV, coffee, athletic shoes, lawnmower, and potato chips are considered to be of a masculine nature, whereas products such as shampoo, bath soap, wine, digital camera, facial tissue, food processor, frozen vegetables and hair spray typify high femininity and are considered feminine. These studies suggest that consumers consider the gender images of their product choices to express gender related aspects of the self.

Along similar lines, Patterson and Hogg (2004), in a study with two males and females aged between 18 and 24, report that one male participant did not buy books by female authors because he perceived them as 'girly' books aimed at girls. Similarly, a female participant was particularly conscious of what her clothes symbolized in terms of her femininity. Gould & Stern (1989) note that women are more conscious of fashion related products in relation to gender than are men. That is, both males and females are conscious of gender related stereotypes they communicate via the product choices they make. Goulding and Saren's (2009) study shows how participants, in the context of the Whitby Goth festival, express various gender related aspects. Straight men, for example, express their feminine side by wearing lace, ruffles, and velvet associated with the Gothic dandy. These studies, together, provide evidence that consumers use the symbolic value of products to express various gender related aspects such as roles, masculinity or femininity, or gender consciousness to their own selves and to others.

2.4.4.3. *Uniqueness*

Uniqueness refers to a sense of self that is different or distinctive (Chan, Berger, & Boven, 2009; Franke & Schreier, 2008; Fromkin, 1972; Snyder, 1992; Tian et al., 2001). Individuals purchase goods to express a sense of differentness which may not be particularly socially acceptable or that may even go against social norms to express a unique sense of self (Simonson & Nowlis, 2000; Snyder & Fromkin, 1977, 1980). Tian et al. (2001) explain uniqueness in terms of seeking social differentness through the purchase, use or display of original, novel or unique consumer goods. Vignoles, Chryssochoou, and Breakwell (2000) contend that distinctiveness has an essential role in the construction of a meaningful identity in that one cannot have a sense of who one is without a sense of who one is not. Chan, Berger, and Boven (2009) argue that a desire for uniqueness drives preferences at the within-group level. They report a pilot study in which they visited two parking lots on a college campus, and found that while 79% of the cars in one parking lot associated with a particular group (Alpha Gamma Rho) were American cars, 73% of the cars associated with another house (Sigma Delta Tau) were foreign brands. Such group homogeneity was greater than what was expected by chance. Yet, they also reported a great deal of within-group heterogeneity in car colour. The study suggests that even though consumers may choose products to assimilate at a group level, they make specific choices to differentiate themselves within groups. In other words, consumers opt for differentiation via product choice to communicate a distinctive sense of self.

2.4.4.4. *Cosmopolitanism or a global sense of self and/or location*

Cosmopolitanism refers to the notion of being a world citizen with an orientation that transcends any particular culture or setting (Cannon & Yaprak, 2002). A cosmopolitan orientation may manifest in a variety of ways such as habits, skills and styles, and often in conscious choices such as those of products (Caldwell et al., 2006; Cannon & Yaprak, 2002). Thompson and Tambyah (1999) note the use of products to negotiate conflicts in the expression of cosmopolitanism in expatriate professionals. Fung (2002) shows how female readers enact a cosmopolitan identity through the consumption of magazines. Caldwell et al.'s (2006) study suggests that consumers use products for dual purposes - to strengthen ties with culture or place of origin, and also for constructing a cosmopolitan identity. While a cosmopolitan orientation means adopting aspects of a cosmopolitan lifestyle, possessions or

products from back home serve to remind informants of who they are, and their cultural roots. Wattanasuwan's (2007) study with a group of women from rural areas in the cosmopolitan city of Bangkok shows how consumption symbolism such as eating out at international fast food restaurants, for example, McDonalds and Pizza Hut, wearing foreign brands and accessories, constructs and communicates a specific geographic and cosmopolitan identity. Along similar lines, Kjeldgaard (2003) analyses the role of locality in young people's discourses of identity and consumption and suggests that consumer choices are symbolic of one's geographical identity.

2.5. Symbolic Interpretation of products

Central to the notion that products have symbolic properties is that meanings, beyond the actuality of the product are created. Where used to affirm, construct and communicate aspects of the self, by definition, there needs to be an understanding of what the meanings are and how they relate to the person's idea of their self. Related to this notion is the idea that there should be congruency between the self-related aspect to be communicated and the socially constructed meanings of the product. The notion that there is, or should be self-image-product image congruity in the first place can be traced back to Grubb and Grathwohl (1967) who propose that the self is of value to an individual, that consumer behaviour is directed towards its protection and enhancement; and that the individuals' purchase, display and use of goods communicates symbolic meaning to the individual and to others. Grubb and Grathwohl's proposition includes two key aspects - one, the acknowledgement of the symbolic value of products to communicate the self, and two, the dependency on the social other for recognition of symbolic value or meaning. It encompasses the attribution of meanings to products, the use of the symbolic value of products to communicate something about the self to social others, and the assumption of shared meanings.

Related to this proposition is the notion of congruency between the self and the product. A number of studies focus on assessing the degree to which people match ideas of their self with the products they purchase; the intent being to confirm congruency between self-image and perceived product image (e.g., Dolich, 1969; Grubb & Hupp, 1968; Grubb & Stern, 1971; Hughes & Guerrero, 1971; Landon, 1974; Ross, 1971). In such studies, data is primarily gathered by asking the participants to assess self-related characteristics, their perceptions of products, and the match between the two. That consumers use the symbolic

value of products to affirm or communicate aspects of their selves to others has been discussed in Section 2.4.

However, while most studies acknowledge and assume the integral role of the other in recognising aspects being communicated by dint of shared meanings, there is limited empirical evidence in this regard. Studies that make an attempt in this direction typically focus on the notion of decoding consumption symbolism. These studies recognise the idea that people make judgments or inferences about self related characteristics of product users from the products that belong to the person. Such studies gather data by asking participants to make judgments about the type of people who would use the products presented or described.

In terms of the products studied within the decoding literature, the dominant categories are *coffee and grocery, automobiles and housing, clothing and cosmetics, and a conglomerate of miscellaneous items, viz.:*

Coffee and grocery: *E.g., Baran, Mok, Land, and Kang (1989); Fram and Cibotti (1991); Haire (1950); Holbrook and Hughes (1978); Lane and Watson (1975); Sheth (1970); Webster and Von Pechmann (1970); Woodside et al. (1977).*

Automobiles and housing: *E.g., Belk et al. (1982); Belk et al. (1981); Christopher and Schlenker (2000); Grubb and Hupp (1968); Grubb and Stern (1971).*

Miscellaneous: *E.g., Belk (1978); Belk (1980); Belk (1981); Munson and Spivey (1981); Shavitt and Nelson (2000).*

Clothing: *E.g., Bell (1991); Darley and Cooper (1972); Frank and Gilovich (1988); Forsythe (1988); Forsythe (1990); Harris, James, Chavez, Fuller, Kent, Massanari, Moore, and Walsh (1983); Holman (1980); Johnson, Schofield, and Yurchisin (2002); Paek (1986); Suedfeld, Bochner, and Matas (1971).*

Cosmetics: *E.g., Graham and Jouhar (1981); Hamid (1972); McKeachie (1952); Workman and Johnson (1991).*

These studies, across product categories, conceptualise the self in a number of ways, for e.g., in terms of personal motivations, characteristics, personality traits, social interactions, social

roles, and social impressions (See Appendix 2 for representative studies). That is, there is no clear consensus on the conceptualisation of the self.

The bulk of the studies are experimental in nature; these measure or discuss observers' inferences of products (pre-determined by researchers) primarily in terms of characteristics or personality traits.

One of the earliest studies in this area is that of Haire (1950) who provided identical shopping lists to subjects, except that one list included Nescafe and the other Maxwell House Coffee. Subjects were instructed to characterize the woman who bought the groceries. The woman who bought Nescafe was characterized as *lazy*, *spendthrift*, and a *poor wife who failed to plan well for her family*. In contrast, the woman who bought Maxwell House Coffee was perceived as a *thrifty* and a *good housewife*. A number of replications followed successively (e.g., Lane & Watson, 1975; Sheth, 1970; Webster & Von Pechmann, 1970). Sheth's (1970) findings showed a diminishing of negative attitudes towards instant coffee; Webster & Von Pechmann (1970) found no statistically significant differences between characteristics of the Maxwell House Coffee and Nescafe shoppers; and while the English Canadian women in the Lane and Watson (1975) study used expressions such as *laziness* and *doesn't enjoy homemaking* to describe the Nescafe coffee shopper, the French Canadian women described both Maxwell Coffee House shoppers and Nescafe Coffee House shoppers as being *in the workforce* with time constraints.

Several years later, Holbrook and Hughes (1978) and Fram and Cibotti (1991) repeated the same experiment and confirmed significantly different findings to those of Haire's. In these studies, shoppers were favourably associated with the pursuit of a career and an outgoing social life thereby overturning the negative characterisations associated with synthetic or convenience foods, and also reflecting the evolution of meanings over a period of time.

While most experiments focus on a specific product category, a few studies have examined multiple product categories. Belk (1978), for example, conducted a set of exploratory experiments presented in the guise of a detective study being conducted for the New York police department to locate owners of unidentified property which was lost or stolen. The study involved moderately visible consumption items such as a wallet or purse, a sports event item, and a personal care item (hair care/lipstick). The findings showed consistent

differences in the impressions formed of the consumers of these products. Belk (1980) suggests that it is the configuration of certain sets of products that carry information about a person. A person who owns a softball, slacks, a 10-speed, and a suitcase is likely to be perceived as different from someone who owns a pair of jeans, a scotch, a television set, and a backpack. The findings from this study suggest that product configurations impact on observer inferences of the self.

Although the studies in the decoding literature provide useful perspective on observers' inferences of consumers from the products they see, they do not ascertain if the message intended by the individual (about aspects of their self) is congruent with the meanings accorded by the *Other*. One of the rare studies that come close to matching the individual's perceptions with their audience is the Grubb and Stern (1971) study that built further on Grubb and Hupp (1968). Grubb and Hupp (1968) tested for congruency related aspects between consumers' self-concepts and relevant aspects of their consumer behaviour. A sample of Pontiac GTO owners and a sample of Volkswagen owners rated eight different products (including Pontiac GTO and Volkswagen) on a series of attributes. The study found that Pontiac GTO owners perceived other GTO owners as more status-conscious, flashy, fashionable, adventurous, interested in the opposite sex, sporty, style-conscious, and pleasure-seeking than Volkswagen owners. On the other hand, Volkswagen owners perceived GTO owners as less thrifty, practical, conservative, and economical than Volkswagen owners, but also more creative, individualistic, and quality conscious than Volkswagen owners. Consumers of the two different brands perceived themselves significantly different and held definite stereotype perceptions of the owners of each make. Further, they perceived themselves to be like others who owned the same car brand and quite different from owners of competing brands. Similarly, Grubb & Stern (1971) used automobiles as the product category, with Volkswagens and Mustangs being the specific brands. Owners of each brand rated their own perceptions of themselves, of the images of the two automobiles, and of the images of other owners of each brand on two semantic differential scales. The study then measured perceptions of significant others who were also asked to complete the same questionnaire to generate their perceptions of the brand images of the two automobiles. The study reported that both the consumer and the significant others perceived similar stereotypes of generalised users.

The other study that actually conducts a matching process is that of Feinberg, Mataro, and Burroughs (1992). Feinberg et al. (1992) conducted an experiment to examine whether correspondence existed between the meaning wearers intend to convey and the perceptions of observers. Eighteen female subjects of homogenous clothing size were asked to bring in a complete outfit that they felt best reflected their personality. Each of the 18 subjects then rated herself on 20 bipolar items on a personality scale. Following which, an independent group of ten male and ten female subjects was presented with the photographs of each of the 18 outfits of clothing. These subjects were instructed to infer the personalities of the people who purchased and wore each of the outfits of clothing on the 20 personality items. Correlations between clothing owners' self-ratings and mean observers' ratings for each of the 20 personality items showed that observers were able to *read* the clothing owners' self-ratings of personality accurately enough to achieve statistical significance on 7 of the 20 items.

While the Grubb and Stern (1971) study includes only one product category and two specific car brands, the Feinberg et al. (1992) study examines personality related characteristics for only one dress item. Furthermore, in both studies, the product category and brand is researcher prescribed, so these may not necessarily represent a consumer's or subject's best identity related product category or choice. While there is no direct matching of self-related characteristics between consumers and their observers in the Grubb and Stern study, the choices of the test items in the Feinberg et al. study are also pre-determined, thus restricting both subjects' and observers' choices. Further, while the Feinberg et al. study involved 18 female subjects, the observer group included a mix of both female and male subjects. The rationale for such choice is not clarified.

2.6. Issues

At least two issues have relevance for this study. The first relates to the conceptualisation and the measurement of the self. The other relates to the mode of data collection. Most studies limit the empirics of product and self related perceptions to prescribed product categories and/or pre-determined scales. As Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 show, there is a high degree of variability in how the self is conceived. The second issue relates to the match of self identified characteristics in relation to a product between consumers and observers, and the

consequential nature and degree of shared meaning of products. These issues are discussed in the following four sub-sections.

2.6.1. The construct of the self

An overview of studies in Sections 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5 shows that the self is conceptualised or operationalised in primarily four ways:

- as a singular, multidimensional construct (e.g., Green et al., 1969; Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967; Grubb & Hupp, 1968; Grubb & Stern, 1971);
- as a personality construct (e.g., Belk, 1981; Birdwell, 1968; Evans, 1959; Forsythe, 1988; Frank & Gilovich, 1988; Graham & Jouhar, 1981; Greeno, Sommers, & Kernan, 1973; Haire, 1950; Hamid, 1972; Harris et al., 1983; Holbrook & Hughes, 1978; Paek, 1986; Tucker & Painter, 1961; Woodside et al., 1977; Workman & Johnson, 1991);
- as an internal duality - the “actual”, how a person sees himself, and the “ideal” self, the way a person would ideally be (e.g., Dolich, 1969; Hamm & Cundiff, 1969; Hughes & Guerrero, 1971; Landon, 1974; Ross, 1971);
- and along the personal-social duality. The last set of studies tend to approach the self in terms of social interactions, possible selves, roles, and social identities such as those stemming from or relating to a collective, community, or a group (e.g., Berger & Heath, 2007; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Goulding & Saren, 2009; Hogg, 1998; Hogg & Michell, 1996; Jantzen, Ostergaard, & Veira, 2006; Kleine et al., 1993; Lamont & Molnar, 2001; Oswald, 1999; Patterson & Hogg, 2004; Thompson & Haytko, 1997; Thompson & Tambyah, 1999; White & Dahl, 2006, 2007).

As noted in the literature, the conceptualisation of the self is complex and varies across studies. It is usually researcher driven and context dependent and does not easily transfer across studies or contexts. This situation dictates that for this study, a central task is establishing how the self is conceptualised. This task is dealt with comprehensively in Chapter 3.

2.6.2. Measurement of the self

The next issue relates to the complexity of the empirics of the self which is reflected in the variety of measurement techniques or methodological procedures. Earlier studies, for example, typically use Q-sort techniques (e.g., Hamm & Cundiff, 1969), rating scales (e.g., Landon, 1974), and semantic differential scales (e.g., Birdwell, 1968, Grubb & Hupp, 1968, Grubb & Stern, 1971). A number of recent studies gather data via interviews, or a combination of interviews with questionnaires, or experimental designs (e.g., Berger & Heath, 2007; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Hogg, 1998; Kleine et al., 1993; Lamont & Molnar, 2001; Oswald, 1999; Thompson & Tambyah, 1999; White & Dahl, 2006, 2007).

The bulk of studies in the decoding literature tend to employ experimental designs, with measurement techniques involving projective techniques, psychological and personality tests, or rating scales (Appendix 2). Such variation in approaches to the measurement of the self also indicates that there is no clear consensus on any preferred way to measure or study the self.

2.6.3. Consumer driven discourses and the other

In terms of the data, what is noticeable is the relative absence of the consumer's voice, that is, the consumer's undirected experience of product in relation to the self. The few studies that do address the consumer's voice do so with reference to a specific age group, product category and/or context (e.g., Jantzen et al., 2006; Kjeldgaard, 2003; Thompson & Arsel, 2004; Thompson & Haytko, 1997; Wattanasuwan, 2007). Consequently, consumer driven discourses based on self-selected choices of products remain relatively under explored. Furthermore, whilst there is recognition of the significance of the *other* in studies involving the use of products in the construction of the self, whether implicitly or explicitly, there is little empirical research in this regard. That is, whether there is a match between intended messages and those interpreted by audiences is not clear. This issue, resonates Ligas and Cotte (1999, p.611), albeit in the wider context of branded objects and the marketing environment: *"In the case of using objects (branded products), the individual (consumer) must not only account for what is currently known about the object (from the marketing environment) and what one personally believes the object signifies (from the individual environment), but one must also be aware of the way in which the social group interprets the*

meaning of the object”. In other words, intrinsic to successful communication is the sharing of meaning one accords to a product with the social groups one interacts with.

2.6.4. The understanding of shared meaning in the decoding literature

The decoding literature (Section 2.5) provides some evidence of shared meaning of products to the extent that observers (in decoding studies) associate certain products with some socio-psychological characteristics of the self. The bulk of the studies in the decoding literature examine characteristics or personality traits with no clear consensus on what specific aspects are included or excluded.

In such studies, both products and the self-related aspect being examined are pre-determined by the researcher and may neither represent a consumer’s choice of product to communicate the self, nor may necessarily reflect both consumer’s and observer’s choice of self characteristic in relation to the selected product. This observation holds true for almost all studies within the decoding literature which tend to be experimental in nature, and which usually involve sets of clothing, grocery items or shopping lists, or in rare instances housing and automobiles, or a selection of pre-selected items. In other words, the choice of product in such studies lies with the researcher; the decision on the self-related aspect associated with or being communicated by the selected product is also made by the researcher or judges assigned the specific task; and the investigation of whether the specific self-related characteristic holds true in relation to the selected product is also conducted by the researcher. The authenticity of shared meaning in such studies is therefore questionable. This means that other than the limited scope of two studies (Feinberg et al., 1992; Grubb & Stern, 1971), to the best of the researcher’s knowledge, there is no reality check in terms of the real world choices of consumers, the self-attributed characteristics in relation to the product choices they make, and the nature and degree of match with observers’ inferences, descriptions or interpretations of the self from the products they see that belong to the consumer. It would be, therefore, reasonable to state, that the examination of self-related characteristics in relation to a product, and the consequential understanding of shared meaning amongst observers in relation to the selected product/s, as evident in the decoding literature is controlled, limited, and remains open to full and further examination.

2.7. Research questions

This study addresses the issues described above by presenting, in Chapter 3, a comprehensive discussion and a clear position statement on how the self is conceptualised in the study. To address the relative paucity of the consumer voice, the research design allows for maximum control by the participants in that they are (a) able to self-select products, and also are (b) able to express self-related aspects in relation to their choices of products.

As is evident, there is shared meaning to the extent that observers (in decoding studies) do associate certain products with some socio-psychological characteristics that people display. However, with the exception of two studies (Feinberg et al., 1992; Grubb & Stern, 1971) that provide limited perspectives on the issues this study addresses, there is no clear evidence that the products that consumers select to display certain aspects of the self, are accurately interpreted by their intended audience(s), and whether shared meaning of products between consumers and observers, or within a select population group, can be inferred on such basis.

For this study, the intent is to ascertain the degree to which the self-related messages intended by the sender accord with the interpretation of the receiver.

Considering the issues and gaps identified, this study formulates the following research questions:

1. What products do young adults select to display aspects of their selves to an audience of peers?
2. What aspects of the self do they identify?
3. What common themes emerge when young adults talk about products in relation to aspects of their self?

Given that the intent is to communicate aspects of their self,

4. How successful are they in doing so? Is there evidence of shared meaning between message senders and message receivers?

Extant research has examined a range of product categories to communicate aspects of the self such as belongingness to reference groups, status, ethnicity and culture, uniqueness, age, gender, or a sense of cosmopolitanism. Since there is evidence that consumers use the

symbolic value of products to communicate aspects of their selves, it is anticipated that participants in this study would identify and reflect these aspects of the self. The next chapter frames specific propositions to address research questions one and two.

2.8. Conclusion

This chapter has overviewed the literature in two related areas - the symbolic use of products to communicate aspects of the self to others, and observers' inferences of owners' characteristics from the products they see. The bulk of studies on the symbolic use of products to communicate aspects of the self report on how consumers think the product supports or communicates aspects of their self. The matching of intended or sent messages with those received by external audiences has had minimal attention. The study identifies four key issues - the first relates to the complexity and ambiguity surrounding the conceptualization or operationalization of the self, and the general lack of consensus in the literature in this regard; the second relates to the measurement of the self; the third refers to consumer discourses and the match between intended messages with those interpreted by others; and the fourth refers to the understanding of shared meaning. In view of these issues, the chapter identifies gaps and formulates questions the study proposes to address. These are first, the range of products consumers (young adults) select to display aspects of the self. The second and third questions relate to the aspects of the self they communicate via the product choices they make, and the common discursive themes that emerge. The fourth and last question addresses the issue of whether characteristics attributed to the self via product choice match with characteristics attributed by others, and whether shared meaning of products can be inferred on such basis. These questions together drive this study.

CHAPTER 3. Framing, Theoretical Basis, and Propositions

3.1. Introduction

The self, as seen in the previous chapter, has engaged significant attention of consumer researchers. Discussions on the nature and the significance of the self can be traced back to the beginnings of civilization - to philosophers such as Socrates and Plotinus, to Christian thinkers such as Paul and Augustine in the West, and to ancient scriptures such as the Vedas in the East (Remes & Sihvola, 2008). However, the significance, understanding, and measurement of the self as a scholarly construct in consumer behaviour and marketing literature is of relatively recent (twentieth century) origin. As noted in Chapter 2, the increasing relevance and role of products as communicators has contributed to the interest in the self in consumer behaviour research. Even so, the construct of the self itself remains a fragmented, incoherent, and highly diffuse area within consumer behaviour (Malhotra, 1988; Reed, 2002; Sirgy, 1982). The purpose of this chapter is threefold - to clarify the theoretical premise of this study, to contextualize the understanding of the self in relation to this study, and to frame the propositions this study will address.

Section 3.2 sets out the theoretical premise of this study; Section 3.3 addresses the complexity involved in the self-related literature. Section 3.4 points out the two key paradigms of the self as areas of interest to consumer behaviour researchers. Section 3.5 discusses the approach to the self in this study. Section 3.6 sets out the research questions and the corresponding propositions the study will address. Section 3.7 summarises the chapter.

3.2. Theoretical premise

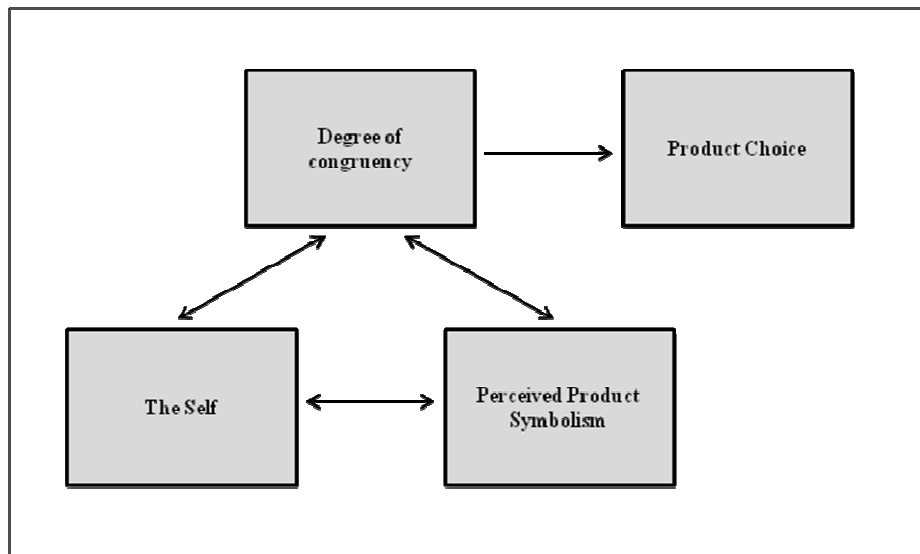
The studies described in Chapter 2 assume a number of conditions - (1) the greater the product and self-image congruence, the more a product will be preferred; (2) products are perceived by consumers as having images or symbolic meanings; (3) the meanings of products are socially constructed and shared; (4) because of their symbolic role, the display and use of these products as symbols assists an individual in defining and enhancing the self for their own self and for others.

For this study, a number of theories have relevance to theoretical framing. As with the majority of the studies in Chapter 2, notions of congruency as proposed in the theoretical frameworks of Grubb and Grathwohl (1967) and Sirgy (1982, 1985, 1986) serve as pertinent theoretical bases, however, Goffman's (1959) theory of presentation of the self and impression management is also pertinent. Grubb and Grathwohl (1967) propose that congruency between product symbolism and a person's self affects product choice, and that consumers' choices of goods communicate meaning to others. Sirgy (1982, 1985, 1986) proposes congruency between perceptions of product-image and self-image, and elaborates on the types of self-congruity with social others. As such, these notions of congruency recognize the value of congruency theories originally proposed by Rokeach (1960) and Heider (1946, 1958).

Rokeach's Belief Congruence Theory (BCT) proposes that the most important determinant of one person's attitude toward another is the similarity or the congruence between the two people's belief systems. His understanding of the theory caused some controversy because it was viewed as a theory of prejudice as he focused on BCT's application to determining people's attitudes toward out-groups rather than the in-group out-group category difference (Brewer & Kramer, 1985; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000). In that its basic premise is that congruency of belief between two people will result in congruency of action for them, Rokeach's BCT has, of course, resonance with Heider's (1946, 1958) Balance Theory. Essentially, Balance Theory explains how people tend to maintain consistency in patterns of their liking and disliking of one another and/or of inanimate objects (Hummon & Doreian, 2003; Robins & Kashima, 2007; Weimann, 1982). When patterns of liking and disliking are balanced, structures are stable. When they are imbalanced, structures are unstable, and there is pressure to change in the direction that makes them balanced. In other words, consistency in patterns of understanding and shared meaning has a bearing on social interaction, and is integral to successful communication within social groups. The premise of this study being shared meaning, the relevance of congruency as proposed in these theories essentially stipulates that how a person views a product is also congruent with the views of others.

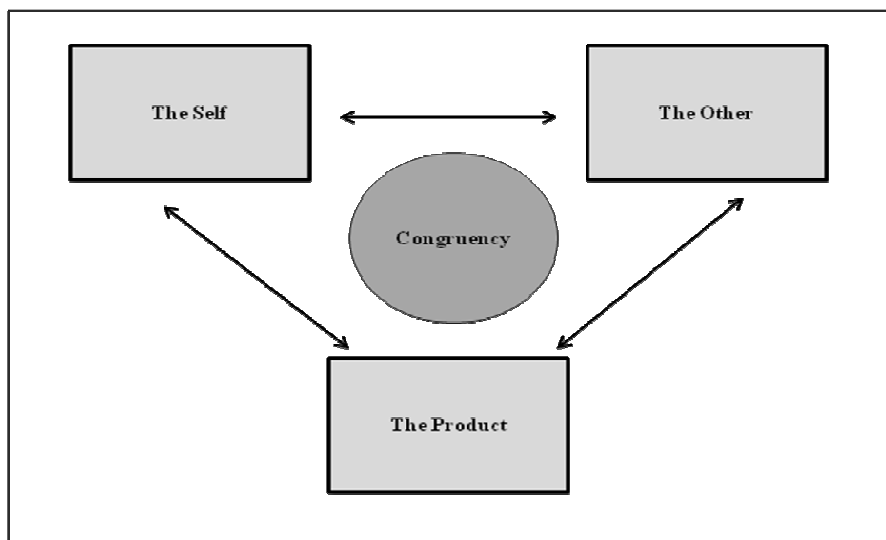
In line with these ideas, in the context of the self, congruity theory proposes that strong congruency between product symbolism and a person's self affects product choice (See Figure 3-1).

Figure 3-1: The Basic Premise of Congruency Theory



For this study, the intent is to expand the self-product congruency theory to be more in line with BCT and Heider's Balance theory in that congruency should exist between the three entities - the self, perceived product symbolism, and the 'other' (the audience) (See Figure 3-2). That is, congruency of meanings associated with the product should exist between the self and the 'other' (the audience).

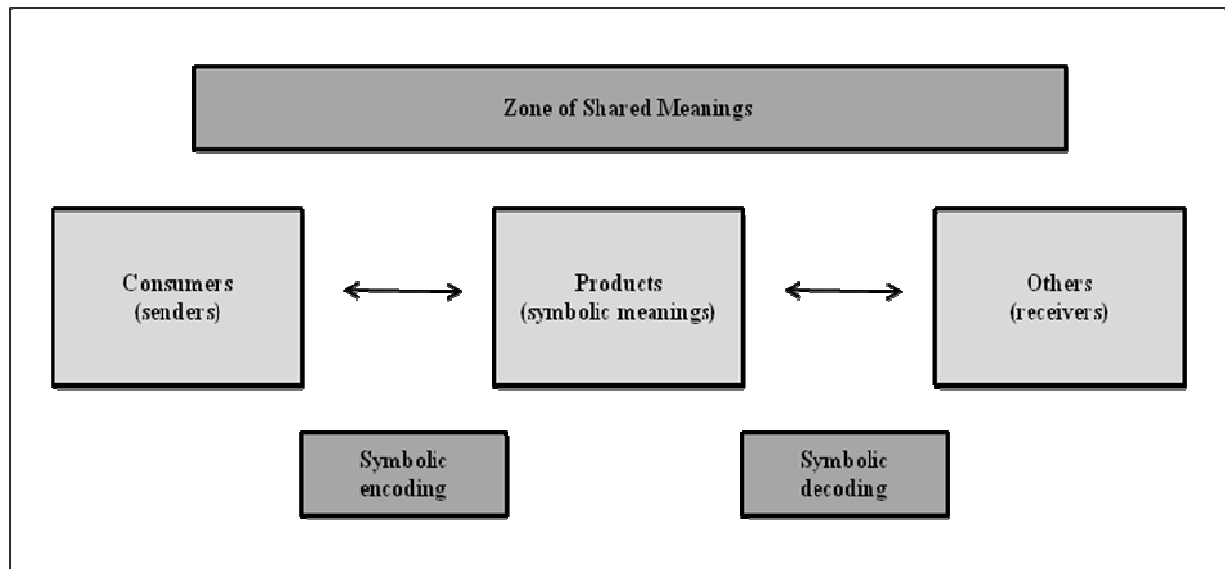
Figure 3-2: Proposed Model of Congruency Theory



Though this understanding of congruency is, as the literature review demonstrates, accepted, it has not been clearly substantiated. The task for this study is to examine the degree to which there is shared meaning, between the self and the other, or the sender and the receiver,

of the product in relation to the self. In other words, is there congruency between senders and receivers of product meaning in relation to the self (see Figure 3-3).

Figure 3-3: Model of Encoding and Decoding Congruency for Product Meaning in Relation to the Self



Implicit in this understanding is the notion of impression management. Impression management (IM) theory states that any individual (or organisation) must establish and maintain impressions that are congruent with the perceptions they want to convey to their publics.

Impression management links with Goffman's (1959) work - *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Goffman engages with how people present themselves in their everyday lives, that is, how they construct their selves through everyday performances. Goffman's *self* is constantly engaged in performances, routinely playing specific roles within particular social interactions. Much of his vocabulary, such as *script*, *scene*, *actor*, *frontstage* and *backstage* draws upon the world of theatre, in which there is always an audience. In real life, however, individuals through various choices and practices, foster impressions that reflect well upon themselves, thereby encouraging others to accept their preferred constructions of themselves. That is, individuals encode meanings in the choices they make, and rely on others to suitably decode the same. The nature and degree of match between meanings encoded by senders' and those received by audiences (receivers) results in successful communication and shared meaning. Meaning, then, is a shared social construction, and is constituted in audiences' (or

receivers') ability to respond or perceive meanings as intended by senders' acts of choice and/or practice.

From a communications viewpoint, impression management encompasses the vital ways in which one establishes and communicates this congruence between intended impression (encoding) and perceived impression (decoding). The idea, that perception is reality, is the basis for the proposed theory that straddles the spheres of both sociology and social psychology.

3.3. The concept of the self

Central to this study is the concept of the self. The varied interpretations and modes of operationalising the concept indicate that the researcher should state how the self is understood in their particular study. As indicated in Chapter 1, social constructionism informs the understanding of the self in this study. The application of social constructionism to the understanding of the self is clarified in Section 3.3.1. Section 3.3.2 addresses the problematic construct of the self. Section 3.3.3 presents an overview of the key perspectives on the self.

3.3.1. Social constructionism

Where the notion of social construction is assumed, researchers need to clarify how they are applying the concept. Constructionist ideas can take many forms. However, the two most common forms are social constructivism and social constructionism. Both these forms are the subject of considerable debate, and to an extent, confusion; so a position statement on the understanding of social constructionism and social constructivism is also merited. Both social constructionism and social constructivism are similar constructs in that both concern with the ways in which social phenomena develop. Where the two constructs differ, lies in the focal dimension of each. Social constructionism refers to the social origin of knowledge (e.g., Billig, Condor, Edwards, Gane, Middleton, & Radley, 1988; Gergen, 1994, 1997; Gergen & Gergen, 1984, 1986; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Shotter, 1993a, 1993b). It assumes that meanings given to phenomena emerge from communal thought that is generated by social processes. The focus tends to be on the phenomena, e.g., agreements as to what constitutes *status* in a community.

Constructivism is concerned with the individuals' unique world view and as such is more psychological in focus. According to Burr (2003), constructivists argue that individuals perceive the world in different ways actively creating their own meaning from events whilst being influenced by the common (agreed meaning) given to social phenomena. Von Glaserfeld (1988) argues that people are cognising entities who constantly strive to make sense of their environment, and so whilst they are aware of the socially constructed and shared meanings of phenomena, they bring to each phenomena their own individual experiences, and so, create their own unique meaning of the phenomena.

This, of course, demonstrates a direct link with phenomenology (e.g., Husserl, 1970; Schutz, 1962, 1964, 1967, 1970; Thompson et al., 1989). According to Taylor and Bogdan (1998), phenomenology involves understanding of social phenomena from an individual's own perspective. Husserl (1970) notes the active role of human consciousness in constructing objects of experience. Schutz (1962, 1964, 1967, 1970) focuses attention on the ways in which the life world is experienced by individuals essentially through constructs that are social in origin. Thompson et al. (1989) describe the concept of the life world as a manifestation of existential phenomenology which seeks to describe experience as it is lived. While a phenomenological approach allows for the consideration of the individual perspective, based on the individual's experiences and understandings of the world, the social constructionist philosophy enables an understanding of that which is shared, and is inter-relational.

This thesis postulates that essentially these two world views are not mutually exclusive. Constructionism, in essence, is a philosophical stance which assumes that as a collective, individuals establish and agree on how the world should be constructed. For example, that there are characteristics that individuals collectively label as kind, honourable, generous, aggressive, that individuals have a shared understanding of what these concepts mean, and that individuals use to make judgments. This of course underpins the shared meaning framework as set out in Figures 3-1, 3-2, and 3-3. Personal interpretation is assessed by means of a phenomenological approach to data collection, and so, directs the use of unstructured depth interviews allowing participants to self select the products that they think say something about their self.

3.3.2. *Self as a problematic construct*

That consumers use products as a means to an end and that these ends are delivered through the benefits that the products deliver is widely accepted. It is also widely accepted that there are three types of benefits: functional, experiential and expressive, and that these benefits are not mutually exclusive, that is, a single purchase can deliver one or all three benefits (Keller, 1993; Pitta & Katsanis, 1995; Schmitt, 1999; Srivastava, Fahey, & Christensen, 2001). These benefits can however be studied in isolation. Where the focus is on the expressive benefit - the assumption is that the product is being used to express aspects of the self and that there is shared meaning - i.e., the audience can accurately decode the symbols being used.

As Chapter 2 shows, this area has been extensively explored by consumer researchers. Although examined for different reasons and from different perspectives, the area that has remained the most problematic is the construct of the self (Baumeister, 1987). Many researchers tend to agree with Rosenberg's (1979, p.7) assertion that the term self represents the "totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself". However, operationalising the construct is difficult. The construct of the self is multi-dimensional and multi-faceted and researchers commonly investigate one or more dimensions and/or aspects. Though this is reasonable, the problem is the confusion that surrounds the labelling and demarcation of the dimensions and facets. The confusion is partly a function of the nebulous nature of the construct. It is as Toulmin (1986, p. 41) writes, "a shorthand sign, pointing to the whole realm of deliberate and non-deliberate conduct and reflexive experience". The next sub section provides an overview of perspectives on the nature of the self.

3.3.3. *The self*

A number of perspectives, approaches, and demarcations pervade the realm of self (Malhotra, 1988; Reed, 2002). While Malhotra (1988) refers to seven key approaches - *the self as an object; symbolic interactionism; neo-Freudian; organismic; phenomenological; cognitive; and current* (see Exhibit 3-1); Reed (2002) identifies six paradigms: *the self as an object of introspection; the self and behaviourism; the self and the psychoanalytic tradition; the self and the cognitive revolution; the self, perception, and awareness; and the self, social relationships, and social identity* (see Exhibit 3-1). A high degree of commonality exists between Malhotra's (1988) and Reed's (2002) work, and as Reed contends, the extent to

which each emphasizes the more internal psychological aspects, or the more external, socially situated aspects differentiates one from the other (see Exhibit 3-1).

Exhibit 3-1: Perspectives on the Self

	Perspectives or paradigms	Key scholars	Conceptualization of the self
1.	The self as an object of introspection (Malhotra, 1988; Reed, 2002)	James (1890); Allport (1955); Cattell (1950)	All that we call our own, and that we regard as peculiarly ours
2.	Organismic (Malhotra, 1988)	Lecky (1961)	Organized conceptual system of an individual's thoughts about himself
3.	The self and behaviourism in response to environmental contingencies (Reed, 2002)	Hull (1951); Skinner (1953, 1978, 1987); Thorndike (1932); Watson (1930)	Repertoire of behaviours directed by an outgrowth of environmental contingencies; reactive self involving environmental responses
4.	Neo-Freudian - The self and the psychoanalytic tradition (Malhotra, 1988; Reed, 2002)	Sullivan (1953); Adler (1927); Freud (1923, 1946); Horney (1945); Jung (1960)	Self-system – an organization of educative experience; an all inclusive totality of both conscious and unconscious aspects
5.	Cognitive; Self and the cognitive revolution (Malhotra, 1988; Reed, 2002)	Sarbin (1952); Mischell (1977); Kihlstrom and Kleine (1994)	Cognitive structure that includes substructures; conceptual system or a knowledge structure in memory
6.	Phenomenological; Self, perception, and awareness (Malhotra, 1988; Reed, 2002)	Snygg and Combs (1949); Rogers (1951); Lewin (1936); Raimy (1948)	Everything the individual refers to with the words I, Me, and mine; a consistent conceptual pattern of perceptions of characteristics; selective filter derived from perceptions from the external and the internal world
7.	Symbolic interactionism; The self, social relationships, and social identity (Malhotra, 1988; Reed, 2002)	Cooley (1902); Mead (1934); Goffman (1959); Hogg (1996); Hogg and Abrams (1988); Schlenker (1980, 1982, 1985); Tajfel (1978, 1982); Tajfel and Turner (1979)	Everything an individual designates as his own and to which the individual refers with the personal pronouns 'I', 'Me', 'myself'; social structure arising out of social experience; self-system-an organization of educative experience Reflective mirror born out of social interaction; an object that arises from social interaction; an enacted role for an audience; a universe of potential different identities that may guide behaviour
8.	Current (Malhotra, 1988)	Burns (1979); Epstein (1980); Rosenberg (1979)	An organization of self-attitudes; a self-theory of what the individual is like; the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings with reference to himself as an object

Source: Malhotra (1988); Reed (2002)

The significance of Malhotra's and Reed's classifications lies in the fact that most theorisations of the self and surrounding debates can be linked to one or more perspectives/paradigms. A typical example is that of the discussion on the distinctions and similarities between identity theory and social identity theory which are both relevant to perspective Seven in Exhibit 3-1. Identity theory conceptualizes the self as an occupant of a role, and the incorporation of expectations, meanings and behaviours associated with the particular role (Burke, 1980; Hogg, Terry & White, 1995; McCall & Simmons, 1978; Stryker, 1968, 1980, 1987; Stryker & Serpe, 1982; Turner, 1978). Identity theorists typically focus on individualistic outcomes of identity related processes. On the other hand, social identity is a person's knowledge of belongingness to a social category or group (Hogg, 1992, 1993; Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1982). It is characterised by the social category one belongs to, or one which provides a definition of who one is in terms of a category, for example, nationality, political affiliation, sports team, and whether one belongs to an in-group or an out-group. Stets and Burke (2000, p. 224) observe substantial similarities and overlaps between social identity theory and identity theory - "In social identity theory and identity theory, the self is reflexive in that it can take itself as an object and can categorize, classify, or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications". They contend that while this process is called *self-categorization* in social identity theory, it is called *identification* in identity theory. In most instances, they observe, differences are about focus rather than kind. This means that one's overall sense of the social-self derives from not only the particular identities that one enacts, but also from those that one ascribes to one's self. In short, both identity theory and social identity theory clearly lie within the purview of the *self, social relationships, and social identity* paradigm. Similarly so, this paradigm also links with the works of Cooley (1902) and Mead (1934). Just as the looking glass serves to reflect an individual's physical appearance, similarly, it is in the imagination that the self perceives its impact on others (Cooley, 1902). Mead (1934), on the other hand, theorizes that individuals have multiple selves, and that, different selves came to the fore for different social relationships. Individuals become aware of their selves only by taking on roles of others.

One view that is not separately represented in Malhotra's nor in Reed's classification is the multidimensionality perspective on the self (Burns, 1979; Gergen, 1991; Markin, 1979; Markus & Kunda, 1986; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Markus & Wurf, 1987; Rosenberg, 1979).

The multidimensionality perspective refers to plural conceptions of the self, such as the good or bad self, the possible, actual or, ideal-self. Markin (1979) notes the perceived self is how one sees oneself; the ideal-self is the person one aspires to be; the social-self refers to perceptions of others; and the apparent-self is how others view the individual. The actual-self is a composite of all these concepts. Irrespective of the type, the self in such classifications references both personal and social contexts, and so this perspective also ties in with paradigms Six and Seven in the above table.

No doubt then, the self is a complex and multidimensional construct as reflected in the consumer behaviour and marketing literature. The next section provides an overview of the same.

3.4. Consumer behaviour literature

Appendices 1 and 2 summarise the key studies described in Chapter 2. As the summaries in Appendices 1 and 2 show, the interpretation of the self in these studies resonates with two of the paradigms as described in Exhibit 3-1. These are:

Paradigm Six - *Self, Perception and Awareness* (inclusive of a phenomenological perspective); and

Paradigm Seven - *Self, Social relationships and Social identity* (inclusive of social interactionism)

Paradigm Six essentially refers to the self in terms of perception and awareness. Behaviour in this perspective is influenced by the personal meanings each individual attaches to his or her perception of the external and the internal world. Paradigm Seven - the *Self, Social Relationships and Social Identity*, on the other hand, refers to the self in terms of social interactions, roles, strategic and/or multiplicative identities. The conceptualisation and/or operationalisation of the self in the literature as discussed in Chapter 2 and as noted in Appendices 1 and 2, ties in with these two key paradigms, usually with overlaps, but also with a focus on one aspect or the other. Essentially while Paradigm Six focuses on the personal aspects of the self, Paradigm Seven refers to the social dimensions of the self.

The next section discusses the relevance and application of these perspectives to the current study in more detail.

3.5. Approach to the self in this study

As Reed (2002) suggests, it may be sensible to consider the self as a somewhat less nebulous and manageable starting point to understanding an individual. He provides a cogent argument for the notion that the *Self, Social Relationships, and Social Identity* should dominate consumer research. The consumption of products is a social activity - irrespective of a public or private consumption situation, primarily because the meanings associated with products are socially constructed. So Reed's argument for the salience of the *Self, Social Relationships, and Social Identity* paradigm is sensible. However, this paradigm does not negate the notion that the self is comprised of at least two interacting facets- the persona (*the self as denoted by 'I', 'me', 'myself', characteristics, and abilities*) and the social-self (*the self as denoted by roles and social signifiers such as status*); it recognises that a factor in their formation is a function of social interaction. Clearly then, the *Self, Social Relationships, and Social Identity* paradigm sits with the constructionist philosophy as individuals must be cognisant of social others, and how social others expect them to think and behave in given situations.

Cognisance of social others as characterised in the *Self, Social Relationships, and Social Identity* paradigm, in turn, is not delinked from the thinking, perceiving, and behaving individual as represented in Reed's *Self, Perception, and Awareness* (inclusive of Malhotra's *phenomenological* perspective). Underpinning this paradigm is the notion that a sense of self is individual and must be understood from the individual's perspective (Lewin, 1936; Raimy, 1948; Rogers, 1951; Snygg & Combs, 1949). This paradigm references the individual's phenomenological field, and also the conscious awareness of one's own characteristics, experiences and meanings at any given point. As such, Reed's *Self, Perception, and Awareness* sits with constructivism.

So even though Reed presents *Self, Social Relationships, and Social Identity*, and *Self, Perception, and Awareness* as two separate paradigms, they are not mutually exclusive in the understanding of the *self*. While the *Self, Social Relationships and Social Identity* paradigm tends to focus on the social, the external and the inter-personal, the *Self, Perception, and Awareness* paradigm tends to focus on the personal and the internal. The *Self, Perception and Awareness* paradigm is linked to the *Self, Social Relationships and Social Identity*

paradigm in that being perceptive and aware at a personal level is integral to communicating the self in social contexts.

The approach to the self in this study is driven by this interrelated understanding of the self. As the study concerns with conscious thoughts and meanings, the understanding of the self negates the sub-conscious or the unconscious realm. Furthermore, even though the study acknowledges the multiple conceptions of the self, the focus on the understanding of the self is in terms of the actual, a snapshot of the current self, rather than any aspired or ideal-self. In a final summarisation, then, the use of the term self in this thesis essentially refers to the conscious recognition of both personal and social aspects of individuals, as seen by their own selves, and by others. Such conceptualisation postulates that both personal and social dimensions co-exist in the construct of the self. Such understanding of the self drives the current study.

3.6. Research questions and propositions

This study focuses on young adults between the ages of 18 and 21 as they are in a stage of transition from adolescence to full-fledged adulthood, a period most often associated with the development of the self (Erikson, 1959, 1968, 1975; Johnson, Berg, & Sirotzki, 2007; Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Stokes & Wyn, 2007). As young adults are highly cognisant of the symbolic value of the products they consume (e.g., Galican, 2004; Piacentini & Mailer, 2004), one would expect this would be reflected in an ability to maintain, construct or communicate aspects of the self via the product choices they make.

Accordingly, this study seeks to determine answers to the following questions:

- What products do young adults select to display aspects of their self to an audience of peers?
- What aspects of the self do they identify?
- What common themes emerge when young adults talk about products in relation to aspects of their self?

Given that the intent is to communicate aspects of their self,

- How successful are they in doing so? Is there evidence of shared meaning between message senders and message receivers?

The intent of the first three questions - *What products do young adults select to display aspects of their self to an audience of peers? What aspects of the self do they identify? What common themes emerge when young adults talk about products in relation to aspects of their self?* is to, examine consumer responses when they are given carte blanche to select products and the aspects of the self that they reflect. In relation to the first question, existing research has considered a range of products and their relation to the self. These include:

- **Clothing and accessories** (e.g., Holt, 1997; Kjeldgaard, 2003; O'Cass & Frost, 2002; Thompson & Haytko, 1997), Ralph Lauren and Yves St. Laurent shirts (e.g., Hogg, 1998), **accessories such as sunglasses** (e.g., O'Cass & Frost, 2002; Wang & Wallendorf, 2006), **watches** (e.g., Lamont & Molnar, 2001), **wristbands** (e.g., Berger & Heath, 2008), **lingerie** (e.g., Jantzen et al., 2006); **footwear** (e.g., Elliott, 1994; Thompson & Haytko, 1997);
- **Automobiles** (e.g., Berger & Heath, 2007; Birdwell, 1968; Chan, Berger & Boven, 2009; Evans, 1959; Green et al., 1969; Grubb & Hupp, 1968);
- **Cigarettes** (e.g., Vitz & Johnson, 1965);
- **Mobile phones** (e.g., Hogg, 1998), cell phone covers (e.g., Franke & Schreier, 2008);
- **Cosmetics such as hair spray** (e.g., Morris & Cundiff, 1971);
- **Food and drinks such as beer** (e.g., Holt, 1997; Lamont & Molnar, 2001; Lindridge et al, 2004; Oswald, 1999);
- **Home decor and furnishings** (e.g., Holt, 1997);
- **Magazines & books** (e.g., Fung, 2002; Patterson & Hogg, 2004).

Given the extent of the extant research, it is reasonable to assume that these categories could also emerge in this study. Accordingly, the study sets out the following proposition:

Proposition 1: Young adults in the research population select from a limited set of products to communicate aspects of their selves.

Given the number and scope of previous studies, one would expect the behaviour of young adults to reflect the findings of extant research. Extant research indicates strong evidence for

product choice to denote group membership or affiliation (e.g., Berger & Heath, 2007, 2008; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Hogg & Michell, 1996; White & Dahl, 2006, 2007). It is expected that participants in this study would reflect this behaviour:

Proposition 2: Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to express affiliation, association, or belongingness with reference groups or community.

The literature provides evidence for individuals' use of products to denote status (e.g., Lamont & Molnar, 2001; O'Cass & Frost, 2002; O'Cass & McEwen, 2004; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). It also provides evidence to the effect that consumers use products to indicate ethnicity (e.g., Chattaraman & Lennon, 2008; Lindridge et al., 2004; Oswald, 1999; Penaloza, 1994). It is expected that respondents in this study would reflect these behaviours, and accordingly Propositions Three and Four are set out:

Proposition 3: Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to indicate status.

Proposition 4: Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to indicate ethnicity.

There is some empirical evidence for the notion that individuals use products to establish differentiation from others in terms of uniqueness (e.g., Chan et al., 2009; Franke & Schreier, 2008). Accordingly, the following proposition is set out.

Proposition 5: Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to communicate uniqueness.

Existing studies suggest consumers' product choices indicate cosmopolitanism-related characteristics of the self (e.g., Caldwell et al., 2006; Wattanasuwan, 2007). The following proposition follows.

Proposition 6: Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to communicate cosmopolitanism related characteristics of the self.

Consumers' product choices reflect and support age and life stage related characteristics (e.g., Auty & Elliott, 1998; Elliott, 1994). It is expected that the same characteristics will be reflected in young adult consumer discourses.

Proposition 7: Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to communicate age and life stage related characteristics.

Empirical studies suggest the use of products to communicate gender related aspects of the self (e.g., Fugate & Philips, 2010; Goulding & Saren, 2009; Patterson & Hogg, 2004; Vitz and Johnson, 1965). Accordingly, this study sets out the following proposition:

Proposition 8: Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to communicate gender related characteristics.

Question Four concerns with assessing the degree of success consumers have when using products to express aspects of their self to others. This question requires a matching process, and thus measurement. The assumption is that the consumer (the sender of the message) has a clear understanding of the aspects of the self they are communicating and the audience (receiver) will interpret the message in the manner intended. Accordingly, the study proposes as follows:

Proposition 9: Receivers are able to successfully interpret the message implicit in the products selected by the sender.

The literature provides mixed evidence on the ability of males and females to communicate and form impressions from products (e.g., Belk et al., 1981; Dittmar et al., 1995; Graham & Jouhar, 1981; Hamid, 1972). This study proposes that females are better at communicating and interpreting information compared to males.

Proposition 10: Young adult females are more successful than young adult males in communicating aspects of their self.

Proposition 11: Young adult females are more successful than young adult males at interpreting the aspects of the self that the product user intends to communicate.

There is evidence that consumers use products to communicate ethnicity related affiliations (e.g., Crane, Hamilton, & Wilson, 2004; Lindridge et al., 2004; Oswald, 1999). The underlying assumption in such studies is that consumers are able to do so, even though there is little empirical evidence in this regard. This study sets out the following proposition to test the same:

Proposition 12: Young adults are more successful at communicating aspects of their self to an audience of the same ethnicity, rather than an audience of differing ethnicity.

3.7. Conclusion

This chapter has mapped the course of this study. It provides necessary background and contextualises the gaps identified in Chapter 2. It considers the complexities in the understanding of the self within the marketing and consumer behaviour literature, positions the specific approach to the understanding of the self, and sets out the theoretical basis of this study. The study conceptualizes the self as a construct comprising of two key dimensions - the personal and the social. Finally, it establishes the research questions and the 12 propositions the study will address. The next chapter discusses the research design to address the same.

CHAPTER 4. Research Design

4.1. Introduction

As Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate, the notion that consumers use products to communicate aspects of their self to themselves and to others is widely accepted. Implicit in this notion is the assumption that consumers have the ability to use products in this manner. There is some evidence that they have the ability, however, the research is not conclusive. Less evident is their success, particularly in relation to how others interpret the product use and the self it communicates. The study aims, therefore, to examine four key questions. The examination of the first three research questions - *What products do young adults select to display aspects of their self to their self and to their peers? What aspects of the self do they identify? And What themes emerge when adults talk about products in relation to aspects of their self* - requires phenomenological style data and an interpretive approach to data analysis. The examination of the fourth question – *Is there evidence of shared meaning between message senders and message receivers* - requires a test of communication using quantitative methods. Accordingly, this research adopts a pragmatic approach to research design. Though a pragmatic philosophy does not automatically imply the use of mixed methods, it is often the case (Bahl & Milne, 2006). Essentially, the pragmatic approach requires that the focus be on the research task without any commitment to a particular methodology.

The study necessitates the data to be collected in prescribed phases. Study One involves auto-photography and semi-structured interviews. Data gathered from Study One will be used to identify the products young adults use, and those aspects of the self that selected products express. Data from Study One will comprise of photographs of products and explanations as to how they express aspects of the participant's self. Study Two investigates how the participants' peer group interprets product use. Study Two will present photographs to the peer group who will first be asked to describe the person to whom the products belong, and then asked to select from a bank of characteristics and attributes they associate with the person to whom the products belong. Section 4.2 describes the sample selection for both Study One and Study Two. Section 4.3 describes the data collection and data analysis for Study One in Sub-Sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2, and for Study Two in Sub-Sections 4.3.3 and 4.3.4 respectively. Section 4.4 concludes the chapter.

4.2. Sample selection

An important consideration for the study is the need to have a homogeneous sample. The study is premised on the idea of shared meaning which derives from similar education levels and age, a common communication platform, shared experiences of available products, media use, and of course, a common socio-cultural milieu.

The intent is to identify a sample of young adults. This is because young adults are in a state of transition from adolescence to full-fledged adulthood; a time that is most often associated with the development of the self (Erikson, 1959, 1968, 1975; Johnson et al., 2007; Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Stokes & Wyn, 2007). Existing studies suggest that as young adults work within and across boundaries of adolescence and young adulthood, they make active investments to construct their selves (Erikson, 1959, 1968, 1975; Johnson et al., 2007; Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Stokes & Wyn, 2007). Such investment can take various forms - one being the use of products to do so.

Because each life stage is marked by significant changes in status, choices, and consumer behaviour (Erikson, 1959, 1968, 1975; Hill, 1992; Piacentini & Mailer, 2004), one would expect this to be reflected in young adult consumers' product choices and underlying discourses. Piacentini and Mailer (2004) observe that young people have a strong desire to affirm and communicate their newly found adulthood to their peers. Quite akin to rituals and rites that mark life stages, young adult consumers employ products to indicate their transition to a new life stage. Although Piacentini and Mailer make the argument in the context of teenagers, it is equally applicable to young adult consumers. Similarly, Galician (2004) notes that young adults are highly brand conscious and are cognisant of the symbolic value of brands. Such views suggest that for young adult consumers, the usage of products and shared meaning may be particularly strong, and so one would expect this to be reflected in an acute ability to interpret brands. In accordance with these views, the sample will be drawn from the undergraduate student population at two closely situated major universities who are enrolled in a business degree within the Auckland region.

4.2.1. Approach to sample selection

Both Studies One and Two will employ non-probability sampling with criterion-based purposeful sampling (Hair, Lukas, Miller, Bush, & Ortinau, 2009; Patton, 2002). Non-

probability sampling is sampling in which participants are chosen based on the researcher's judgment regarding the characteristics of the population and the needs of the research (Fink, 2003a). The limitations of non-probability sampling lie in that some members of the eligible target population have a chance of being chosen while others may be left out. Clearly then, regardless of the sample size, that such sampling represents the entire population cannot be known, as it is difficult to generalize the results beyond the specific sample used.

As a preliminary step, both Studies One and Two will employ purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). Maxwell (2005) notes that such an approach selects particular settings, persons, or activities deliberately in order to provide information that cannot be gathered as well from other choices. Purposeful sampling can be of several kinds. Patton (2002) lists sixteen alternative approaches to purposeful sampling - extreme or deviant case sampling, intensity sampling, maximum variation (heterogeneity) sampling, homogeneous samples, typical case sampling, critical case sampling, snowball or chain sampling, criterion sampling, theory-based, operational construct, and theoretical sampling, confirming and disconfirming cases, stratified purposeful sampling, opportunistic or emergent sampling, purposeful random sampling, and sampling politically important cases. The specific approach a researcher selects is directed by the purpose of the study.

Both Studies One and Two will employ criterion-based sampling (Patton, 2002). Criterion based sampling refers to the application of a certain set of criteria in delineating the population for the study. As this study focuses on individuals who belong to a certain age group, are of a certain educational level, and who live within the Auckland region, this approach is considered suitable.

Other approaches to purposeful sampling were considered, however, these were not adequately suited to the research goals of the study. For example, a possible risk of the snowballing approach could have been the coming together of a relatively tight homogeneous group in terms of closely shared preferences, experiences, interests, affiliations, or even ethnicity. Nor does the study aim to investigate extreme or deviant cases of unusual manifestation. Nor is it confined to intensity sampling or cases manifesting a specific phenomenon. Neither does the study conform to any typical standard of product consumption, so there is no typical criterion for the entire population. The approach also does not qualify as the critical case sampling approach which permits logic generalization

and application to all other cases. Neither does the study seek to find and examine manifestations of a specific theoretical construct as in the case of theoretical sampling. The sample does not qualify as a purely convenience one either, as the participants need to meet the criteria of age, education, and location.

This study recognizes that gender and ethnicity may have an impact on how people attribute meanings to products. According to information on the Statistics New Zealand (2009) website, people identifying with European ethnicity are the largest ethnic group in New Zealand followed by the Maori, Asian and Pacific ethnic groups. In view of such diversity, the study will endeavour to have an adequate representation of these ethnic groups in the final sample selection for Study One. Accordingly, the researcher will use the purposeful sampling approach to sift through the initial set of volunteers for purposes of including an adequate representation of males and females, and diverse ethnicities.

As the study is based on the assumption of shared meaning, the sampling approach for Study One will also involve an element of confirmation and disconfirmation. That is, the sample will comprise of those who believe that products say something about them in social contexts. An initial question - Do you think products used in social contexts say something about the wearer or user - will be used. Those who answer in the affirmative are likely to be using products to affirm, construct or communicate their selves in social contexts. Thus, the sample selection for both Studies One and Two draws upon a combination of approaches to meet the needs of the study.

Data for Study Two will be collected via an online platform. Whilst it is feasible to seek participants from the student population, it is not feasible to manage gender and ethnicity. As there will be no control on the gender and ethnicity of those who finally respond to the survey, the final sample for Study Two qualifies as a mix of both criteria based and convenience sampling approaches. Even though a convenience sample, as in this study, may be disadvantageous in terms of not being truly representative or reflective of the population as a whole, it still provides variation in gender and ethnicity to allow intergroup comparisons.

4.2.2. Invitation to participants

A general invitation will be circulated amongst prospective participants in the age group of 18 to 21, the aim being to spread the message amongst young adults who fulfil the criteria for

the study and are willing to engage in the research process. Invitations will be by announcement in lectures and posters at prominent locations. Prospective participants will be provided with information sheets, consent forms, participant details forms, and a photography protocol (See Appendices 4, 5, 6, and 7).

For Study One, a preliminary group of about 30 participants will be selected from this initial list. This selection will factor in adequate gender and ethnicity representation and the possibility that some participants may not complete the entire research process.

For Study Two, the invitation protocol and criteria will be the same as for Study One. Participants will be provided with an information sheet (See Appendix 8).

Participants will be invited to visit an online link. An online information sheet will provide complete information on the nature, objectives and process of research. Those who consent to participate will be asked to click on a link that will lead them to an online questionnaire.

4.2.3. Sample size

For Study One, the intent is to limit the sample size to 30 willing participants who reflect the set criteria. While Patton (2002) observes that there are no rules for sample size, the validity, meaningfulness and insights generated having more to do with information richness than with the sample size, Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.202) suggest sample selection “to the point of redundancy...in purposeful sampling the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations. If the purpose is to maximise information, the sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sampled units”. It is estimated that a target population of 30 participants might suffice for the purposes of providing both rich and sufficient information for the purposes of this study. That is, 30 participants would be able to provide a rich enough spread of selected products and associated discourses and characteristics of the self which may not be possible from a smaller number. Further, the number compares favourably to other studies focusing on individual interviews or consumer discourses within the realm of consumer behaviour literature (e.g., Kjeldgaard, 2003, 2004; Thompson & Haytko, 1997). These studies typically use 8 to 20 participants.

For Study Two, the researcher will aim to recruit around 200 to 250 participants. This is because 200 to 250 participants is a large enough sample size to allow statistical comparisons

between groups. This number also compares well with studies that examine perceptions of observers in relation to consumers' product choices. Decoding studies have typically used similar sample sizes varying between 100 to 300 participants (e.g., Christopher & Schlenker, 2000; Forsythe, 1988; Harris et al., 1983; Holbrook & Hughes, 1978; Munson & Spivey, 1981; Shavitt & Nelson, 2000); so this number is justified.

4.3. Research design

The study requires two different types of data. To address the questions: *What products do young adults select to display aspects of their self to their self and to their peers? What aspects of the self do they identify* and *What themes emerge when adults talk about products in relation to aspects of their self* - the study needs to capture individual perceptions - specifically how young adults make sense of, or experience the use of products to construct a sense of self. Accordingly, to be able to do so, Study One draws upon phenomenological approaches to data collection. Study Two, designed to ascertain if *the intended audience attribute similar meanings to the products selected* is best managed via a test of communication, and so quantifiable data is required. Study One requires phenomenological based qualitative data acquired via semi-structured interviews and discourse analysis; Study Two essentially comprises responses to a self-report questionnaire, and involves data that can be quantified and statistically analysed. Accordingly, the pragmatic paradigm underpins the research design. The pragmatic paradigm is based on the assumption that the research question(s) is more important than either the method used or the researcher's adherence to a specific research perspective and is formally linked to the notion of mixing-methods (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Creswell & Clark, 2007; Denzin, 1978; Jick, 1979; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). It essentially refers to blending and integrating a range of data and methods involving simple to complex designs allowing "a more complete, holistic, and contextual portrayal of the unit(s) under study" (Jick, 1979, p. 603). That is, the pragmatic paradigm illuminates elements that may be hard to capture by a single method alone. Studies One and Two intend to capture two separate but related aspects of the research task. The two studies complement each other and will individually contribute to a final holistic picture.

The use of mixed methods bridges the gap between quantitative and qualitative methodologies and capitalizes on the respective strengths of each (Bahl & Milne, 2006; Creswell, 2003; Curry et al., 2009; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Although some researchers

(e.g., Guba & Lincoln, 1988) argue that internal paradigmatic consistency and logic cautions against mixing, others (Bahl & Milne, 2006; Bryman & Bell, 2007; Creswell & Clark, 2007) note that mixed methods provide strengths that offset the weaknesses of studying a research problem using a qualitative or a quantitative approach alone. They are driven by the research questions of the study, and their appropriateness and use is determined by the philosophical assumptions underlying this study. Patton (2002) asserts that the need to gather the most relevant information is paramount and outweighs concerns about maintaining methodological purity. He suggests the need to be more flexible in adopting research approaches:

“Just as machines that were originally created for separate functions such as printing, faxing, scanning, and copying have now been combined into a single integrated technological unit, so too methods that were originally created as distinct, standalone approaches can now be combined into more sophisticated and multifunctional designs” (Patton, 2002, p. 252).

Mixed methods employ both inductive and deductive logic (Bahl & Milne, 2006; Creswell, 2003; Patton, 2002). That is, the researcher is open to what emerges from previous studies, and also to what may be new discovery. A study may, for example, reveal certain patterns, an inductive approach; the verification of these patterns may involve a deductive approach. How mixed methods will be applied to this study is discussed in the following sections on research design.

4.3.1. Study One - Data collection

Study One will address the first two questions of the study - *What products do young adults select? What aspects of the self do they intend to communicate? And What themes emerge when adults talk about products in relation to aspects of their self?*

As noted in Chapter 3, it will specifically examine the following eight propositions:

Proposition 1: Young adults in the research population select from a limited set of products to communicate aspects of their selves.

Proposition 2: Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to express affiliation, association, or belongingness with reference groups or community.

Proposition 3: Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to indicate status.

Proposition 4: Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to indicate ethnicity.

Proposition 5: Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to communicate uniqueness.

Proposition 6: Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to communicate cosmopolitanism related characteristics of the self.

Proposition 7: Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to communicate age and life stage related characteristics.

Proposition 8: Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to communicate gender related characteristics.

Participation in Study One requires young adult consumers to a) identify and photograph products, and b) to discuss self-related characteristics in relation to selected products. It will involve a discourse-based data collection mode as this allows the respondents to provide details and descriptions of their own world view. Discourse after the Latin *cursus* or *running to and fro* refers to written or spoken conversation or debate, or a formal discussion of a topic in speech or writing (Oxford English Dictionary, 2006). To gain insights into how young adults use products in the context of their self, it is necessary to understand individual perceptions and meanings - specifically how young adults make sense of, or experience the use of products to construct a sense of self. Though such use may not be conscious, the purpose of this study is to ascertain the conscious, acknowledged interpretations consumers accord the products they choose and use.

Data collection will involve the use of two key methods - auto-photography, and semi-structured interviews. These are discussed further below.

4.3.1.1. Auto-photography

The use of photography as a visual tool has often been employed for diverse studies within the qualitative realm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Caldwell and Henry (2010) and Caldwell, Henry, and Alman (2010) observe that audio - visual representations are an increasingly significant area in consumer research. Auto-photography, as a method, involves giving participants a camera and asking them to take pictures that are important or significant in some way, for example, products most salient to the construction of the self (Noland, 2006; Ziller, 1988, 1990; Ziller & Lewis, 1981; Ziller & Rorer, 1985). Heisley and Levy (1991) refer to the same method as autodiving. Photography can give participants a chance to think about what is important to them, who they are, and express the same through pictures. In the words of Heisley and Levy (1991, p.362), “autodiving makes it possible for people to communicate about themselves more fully and more subtly and, perhaps, to represent themselves more fairly”. Kjeldgaard (2003) employed the use of the auto-photography method to examine how adolescents use consumption practices to construct locale specific identities in a global context. Similarly, Noland (2006) extended and adapted previous work on auto-photography for her research on identity of immigrant Indian women. Auto-photography is useful as it lends more voice to participants. Further, as pointed out by Noland (2006), it may be difficult for young adults to answer direct identity questions. Photographs can enable them to open up and talk more freely about how they view the product in question in relation to the self. In view of the associated advantages, auto-photography is considered suitable for the research purposes of this study. Furthermore, the use of this method will allow participants the freedom to decide what products are most salient to the construction of their selves.

Participants will be instructed to take pictures of products they use and which say something about them to their peers. They will be provided with a disposable camera that will be returned to the researcher on completion of task.

4.3.1.2. Semi-structured interviews

The interview is a widely used method of data collection in qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). It allows the researcher to gather a first-hand account of people's thoughts and experiences (Patton, 2002).

The three widely used interview modes are - the structured, the semi-structured, the unstructured, and these can be conducted in an individual or group setting and a research project may use one or combine types (May, 2001). For this study, the intent is to conduct individual interviews using the semi-structured mode. The semi-structured mode provides direction, but not constraint. This enables participant thoughts and ideas to emerge with minimal input from the researcher.

Accepted interview protocols in the literature will be followed (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998; Kvale, 1996). Bryman and Bell (2007) suggest the use of a general semi-structured interview guide, the use of open and non-leading questions, flexibility, the use of expert or skilled interviewers, taped interviews and note taking. Taylor and Bogdan (1998, p.88) emphasize the critical role of the interviewer - "far from being an impersonal data collector, the interviewer, and not an interview schedule or protocol, is the research tool". A successful interviewer is knowledgeable and well familiar with the focus of the interview; appropriately structures the interview, is clear, sensitive and empathetic in dealing with the interviewee, open and flexible, is able to steer the conversation to find out what he or she wants to, is critical and able to deal with inconsistencies in responses, can make connections with what has previously been stated by the interviewee, can interpret and clarify meaning if need be, and is ethically sensitive (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998; Kvale, 1996). So equipped, interviewers ideally conduct interviews in quiet settings free from external interruptions or disturbances in a relaxed atmosphere (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The researcher will draw upon her previous research experience in conducting interviews with children and adults. She will also familiarise herself with various aspects of conducting interviews to prepare for the interview stage. This includes asking several kinds of questions (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Kvale, 1996; Patton, 2002; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) such as introductory or opening questions, open-ended questions, probing questions, and closing questions. To put participants at ease, the researcher will begin the interview with general comments such as how the day was going or the weather, followed by information about the interview and the process to be followed. The researcher will clarify the purpose of the meeting which will be to talk about the photographs participants have taken and to gather their thoughts on what they say about them. The researcher will ensure that participants have signed the consent form and provided the necessary information on the participant information form. They will be informed that the meeting would last for a

maximum of one and a half hours, and that the session will be taped. The first half hour would allow participants to arrange pictures in any form they felt comfortable with, whether in sequence, groups, or in collage form, to talk from. Once participants finish arranging the pictures and are ready to talk, the interview would commence and would not last for more than an hour. The researcher will encourage interviewees to talk freely, and will reassure them about the confidentiality of their talk. The researcher will use broad, introductory questions such as “Can you please tell me something about this picture?”, or “what is this picture about” to allow interviewees to open up. Open ended questions in the format of “how do you feel...?”, or “what do you think about...” will be used to allow participants to express their thoughts. The researcher will use probing or detail oriented questions to seek further clarification or elaboration from the interviewee. These could take the form of “when or where do you wear this”? Or “could you elaborate on this further?” McCracken (1988) discusses the contrast probe. A contrast probe provides boundaries to interviewees’ responses by allowing comparisons. The contrast probe is a useful probing technique as it helps in defining and clarifying experiences, feelings, and thoughts. It usually flows from the interview process itself. For example, in the context of this study, questions such as “what kind of people wear this” and contrast probes of “what kind of people would not use this product or brand?” could provide and clarify information that may not be forthcoming otherwise. Depending on the course of the interview, the researcher will pause allowing the interviewee to reflect and elaborate further.

The researcher will also incorporate other guidelines on conducting interviews. Patton (2002) suggests the importance of taking notes during interviews. The researcher will follow this guideline as a backup plan and also to formulate any new questions through the interview process, to note early insights, or to locate important quotations. The interview process will be conducted gently and naturally in a positive manner. For example, if verbal and non-verbal behaviours indicate that an interviewee may have difficulty in answering a question, the researcher will acknowledge the same, appreciate the effort made, and move on. The researcher will generally support, provide positive feedback, and finally thank the participant for their time and effort. Finally, the interview will be conducted in a quiet setting, free from any external disturbance.

A general semi-structured interview guide is presented in Appendix 3.

4.3.2. Study One - Data Analysis

Study One comprises two sub-sections (*Stage One and Stage Two*). *Study One, Stage One* involves three processes. The first identifies the products selected by participants, to examine Proposition One. The second concerns with identifying and reporting content that links with Propositions Two through Eight. The intent is to determine “the existence or nonexistence” of the themes that constitute the propositions, and via quantification, assess the scope and substance of related associations (Kassarjian, 1977, p. 11). The third process identifies aspects of the self (characteristics) that participants consider the products communicate.

Study One, Stage Two is concerned with in-depth exploration of the themes identified; essentially, the reporting and interpreting of the underlying meanings and associations that participants attribute to the products identified.

The sections below discuss the mode and process of data analysis for Study One.

4.3.2.1. Manual or text analysing software

A common dilemma for researchers is whether to analyse text manually or whether to use computer software. There is no doubt that computer software packages automate coding processes, and are reliable in many ways (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Different programs can read, codify and help in simplifying the researcher’s task. Text retrievers, for example, specialize in finding all the instances of words and phrases in a single or multiple files; code and retrieve programs apply category tags to passages of text; code based theory builders have special features that support theory building efforts, and conceptual network builders help create and analyse network displays (Fielding & Lee, 1998, 2002). Yet, automated processes of such kind may pose limitations when applied to discourse analysis as an over-emphasis on code and retrieve approaches can compromise meaning making and the fluid and creative ways in which discursive themes emerge (Alexa & Zuell, 2002; Gibbs, Friese, & Mangabeira, 2002; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1988). As context and meaning making are significant in the process of discourse analysis, the researcher will steer away from using automated software. So, texts will be manually analysed.

4.3.2.2. *Study One, Stage One - Content Analysis*

Content analysis will be applied to each of the three research processes for Stage One. Content analysis has been defined in a number of ways. One of the earliest definitions was provided by Berelson (1952, p.55) who states that “content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication”. In Budd, Thorpe, and Donohew’s (1967, p.2) words, it is a “systematic technique for analyzing message content”. Kassirjian (1977, p.8) observes, “content analysis is the study of the message itself”. According to Krippendorff (2004, p.18), “content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from text (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use”. Krippendorff (2004) further notes that content analysis in present times has evolved into a repertoire of methods that provide inferences from a range of verbal, pictorial, symbolic and communication data, the choice of method depending on the nature and purpose of the research.

This study will apply content analysis to each of the *three* research processes comprising Study One, Stage One - (a) the first will identify the number and type of products participants speak of through each of the participant transcripts (Task A); (b) the second will identify content relating to propositions derived from a review of the literature through each transcript (Task B) ; and (c) the third will involve extracting participants’ descriptions of their own selves through each transcript (Task C).

More specifically, the content analysis tasks for each of the three applications will be as follows - to determine the number, nature, and type of product/s each participant speaks of (Task A); to identify evidence impacting on one or more propositions within transcript sections referring to a photograph (Task B); and to identify words, phrases or sentences referring to self-related aspects of the self (Task C). The specific application of processes for Task A, B, and C will be detailed in Chapter 5.

Ideally, content analysis should be objective and systematic (Kassirjian, 1977; Kolbe & Burnett, 1991; Krippendorff, 2004). Objectivity refers to a set of rules (Holsti, 1969) that minimize the reflection of the analyst’s subjective predispositions so that if other analysts were to undertake the same task, they would be able to arrive at similar conclusions. Systematization refers to the consistent application of rules, and that analysis is designed to

suit the research question or problem. The set of rules would include “explicitly formulated rules and procedures” (Kassarjian, 1977, p. 9), for example, the categories to be used, the criteria to decide that a content unit should be placed in one category, rather than another. If involving quantification, the data can take the form of quantitative words such as “more, always, increases, or often” (Kassarjian, 1977, p. 10).

Reliability involves issues relating to reproducibility and accuracy of data (Kaplan & Goldsen, 1949; Kassarjian, 1977; Kolbe & Burnett, 1991; Krippendorff, 2004; Mayring, 2000; Rosengren, 1981; Ryan & Bernard, 2000). It provides assurance that data obtained is independent of measuring persons or instruments. One way of ensuring this is to formulate categories, present to judges, and gather opinion on which items belong to a category and which do not. This study will present exemplars and descriptive evidence through the different applications of content analysis. Interjudge reliability refers to the percentage of agreement or “the degree of consistency between coders applying the same set of categories to the same content” (Kassarjian, 1977, p. 14). He suggests the application of a commonly used measure - the ratio of coding agreements to the total number of coding decisions. “Thus, if in a particular study two judges make a total of 1,000 decisions each, and agree on 930 of them and disagree on 70, the coefficient of reliability would be 93 percent. If more than two judges are involved, the typically reported figure is the percent agreement between each pair of judges. The average interjudge agreement can be presented as a composite reliability score” (Kassarjian, 1977, p. 14). He further notes that reported reliabilities in the literature are extremely high, and that figures above 85 percent are quite satisfying.

For purposes of inter-coder reliability, samples of task will be independently coded by the researcher, the researcher’s supervisor/s, and an independent marketing academic and practitioner with previous experience in content analysis. However, the nature of the study and the tasks in question are unlikely to result in coded data that can be compared meaningfully using statistical tests of difference for all three content analysis tasks. Findings of Task A will be compared between judges for purposes of accuracy; Kassarjian’s measure of inter-coder reliability will be applied to Task B; whereas a simple comparison of listed characteristics will be made for Task C. Issues of validity relate to the extent to which an instrument measures what it purports to measure. The study will ensure validity of content and/or measures in terms of the processes it follows. In summary, the content analysis tasks in this study will adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Clarifying the purpose of the content analysis;
2. Defining aspects of analysis, main categories and/or sub-categories;
3. Formulating definitions and coding rules;
4. Engaging in checks of reliability; and finally,
5. Interpreting results, for example, frequencies, trends, indicators.

4.3.2.3. *Study One, Stage Two - Process of discourse analysis*

The use of discourse in this study refers to interviewees' verbal talk, so data analysis for Study One refers to analysis of talk as captured in interview transcripts. The assumptions underlying the study and to what is most meaningful in the context of such assumptions and the research questions the study addresses will guide the analysis. Importantly, the study recognises that it could be possible to describe the same phenomenon in alternate ways, and that there is no perfect way to deal with and sift discursive accounts. Discursive texts will be approached in their own right with no value judgments on whether they are wrong or right.

The process of discourse analysis is an area replete with confusion as the term has been used in various ways across and within disciplines. As Potter and Wetherell (1987) note, some researchers use discourse to refer to all forms of talk or writing, others apply the term to the way talk is meshed together, still others focus on language in social and cognitive contexts, or only on linguistic texts. They observe: "It is a field in which it is perfectly possible to have two books on discourse analysis with no overlap in content at all" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 6). Even though there are some references to discourse in the marketing and consumer behaviour literature, yet, there is little on the actual conduct of or application of discourse analysis. Discourse analysis generally tends to be undertaken as a thematic analysis. Thompson and Haytko (1997) use the term 'fashion discourse' in their study of how consumers use fashion to align themselves with certain cultural view points while resisting or subverting others. The analysis of transcripts refers to iterative procedures and similarities across transcripts. Along similar lines, Kjeldgaard (2003) proposes discourse analysis in terms of looking for discursive themes. That is, discourse analysis has not been defined nor explained with any finality within the marketing and consumer behaviour literature, and tends to reflect the practice of applying thematic analysis with a greater sense of coherence of functionality. Functionality refers to functions such as explaining or justifying the wider purposes a discourse serves (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). For instance, explaining or justifying

product choice to affirm, construct or communicate a certain aspect of the self. In the current study, coherence of functionality refers to the idea of how different discourses come together to construct a coherent sense of self.

As there is no standard method of analysing discourse, the guidelines suggested by Potter and Wetherell (1987), Wetherell and Potter (1988), Owen (1984) and Carabine (2001) will be adopted. Essentially, these guidelines suggest identifying and analysing themes, words and phrases for variability and consistency within and across interviews. Such guidelines are consistent with the thematic analysis approach. The use of thematic analysis is justified as “it not only probes symbolic constructions, but also relies on discursive accounts as the primary data that reveal the meanings [participants] generate for their experiences” (Wood, Dendy, Dordek, Germany, & Varallo, 1994, p. 116). Each transcribed interview script will be read and re-read to identify and highlight the key discursive themes that emerge when young adults talk about products in relation to the self. As Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Wetherell and Potter (1988) note, categorizations are crucially related to the research questions of interest. Sometimes the process can be fairly straightforward, yet at other times, a picture may not emerge until a number of attempts at interpretation have been made. Owen’s (1984) criteria of (a) recurrence of the same thread of meaning even though different words may be used; (b) repetition of words, phrases, or sentences, and (c) forcefulness, exemplified by positioning an idea first in a list of explanation, or stressing certain ideas, phrases or words (Zorn & Gregory, 2005; Zorn & Ruccio, 1998) will be followed. Major themes will be identified within and across all interview transcripts. The same process will be repeated to identify sub-themes and/or distinguishing characteristics across common discursive themes.

Once various discursive themes are identified, the researcher will begin the process of interpretation and analysis. Patton (2002, p.480) observes, “Interpretation means attaching significance to what was found, making sense of findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, extrapolating lessons, making inferences, considering meanings, and otherwise imposing order on an unruly but surely patterned world”. Several others (Ritchie, Spencer, & O’Connor, 2003; Ryan & Bernard, 2000; Silverman, 1997; Spencer, Ritchie, & O’Connor, 2003; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) note that analysis goes well beyond simple reporting or identifying sections of an interview; it involves the selection or highlighting of most important or interesting features, detecting patterns or linkages, and developing explanations

or explanatory concepts. It is also informed by relevant theoretical material or concepts. It is flexible and inductive enough to allow for interesting observations or insights to emerge; incorporates evidence or data, such as quotations and paraphrases, and is provocative in that it notes ironies, contrasts or paradoxes. Coherence, that is how a discourse builds up a picture or representation in the light of the assumptions and the research questions driving the study, will be an important consideration through the process of analysis (Carabine, 2001; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1988).

In view of the above guidelines, the researcher will conduct the initial discursive theme identification and analysis. Next, the initial identification and analysis will be shared with her supervisors, and together the researcher and supervisor will discuss, amend and refine the analysis if need be. As a last step, the researcher will conduct a final confirmation with ten participants. The researcher will explain the themes identified in the analysis and ask participants for their comments.

4.3.3. Study Two - Data collection

Study Two will examine Question Three - *Is there evidence of shared meaning between message senders and message receivers*. It will investigate how the participants' (from Study One) peer group interprets product use to communicate aspects of the self. It will primarily address the question of whether and how successful participants are in communicating aspects of the self to their peer group. And by dint of such communication, whether the peer audience attributes similar meaning to the products participants choose to communicate aspects of their self. Photographs will be presented to the peer group who will be first asked to describe the person to whom the products belong, and then asked to select from a bank of characteristics and attributes they associate with the person to whom the products belong. There will be no faces or identifiable characteristics in the photographs.

Study Two will specifically test the following propositions:

Proposition 9: Receivers are able to successfully interpret the message implicit in the products selected by the sender.

Proposition 10: Young adult females are more successful than young adult males in communicating aspects of their self.

Proposition 11: Young adult females are more successful than young adult males at interpreting the aspects of the self that the product user intends to communicate.

Proposition 12: Young adults are more successful at communicating aspects of their self to an audience of the same ethnicity, rather than an audience of differing ethnicity.

The research design for Study Two will involve a survey. “Surveys are systems for collecting information from or about people to describe, compare, or explain their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour” (Fink, 2003b, p.1). The broad objectives of Study Two will be to gather information on a) how respondents describe participants from four collages of pictures they see (in terms of characteristics, who they are); b) to identify characteristics and attributes respondents attribute to the person to whom the products belong from a master list of characteristics; and c) to statistically analyse the match between self-stated descriptors of participants from Study One and respondents from Study Two.

The research design will involve first, selecting four participants from Study One (hereafter referred to as the four profiles) whose photographs of products will be presented to respondents in Study Two. The rationale for using photographs from just four participants is that presenting photographs for the complete set of 28 participants would present an impractically large and complex task for Stage Two.

Following the selection of four profiles, a master list of self-characteristics communicated by these four profiles will be compiled for the four sets of photographs. Next, a survey questionnaire will be developed. As surveys can be conducted face to face, via mail or email, or even posted online in the form of web surveys, this study will opt for the web survey format over other formats in view of associated advantages - lower costs, faster turnaround, higher response levels, lower rate of errors, broader range of stimuli and greater enjoyment (Bryman & Bell, 2007; McDonald & Adam, 2003). Another advantage is that prospective respondents can visit a web link and complete it at their own convenience. Further, in comparison to email surveys, web surveys offer advantages in terms of features and embellishments such as radio buttons, pull down menus, use of colour, layout structure, appearance and sequential order of questions. Even though a difficulty pointed out with web surveys is technical design and the need to use software packages, this difficulty can be overcome by using pre-structured online survey formats. This study will make use of one

such format (Survey Monkey, 2008). Survey Monkey allows the questionnaire to be designed online and respondents can be directed to the specific web address hosting the survey. Such formats offer several advantages. For example, respondents' responses can be logged in and the entire data set can be retrieved as and when the researcher desires (Andrews, Nonnecke, & Preece, 2003; Llieva, Baron, & Healey, 2002; Wright, 2005). Such a process also means that the task of coding of replies and the entering of data into software is reduced. Time is saved and the likelihood of errors in the processing of data is reduced.

However, as pointed out by Bryman and Bell (2007), web surveys can involve sampling issues. Not everyone is online nor has the technical ability to handle questionnaires posted online in either e-mail or web formats. This limitation, however, will not be applicable to the target population group for this study as each one of the sample population is enrolled at university and is necessarily familiar if not adept at accessing the Internet for purposes of academic education. A risk with an online web survey is that some respondents can complete the questionnaire more than once. This study will include suitable measures to counter such possible risk. Respondents will be asked to provide their university email address (unique to each individual) for a free movie ticket as a token of thanks and appreciation for the time spent. The free movie ticket will be sent out only once to any given university email address, such that possibilities of repeat attempts will be minimised. Another issue could relate to confidentiality and anonymity of responses. For reasons of confidentiality, names and email addresses will be separated from the remainder of the data set and will be stored in a separate electronic file so that respondents' answers cannot be matched with their personal details.

The questionnaire will include three sets of questions. The first set of questions will ask for respondents' gender, ethnicity and the length of time they have lived in Auckland. The rationale for including these questions will be to check for any possible impact of these factors (gender and ethnicity) on the nature of responses. A minimum time of three years of stay in Auckland will be considered acceptable for the purposes of the study. Anyone who had not lived for such time, it is assumed, could have difficulty in understanding or communicating in the language of the peer group in the study. The second set of questions will be based on the four photo collages presenting the product selected by each Study One profile. Each respondent will be shown one set of photographs at a time. They will then be asked to write a short paragraph describing the person to whom the products belonged. The same instruction will be repeated for each successive photograph collage. Once this step is

completed, the four photo collages will be presented again (one at a time) and respondents' instructed to tick from a master list of characteristics those characteristics they believe describe the individual who owns those products. The same instruction will be repeated for each successive set of photographs. A maximum of ten to twelve photographs will be presented in each collage. The second set of questions will precede the third set of questions to minimise any bias or cues from the master list of characteristics. In other words, the second set of questions will attempt to gather respondents' characterisations of participants without any exposure to a pre-given list to select from. Once these three sections are completed, respondents will be thanked and directed to another link if they are interested in a free movie ticket pass.

4.3.4. Study Two - Data analysis

Data analysis for Study Two will comprise two parts - Stage One and Stage Two. It will involve a descriptive and statistical analysis of the data set generated from the survey.

Study Two, Stage One will examine respondents' written descriptions of each of the four profiles and compare characteristics attributed to the profiles by Study Two respondents with the Study One participants' actual self-attributed characteristics. It will involve a content analysis of respondents' descriptions of the person from the pictures of the products they see that belong to the person. Words and phrases that communicate who or what a person is like, or what a word or phrase says about a person will be extracted from respondents' descriptions (Kassarjian, 1977; Kolbe & Burnett, 1991; Ryan & Bernard, 2000).

Study Two, Stage Two will specifically examine the question of whether young adult consumers are successful in communicating aspects of their selves to others, and if so, to what extent. It will compare the match of self-attributed characteristics with those attributed by observers and will employ statistical measures of probability to measure the percentage of participants' success in communicating aspects of their selves across gender and ethnicity, the two variables identified in propositions 9 to 12. Respondents will be directed to a list of characteristics (compiled from the stated characteristics of the participants in Study One) and asked to mark those that they associate with the photographs viewed. The degree to which they are able to successfully select the characteristics identified for each of the profiles will be determined using the probability theory (Black, 2009; Kazmier, 2003; Miller et al., 2010).

Chapters 7 and 8 will report on the findings of Study Two, Stage One and Study Two, Stage Two respectively.

4.4. Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has addressed the research design for the two Studies - Study One comprising Stage One and Stage Two, and Study Two, again comprising Stage One and Stage Two. The research adopts a pragmatic approach, and a mixed methods research design. The Chapter describes the approach to the sample selection process, and the intended sample size for both Studies One and Two. Data collection involves auto-photography, semi-structured interviews, and an online survey. Data analysis involves content analysis of words or phrases, proposition related statements and discursive themes for Study One, and descriptive and statistical analysis for Study Two. In addition, the research design includes reliability and validity checks all along the research processes.

CHAPTER 5. Study One-Stage One: Evaluation of Propositions

5.1. Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 4, the research task necessitates a two step approach to data collection and analysis. Study One data comprises photographs of the products selected by the participants and the transcribed interviews; content analysis procedures are applied to both. Study Two data comprises data collected via an online survey; content analysis and statistical analysis are applied. The findings of Study One are reported in Chapters 5 and 6; the findings of Study Two, reported in Chapters 7 and 8.

Study One findings are presented in two parts. The first part (Stage One) is concerned with two tasks; describing the products selected by the participant, and presenting evidence to support inferences and conclusion in relation to the propositions. The second part (Stage Two) is concerned with identifying, reporting and interpreting the underlying meanings and associations that participants attribute to the products identified.

This chapter, Chapter 5 reports the data and analysis pertaining to proposition evaluation, whilst Chapter 6 reports the identification and analysis of discursive themes.

The chapter is organised as follows: Section 5.2 discusses the nature of the data, the process of data management and analysis, and the application of specific procedures. Section 5.3 describes the results of the study. Section 5.3.1 provides a snapshot of the sample ethnic mix, Section 5.3.2 overviews identified products, Section 5.3.3 evaluates propositions One to Eight, Section 5.3.4 examines photographs not identified in relation to any proposition. Section 5.4 identifies and evaluates self-related characteristics. Section 5.5 concludes the chapter.

5.2. Nature of data

Participants are young adults between 18 to 21 years of age who are students at a tertiary institution. The data comprises photographs and transcriptions of semi-structured interviews. For the purposes of this study, the photographs are used to denote the type of products identified and as such serve as the base unit of analysis. The transcribed discussion with the

participants forms the raw data for this stage and provides information on what products are selected to denote aspects of the self and what aspects the products communicate. Implicit in the data gathering process is the assumption that words and phrases linked to the photographed object reflect the meanings associated with the object therein. An inventory listing the complete set of photographs is displayed in Appendix 9.

5.2.1. *Data Management and Analysis*

Data management and analysis occurs at three levels: One, the identification of the products selected by the participants - this provides data relating to Proposition One; two, analysing the interviews for content that links with Propositions Two through Seven; three, the identification of the aspects of the self (characteristics) that participants consider the product(s) reflect.

The nature of the data directs the use of content analysis techniques. In qualitative research, the term content analysis is used in two ways; as an umbrella term for both quantitative and qualitative approaches to text (words and/or pictures) analysis, or to only describe the process of quantifying data (Kassarjian, 1977; Krippendorff, 2004; Neuendorf, 2002; Smith, 1992). Where the term *content analysis* is used to denote qualitative content only, terms such as *thematic* or *discourse analysis* are used to denote the qualitative condition. In the case of quantified output, the researcher systematically assigns measurable codes to specific elements (e.g. words, phrases, objects) in the text; where applicable, descriptive statistics can be used to identify patterns in the data (Kassarjian, 1977; Krippendorff, 2004; Neuendorf, 2002; Smith, 1992). In this study, the 'umbrella' understanding of content analysis is adopted, and the data is subjected to both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Inferences about the set of propositions are based on a quantitative content analysis of the themes, and word frequencies linked to each photograph. This approach allows an indication of the scope and substance of the associations. The nature of the data and data collection process allows descriptive, non-generalisable, indicative evidence.

Identification of the selected products and brands was undertaken by examining the contents of the photographs supplied. This was done in conjunction with the participants as an aspect of the interviews was the clarification of any ambiguity associated with the items selected for inclusion. Once each interview was transcribed, the researcher identified and listed all

product categories (and brands) through two sample transcripts, and confirmed the findings with her primary supervisor who also undertook the same task for the two sample transcripts. There was complete agreement on identified product categories (and brands), following which the researcher repeated the process for all 28 transcripts. The products and brands identified by this process are presented in Exhibit 5-4.

To facilitate pattern-identification, enable judgments relating to the scope and strength of the propositions (see Exhibit 5-1) and to facilitate reporting, specified items (units) were quantified. A unit was defined as “the specific segment of content that is characterised by placing it into a given category” (Holsti, 1969, p. 116).

Exhibit 5-1: Propositions

Proposition 1: *Young adults in the research population select from a limited set of products to communicate aspects of their selves.*

Proposition 2: *Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to express affiliation, association, or belongingness with reference groups or community.*

Proposition 3: *Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to indicate status.*

Proposition 4: *Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to indicate ethnicity.*

Proposition 5: *Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to communicate uniqueness.*

Proposition 6: *Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to communicate cosmopolitanism related characteristics of the self.*

Proposition 7: *Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to communicate age and life stage related characteristics*

Proposition 8: *Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to communicate gender related characteristics*

The first step in the quantification process is the creation of operational constructs. Whilst the evidence for Proposition One lies in the photographs and the lists derived from product identification through each of the 28 transcripts, Propositions Two through Eight because they examine aspects of the self in relation to products identified, require the identification and description of these aspects. The constructs that pertain to a specific proposition are described in Exhibit 5-2. The essence of each construct (C1 to C7) was established by agreement and discussion between three judges. The complete set of propositions was presented to the researcher’s chief supervisor (J1) and to an independent judge (J2) for further clarification along with two sample scripts of Participant 1 and Participant 28. The two judges also received the complete lists of the product and sub-product categories each

photograph was classified under. At this point, because of some ambiguity in interpretation, a discussion led to the following understandings on application of categorisations to transcript sections. *Affiliation, association, or belongingness with reference groups or community* (C1) denoted social groups such as friends, or peers. Family membership was excluded as it is a given. There was general consensus on how *status* (C2) could be identified in terms of references to prestige, honour or deference, to class, wealth or the lack of it. There was some confusion on whether a quote that was referring to *ethnicity* (C3) could also receive a count for *affiliation, association, or belongingness with reference groups or community* by default. A decision was made that it would qualify as a single count for the proposition of *ethnicity* only. *Uniqueness* communicated a sense of being different to others. The meaning was considered to encompass not being conventional and/or just being different; however, not being socially acceptable was not necessarily implied. There were no differences in interpretation of the last three propositions relating to *cosmopolitanism*, *age and life stage*, and *gender*. Exhibit 5-2 shows the final agreed upon list of constructs (C1 to C7) and their interpretation. Sample quotes that reflect each construct are provided in Exhibit 5-3.

Exhibit 5-2: Construct Descriptions

<i>Affiliation, association, or belongingness with reference groups or community (C1)</i>	Reference to an actual or imaginary group conceived of having significant direct or inverted relevance upon an individual's evaluations, aspirations, or behaviour (Park & Lessig, 1977).
<i>Status (C2)</i>	Reference to prestige, honour or deference accorded to an individual by others (Burn, 2004); reference to class, wealth or the lack of it (Coleman, 1983; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999).
<i>Ethnicity (C3)</i>	Reference to a sense of common ancestry based on shared individual characteristics and/or shared socio-cultural experiences (Driedger, 1978).
<i>Uniqueness (C4)</i>	Seeking to express difference through the purchase, use or display of original, novel or unique consumer goods; avoidance of similarity (Tian et al., 2001); references to product or brand choices in terms of not being particularly socially acceptable (Simonson & Nowlis, 2000; Snyder & Fromkin, 1977).
<i>Cosmopolitanism (C5)</i>	Reference to notions of world citizenship (Cannon & Yaprak, 2002).
<i>Age & life stage (C6)</i>	Reference to age, e.g., in terms of young, old or middle aged; life stage.
<i>Gender (C7)</i>	Reference to gender - male or female; masculine or feminine.

Exhibit 5-3: Representative Quotes for each Construct as identified in the 28 Transcripts

<p><i>Affiliation, association, or belongingness with reference groups or community (C1)</i></p>	<p>Well I've bought one pair of shoes from Smith and Caugheys and it kind of makes me feel a bit special too like I am part of that sort of club and ... (P2)*</p> <p>(The computer) symbolizes my social networking habits and I really love being in touch with my friends...I think even just talking to a friend on it every day or just a couple of days a week still really helps your friendship (P20).</p> <p>They would probably think I am like a Rastafarian kind of person. That is what they call Jamaican kind of reggae people. Well they are black of course (T-shirt with image of Bob Marley) (P 16).</p> <p>(Seeing the book) Maybe they would think maybe I study or am at a school or just doing some type of English or literature or something (P9).</p> <p>Ralph Lauren, even in TVs....Like business people, they wear ...You look like a businessman...(P18).</p>
<p><i>Status (C2)</i></p>	<p>And it shows that I have the money to buy the lap top (Apple) I guess for a start (P2)</p> <p>And it's usually quite expensive and a bit of a trendy brand. These (Vans shoes) are from overseas and my mum bought them. I guess they (peers) might think ...you know... that's nice ...you could afford to... (P3)</p> <p>The reason I took so much pictures of Ralph Lauren is because when people look at Ralph Lauren they see 'he's a high achiever, he is successful' and that 'he is talented and he looks good', plus Ralph Lauren makes you look nice....Successful....Successful as in outdoors, indoors and also in the business environment (P18)</p>
<p><i>Ethnicity (C3)</i></p>	<p>– Well basically my Australian background is a really important to me. To remember I am still Australian and..uhh...that's a lot to do with my identity and....so yeah...it's very obvious... especially it's a rugby jersey as well, and New Zealanders love Rugby, so it's a very obvious symbol of Australia. I guess there needs to be a bit of an obvious sign that I am Australian because you can't tell otherwise... (P3)</p> <p>Just stuff mum uses to cook with, this (ethnic food bottles) is mostly what we use. It is Indian and Chinese stuff as well, like Asian, that is pretty much the kind of food we eat at home on a regular basis. ...it is kind of obvious that I am Indian or Asian (P12)</p> <p>This meaningful to me because I come from a Tongan culture and to us it is very important for the girls to wear dresses. It is a Tongan thing. Because of the design and stuff it represents the coconut trees and leaves and symbolizes the island..Yes the dresses are long because it has to be under your knees, because if it is shorter it is disrespect in our country (P14).</p>
<p><i>Uniqueness (C4)</i></p>	<p>I make sure I have different shoes (Converse) than everyone else ...I bought those because they were different, like quite a lot of my friends have Chucks but none of them have Rainbow Chucks like mine (P 27)</p> <p>A lot of my friends aren't working full time. I am working fulltime....My whole day is organised around time and so for my other friends they don't have class until lunch time so they can just sleep in, wake up and go to class.uni (Alarm Clock) (P 8).</p>

<i>Cosmopolitanism** (C5)</i>	-
<i>Age and life stage related characteristics (C6)</i>	<p>Witchery I think is for younger professional people, or woman around my age, not my mum's age (P25)</p> <p>I would say that it is, because a lot of younger people do buy Pepsi and Coke, whereas I find a lot of older people don't tend to go for Pepsi and Coke as in they are more for like juices, or I don't know. ..Yeah I suppose it does, yeah teenagers...Like older people, like my grandparents would never drink Pepsi or Coke (P23).</p> <p>People that aren't up with technology are probably older people, as in someone like my grandmother (P21).</p> <p>I am on the move a lot and probably don't have much time on my hands so I just grab a Lift+...teenagers, because it is kind of like an energy drink and usually targets teenagers (P9).</p> <p>Young people (like to listen to loud music). ... I mean when you get older you just want to listen to something quiet, because you have more stress and you can listen to something quiet and you get relaxed easily usually take the stress off. When you are young you don't care and just listen to something to give you a good mood (Pioneer stereo system in car) (P10).</p>
<i>Gender related characteristics (C7)</i>	<p>Yes it (Thin Lizzy make up) definitely says something about being a woman. I guess femininity, looking pretty (P8).</p> <p>it (The Holden) is kind of a girly car for me and my mum (P12).</p> <p>Men, I suppose (like to drink Tui). Women do but more men. ..Women seem to like sweeter drinks. I know a lot of girls who love beer, but generally they like sweeter stuff and that is just personal preference. (P17).</p> <p>I am a girly girly If they stereotype me by these (the Moulin Rouge DVD), because it is a romantic love story. I have day dreamed about Ewan McGregor in this movie. Definitely a girly film, I know some boys like it but a few (P25).</p>

* The letter P is used to identify each participant in Study One, e.g., P2 is participant Number 2.

* *None of the dataset provided evidence of this construct

5.2.2. *Application of specific procedure*

While quantitative analysis methods are well-established and accepted, methods for analysis of qualitative data are diverse and often subject to variability (Holsti, 1969; Kassirjian, 1977; Krippendorff, 2004; Neuendorf, 2002; Roberts, 1997; Smith, 1992). Analyses of qualitative data can also be ad-hoc and emergent, however, the use of measurement and formal tables can assist in pattern-identification. Analysis tables, summarizing and synthesizing information from diverse sources in a standardized format can also serve as reporting tools (Krippendorff, 2004; Neuendorf, 2002). Quantification in this study is based on unit counts and provides a basis for inference.

A unit was defined as “the specific segment of content that is characterised by placing it into a given category” (Holsti, 1969, p. 116). In this study, Holsti’s use of the word *category* is also applicable to the constructs of propositions. Constructs of content could comprise of a single sentence or multiple sentences referring to a specific proposition in relation to one photograph. If a participant spoke of one or more construct in relation to a photograph, then a count was recorded for all identified constructs. In other words, each of the seven constructs could be counted only once for a given photograph, fulfilling the criteria of “existence (existent) or nonexistence (nonexistent)” (Kassirjian, 1977, p. 11), applicability or non-applicability of propositions. Further, if a participant referred collectively to a set of photographs in terms of one or more constructs, then the same construct/s would apply to each photograph. For example, in this study, P28 refers to two dresses, a Latin shirt, a pair of ballroom Latin shoes, and a sports jacket in terms of *uniqueness* (C4) and *age and life stage* (C6) - so both constructs (C4 and C6) were applied to each of the five photographs he referred to - a total of five counts for C4 and five counts for C6. All three judges (the researcher, J1 and J2) were requested to highlight and extract construct related statement(s) in relation to each photograph for both sample transcripts (P1 and P28). They were to record if one or more constructs (coded as C1 to C7) were applicable to a photograph. They were to enter all data in columns - the first, noting the product or brand in photograph (or photographs if spoken of as a cluster); the second, noting the applicable proposition; the third, comprising of proposition related statements (Columns 1, 2, & 3 in Appendix 10).

Following this task, comparisons were made on the bases of evidence identified in support of each construct for each photograph. Following this task, comparisons amongst the three

judges were made on the applicability or non-applicability of each of the seven propositions to each photograph. There was more than 90% agreement amongst the three judges. Where disagreements occurred, differences were resolved through discussion. A total count of 34 and 25 propositions applied, respectively, to sample transcript 1 and sample transcript 2. On the basis of the high figure of inter-coder reliability, the researcher proceeded to analyze the remaining 26 transcripts.

5.3. Results

This section reports on the sample profile, and discusses propositions one through eight. Section 5.3.1 provides a brief on the ethnic mix of the participants in the study, Section 5.3.2 overviews identified products, Section 5.3.3 evaluates propositions One to Eight.

5.3.1. *Participants' Profile*

A total number of 28 young adults aged between 18 and 21 agreed to participate. As Table 5-1 shows, both genders were well represented, with participants belonging to Europeans and Maori and Pacific Islander ethnic groups dominating. The sample is representative of the ethnic mix of the student population at Auckland's universities.

Table 5-1: Gender and Ethnicity of Sample

	Male	Female	Total	%
European	5	7	12	42
Maori & Pacific Islander	3	4	7	25
Indian	2	3	5	18
Chinese	2	1	3	15
Middle Eastern	1	-	1	3
	13	15	28	100

5.3.2. *Overview of identified products and brands*

The twenty eight participants took a total of 314 photographs - individually they took a minimum of five and a maximum of twenty two photographs. An inventory list of the photographs is displayed in Appendix 9. The number of photographs did not represent the total number of objects selected as some participants photographed a cluster of items representing a single product category. In the case of females, this was particularly so for the product category of cosmetics. One photograph comprised of a cluster of perfumes - Elizabeth Arden (Green Tea), Marc Jacobs (Daisy), Summer from Van Cleef & Arpels, Yves

Saint Laurent (YSL) Paris); another presented an ensemble of the Mac range of cosmetics - lip Balm, hair mousse, face wash, body butter, make-up; a third included brands of face cosmetics (Revlon), while still another included the Skin Care range of mud mask, cleanser, and moisturiser. A similar pattern was seen in the case of males. For example, one photograph included a game of chess and cards; another included Garnier Fructis cleansing products, still another included Smirnoff Vodka and Tui Beer. Since the clustered items were all representations of a product type, for e.g. perfume, food, cosmetics, and were spoken of as a single unit representing that category, the photograph was treated as a single representation.

The products and brands are summarized in Exhibit 5-4. Of the 15 product categories represented, five can be categorised in the clothing and accessories cluster, two in the cosmetics cluster, four in the electronics items cluster, with the remainder in the car and food and drink categories. However, participants also identified an assortment of products - so varied, as to prevent categorisation. These comprised items such as a soft toy, photograph frames, books and magazines, stationery, a barbecue table, a photograph of a door to a flat, car keys, a wall planner, a flyer for a dance party (Get Shaky), a flyer for the Young Labour Party, a flyer for an entertainment show (Rhythm & Vines), computer tablets to draw on, a public transport information card, bus card, Kleenex tissues, a painting, the New Zealand flag, and a Trombone. These miscellaneous items were clustered together under a 'miscellaneous' product category.

The product categories selected were both expected and unexpected, particularly the inclusion of food and drink items. The items ranged from clusters of fruit to branded items such as pizza (Hell's Pizza). A number of participants took photos of items that expressed their ethnic and cultural affiliations; e.g., flags, sweat-shirts with national emblems, and jewellery (Pounamus or greenstone jewellery). Several took pictures such as those of books, wall planners, an alarm clock, and cars. Many discussed their personal interests from photos of entertainment and political party flyers, dancing gear, musical instruments, books, magazines, painting, Fair Trade tea, music CDs and movie DVDs.

Of the product categories, seven (shoes, bags, clothes, cosmetics, sunglasses, perfume, wallet and watches) accord with those identified by Fionda & Moore (2009) as luxury, i.e., fashion (couture, ready to wear and accessories), perfumes and cosmetics, wines and spirits, and

watches and jewellery. Whilst most of the brands selected in these categories are high-end global brands, a few are high-end regional brands, e.g., Ksubi, Billabong and Rip Curl. Some (e.g., Gucci, Chanel, Louis Vuitton, Christian Dior, Ralph Lauren, Yves St. Laurent) also feature in the top ten brands in the Forbes most desirable luxury brands list (In Depth: World's most desirable luxury brands, 2008). These items suggest that young adults may also be conscious of the luxury related value in the product and brand choices they make. Most brands in categories other than those in fashion and miscellaneous items are well recognized globally, the only exceptions being locally assembled computers (Enermax), and food and drink items such as Chicken Tonight, Hell's Pizza, Just Juice, and Watties (sauce).

Given the range and type of self selected products, the study raises questions about what exactly constitutes the definition and understanding of a product for the young adult participants in this study. Holman (1981) provides a taxonomy or typology of products that communicate aspects of the self. The first categorization is that of *parasomatic* products which include products that modify the body's colour (e.g., chemical hair colours, facial cosmetics), smell (e.g., perfumes, breath mints), apparent size (padding in clothes, elevated shoes), or any other attribute. Such products are considered to be body-based systems of communication. A second categorization includes products not attached to the body but which are used to perform some task (e.g., pens, tools) or to indulge in some physiological need (e.g., smoking apparatus, food). A third category includes products which serve as a background to interactions, for example, furniture, or room decorations. Holman (1981) notes that while these three categories appear to be mutually exclusive, empirical validation on the mutual exclusiveness and the exhaustive nature of these categorisations is lacking. In this regard, while the current study provides clear evidence of the existence of the first two categories (*parasomatic*, *task oriented* or *physiological need associated*), these two categories alone do not adequately explain the entire range of products or brands identified by the participants in the study, especially so for some items that feature in the miscellaneous products category. In this regard, Belk's (1988) proposition of the extended self offers a useful perspective. Belk (1988), in his proposition of the extended self, contends that consumers define themselves by the sum of all that is 'ours' - goods and experiences, achievements, or even persons and places - all part of the extended self. Such a perspective includes collections, money, other people, pets, and body parts.

Exhibit 5-4: Identified Product Categories and Brands

Products	Brands Identified
Shoes	Witchery, New Balance, Vans, Nike, Converse, Puma, Adidas
Bags	Lacoste, Louis Vuitton, Adidas, Rip Curl, Billabong
Clothing, Hats & Belts, & Jewellery	Kzubi, Levis, Diesel, Quicksilver, Billabong , Laura Parker, Witchery, Abercrombie & Fitch, Workshop, Dickies, Horley, Supre, True Religion Jeans, Ralph Lauren, Kathmandu, Mossimo
Mp3	Apple iPod
Mobile Phone	Sony, Ericsson, Motorola, Nokia
Car	Volkswagen Golf, Ford Laser, Honda, Holden, Toyota, Nissan
Computer	Apple, Enamax, Sony Vaio, Toshiba, LG
Cosmetics	Elizabeth Arden (Green Tea), Thin Lizzy, Neutrogena, Mac, Revlon, Maybelline, Fantasy cream, Smash Box, Cetaphil, Garnier
Food and Drink	Burger Fuel, Chicken Tonight, Hell's Pizza, Pepsi, Coke, Coke Zero, Lift, Lipton Tea, V8, Just Juice, Weet-Bix (cereal), Mengren noodles, Sanitarium (cereal), Pump (water), H2Go (water), Watties (sauce), Fair Trade Tea.
Electronics	Logitech, Pioneer, Play Station, Fisher & Paykel, Samsung, Yamaha, TomTom, Hair Straightener (ghd), X-box
Sunglasses and reading glasses	Gucci, Le Specs, Ray-Ban, Dolce & Gabbana, Wayfarer
Perfume	Lancome, Christian Dior , Elizabeth Arden (Green Tea), Marc Jacobs (Daisy), Van Cleef & Arpels (Summer), Yves Saint Laurent (YSL), Chanel, Kylie Minogue, Jo Malone, Oscar de la Renta
Wallets & Watches	Rip Curl, Glassons, Guess, Adidas, Omega, Baby-G
Alcohol/Wine	Lindauer, Malibu, Barbados Rum, Speights, Tui, 42 Below, Smirnoff Vodka, Villa Maria
Miscellaneous items	Barbeque table, soft toy, painting, sporting equipment (chess & cards, gym equipment, scuba tank, diving watch, fishing rod, map of huts in Fiordland, hockey stick bag, cricket bat and soccer ball), trombone, books, magazines, books, stationery, wall planner, flyer for dance party (Get Shaky), flyer (Young Labour Party), flyer for entertainment show (Rhythm & Vines), movie posters, photo wall, photo frame, flat (door), computer tablet (to draw on), bus card , car keys, Kleenex tissues, items of cultural significance, flag of NZ

While the study does not provide any evidence on the inclusion of people, money, pets, and body parts within the scope of products or brands, participants identify items such as a soft toy, political party and dance party flyers, flags, and bus travel cards as products. Even though they do not own the said items, they speak of them in terms of communicating aspects of what Belk refers to as the extended self. In other words, Belk's (1988) definition of the extended self is, to some extent, applicable to the current study. The findings in this study, thus, also extend Holman's classification of products and brands in relation to the self by inclusion of the 'miscellaneous' product category.

Further, as evident in Exhibit 5-4, with the exception of the Apple iPod, participants speak of a range of brands within each product category. In other words, there is no clear consensus on any specific brand. As Chernev and Gal (2009) suggest, this could be because of brand saturation which means consumers have many options, and can select from a number of similar or alternative brands to express their selves. This also means that there may not be enough brand differentiation for consumers to favour a specific choice over another.

5.3.3. Proposition Evaluation

This section evaluates propositions One to Eight.

5.3.3.1. Evaluation of Proposition One

Proposition One states:

Young adults in the research population select from a limited set of products to communicate aspects of their selves.

Underpinning this proposition is the understanding that extant research has identified specific product categories in relation to communicating characteristics of the self (Berger & Heath, 2007, 2008; Birdwell, 1968; Chan, Berger, & Boven, 2009; Elliott, 1994; Evans, 1959; Franke & Schreier, 2008; Fung, 2002; Green et al., 1969; Grubb & Hupp, 1968; Hogg, 1998; Holt, 1997; Jantzen et al., 2006; Kjeldgaard, 2003; Lamont & Molnar, 2001; Lindridge et al., 2004; Morris & Cundiff, 1971; Oswald, 1999; O'Cass & Frost, 2002; Patterson & Hogg, 2004; Thompson & Haytko, 1997; Wang & Wallendorf, 2006).

Exhibit 5-4 identifies key product categories - shoes, bags, clothing, hats and belts, and jewellery, MP3s, mobile phones, cars, computers, cosmetics, food and drink, electronics, sunglasses and reading glasses, perfumes, wallets and watches, alcohol or wine, and miscellaneous items. These 15 key product categories reflect the product categories in the literature as identified in Chapter 3, Section 3.6. Only two categories, that of cigarettes and home decor and furnishings, do not find mention in this study. The explanation for this could lie in the age and life stage of the participants in the study, in which usually, there is little emphasis on investment in home and furnishings. A sub-category of relative interest is that of computers/laptops, which a number of participants refer to, but which finds little mention within the consumer behaviour literature. Similarly, sporting equipment is another category with little mention in the existing literature.

The findings of this study show that the majority of the identified product categories find concurrence in the literature. Young adult consumers in this study do indeed opt for products from more product categories commonly identified in the literature as communicating aspects of the self. Therefore, the study lends strong support to proposition 1: *Young adults in the research population select from a limited set of products and brands to communicate aspects of their selves.*

5.3.3.2. Evaluation of Propositions Two through Eight

Following the procedure set out in Sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2, the interview transcripts were analysed for evidence of the constructs that constitute propositions two to eight. To facilitate analysis, the fifteen product categories in Exhibit 5-4 and the items within each were collapsed into seven broad product groupings:

- **Clothing and accessories** (clothing, bags & wallets, hats & belts, shoes, jewellery, sunglasses and reading glasses, watches);
- **Cosmetics**: (make up, perfumes and deodorants, and personal cleaning and grooming products);
- **Electronics**: (cell phones, computers, iPods, domestic appliances, LCD TVs, hair straighteners, cameras, play station/X-box, music systems, CDs/DVDs, miscellaneous electronic/electrical (GPS, CD rewritable);
- **Food and Drinks (non-alcoholic)**;
- **Drinks (alcoholic)**;
- **Cars**;
- **Miscellaneous** (barbeque table, soft toy, painting, sporting equipment (chess & cards, gym equipment, scuba tank, diving watch, fishing rod, map of huts in Fiordland, hockey stick bag, cricket bat and soccer ball), trombone, books, magazines, books, stationery, wall planner, flyer for dance party (Get Shaky), flyer (Young Labour Party), flyer for entertainment show (Rhythm & Vines), movie posters, photograph wall, photograph frame, flat (door), computer tablet (to draw on), bus card, car keys, Kleenex tissues, items of cultural significance, Flag of NZ)

Out of a total count of 314 photographs, 266 photographs provide evidence supporting propositions Two through Eight. This means that 48 photos do not have any bearing on any of the Seven propositions (Table 5-2). Apart from participant four (P4) who provided evidence relating to the propositions for 8 of 18 photographs, all other participants provided evidence for almost all photographs except one or two. The photographs that did not provide evidence relating to propositions Two through Eight are identified in Table 5-6, and discussed in Section 5.3.4.

Exhibit 5-5: Number of Photos per Participant

Participant	A	B
P1(F)	10	10
P2(F)	11	11
P3(M)	10	12
P4(M)	8	18
P5(F)	20	21
P6(F)	7	10
P7(M)	8	9
P8(F)	12	13
P9(F)	7	8
P10(M)	16	20
P11(M)	7	9
P12(F)	7	11
P13(F)	11	15
P14(F)	6	6
P15(M)	7	7
P16(M)	6	6
P17(M)	9	11
P18(M)	13	14
P19(F)	5	5
P20(F)	4	5
P21(F)	8	10
P22(M)	3	5
P23(F)	10	12
P24(M)	9	11
P25(F)	10	11
P26(M)	6	6
P27(F)	15	16
P28(M)	21	22
Total	266	314

A=Number of photos presented by each participant that present evidence bearing on any of the seven propositions.

B= Total number of photos presented by each participant.

Table 5-2 shows the total number of photographs per product sub-category within each product category. Participants most commonly link aspects of their self to clothing/accessories (36% of photographs) and electronics (25% of photographs).

The dominance of the product categories of *clothing and accessories* and *electronics* could be for a number of reasons. This could be because young adult consumers find these product categories most relevant to their selves and that these product categories help them communicate self-related characteristics.

The interest in *clothing and accessories* and *cosmetics* could also reflect a concern with aspects relating to self-image and status. The bulk of the interest within the product category

of electronics is seen within the product sub-categories of *computers*, *iPods* and *cellphones*. As Wilska (2003) notes, information and communication technologies are a very important part of the everyday life of young people. Svoen's (2007) study suggests that young adults use technologies to construct self-directed identities.

Some reasons can explain the interest in the product sub-categories of *magazines and books* and *sporting equipment*. It could be that the product sub-category of *magazines and books* help manage and communicate aspects of the self to others, for example, by communicating belongingness to a certain social set, supporting or contesting stereotypes of masculinity or femininity, and providing information on self-related aspects, such as relative roles and attitudes of men and women (Kim & Ward, 2004; Moore, Earless, & Parsons, 1992; Shannon, 2004). On the other hand, even though research addresses sport consumption or sport consumption motives (e.g., James & Ridinger, 2002), innovating users in a consumer goods field (Luthje, 2004), or the impact of corporate sponsorship on consumer behaviour (Mason, 2005), there is little focus on how consumer choices of sport related equipment communicate aspects of the self. The findings of this study point towards this direction as a potential area of further research.

Table 5-2: Number of Photographs per Category

Product Category	Females	Males	Total Photographs-266
			%
Clothing & Accessories			
Clothing	15	27	
Bags & Wallets	10	6	
Shoes	12	13	
Hats & Belts	0	2	
Sunglasses Reading glasses	3	3	
Watches (including alarm clock)	2	1	
Jewellery	1	1	
Total	43	53	96 = 36%
Cosmetics			
Make up related	12		
Perfumes & Deodorants	5	5	
Personal cleaning & grooming products e.g., body wash, shampoo, toothpaste, hair care	1	4	
Total	18	9	27 = 10%
Electronics			
Computers	10	5	
Cell phones	8	6	
MP3 players	8	6	
Music system	2	6	
Music CDs/DVDs	2	1	
Domestic Appliances	0	1	
LCD TVs	1	2	
Hair Straighteners	3	0	
Cameras	2	0	
PlayStation /X-Box	0	2	
Miscellaneous electronics/electrical(GPS, CD Rewritable)	0	2	
Total	36	31	67 = 25%
Food/Drink			
Food & Drinks (Non Alcoholic)	17	9	
Drinks (Alcoholic)	3	4	
Total	20	13	33 = 12.5%
Cars			
Cars	5	5	10 = 4%
Miscellaneous			
Photo frames	2	0	
Stationery	1	0	
Magazines & Books	4	3	
Items of cultural significance	2	0	
Sporting equipment	2	5	
Miscellaneous Items	11	3	
Total	22	11	33 = 12.5%
	144	122	

Tables 5-3, 5-4 and 5-5 allow some inferences to be made about the propositions. Table 5-3 presents for each product category the number of times a construct is identified. Table 5-4 offers a detailed view for each product category and sub-category, the number of times evidence is provided in support of a proposition, with data provided separately for female and male participants.

However, both these Tables – 5-3 and 5-4 - do not provide an accurate picture of the number of female and male participants who connect a specific construct with a specific product or product sub-category. To address this issue, Table 5-5 identifies the number of female and male participants who connect a specific construct with a product or product sub-category. For example, in Table 5-4, females connect the construct of ‘affiliation, association, or belongingness with reference groups or community’ within the clothing sub-category seven times, supporting Proposition 2; this means seven photographs are linked to this proposition. However, it could be that a particular participant has taken more than a single photo for this specific product sub-category. This means the construct count does not reflect the actual number of female or male participants who utilize a construct. It could also be that one or more participants utilize the same construct across one or more product sub-categories within the broader product category of clothing and accessories.

Table 5-5 addresses this ambiguity in two ways. First, it records the number of female and male participants who connect a specific construct with a product sub-category, excluding duplicate counts of any female or male participant. Following this step, it checks for duplicate counts across all product sub-categories within a broader product category. For example, while in Table 5-4, within the product category of *clothing and accessories*, the product sub-category of clothing records seven instances in support of Proposition 2 for females; the count is six for the same column and the same product sub-category in Table 5-5. This means, within the product sub-category of *clothing*, one female participant utilized two photos supporting Proposition 2 in Table 5-4. Differences across product sub-categories are reflected in the sum total of instances supporting Proposition 2 for the product category of *clothing and accessories* - 17 - in Table 5-4, while the number of unique female participants who provided evidence supporting Proposition 2 in Table 5-5 is 11. Inferences drawn across Tables 5-3, 5-4, and 5-5 are offered after Table 5-5.

Table 5-3: Constructs linked to Product Categories

<i>Propositions</i>	Clothing and Accessories			Cosmetics			Electronics			Food and Drinks (Non- alcoholic)			Drinks (Alcoholic)			Cars			Miscellaneous			Overall Total
	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	
<i>Affiliation, association, or belongingness</i>	17	20	37	9	6	15	21	15	36	10	6	16	2	2	4	2	0	2	14	8	22	132
<i>Status</i>	29	29	58	10	2	12	12	11	23	3	2	5	1	4	5	5	5	10	3	0	3	116
<i>Ethnicity</i>	4	6	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	2	4	17
<i>Uniqueness</i>	16	4	20	2	0	2	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	5	29
<i>Cosmopolitanism</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Age & Life Stage</i>	16	11	27	7	1	8	13	10	23	3	2	5	0	1	1	1	2	3	3	1	4	71
<i>Gender</i>	6	4	10	3	3	6	3	2	5	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	26
Total	88	74	162	31	12	43	51	38	89	18	10	28	3	8	11	9	9	18	25	15	40	391

Table 5-4: Evidence in support of Propositions from each Product Category; Females (F) and Males (M)

Product categories	Prop2		Prop3		Prop4		Prop5		Prop6		Prop7		Prop8	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Clothing	7	13	9	12	4	4	4	3	0	0	5	7	2	2
Shoes	7	2	9	8	0	1	5	1	0	0	6	4	1	2
Bags & Wallets	1	3	7	4	0	0	4	0	0	0	4	0	2	0
Hats & Belts	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jewellery	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sunglasses & Reading glasses	1	0	3	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Watches	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Clothing/Accessories	17	20	29	29	4	6	16	4	0	0	16	11	6	4
Cosmetics (Make up related)	7	0	7	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	4	0	3	0
Perfumes & Deodorants	2	3	3	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Personal cleaning & grooming products e.g., body wash, shampoo, toothpaste, hair care	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1
Total Cosmetics	9	6	10	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	7	1	3	3
Laptops/Computers	8	3	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	1	0	0
iPods	4	3	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	4	1	0
Cell phones	5	2	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	0	0
TV sets	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Play station/X Box	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Hair straightener	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cameras	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Music system	1	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	1
CDs/DVDs	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	1
Domestic Appliances	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Miscellaneous (GPS system)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Miscellaneous (CD rewritable)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Electronics	21	15	12	11	0	0	2	0	0	0	13	10	3	2
Food	5	4	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0
Beverages & Soft drinks (non-alcoholic)	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Water	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Food	10	6	3	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	0	0
Drinks (alcoholic)	2	2	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Total Drinks (alcoholic)	2	2	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Cars	2	0	5	5	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	1
Total Cars	2	0	5	5	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	1
Books and magazines	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	1	0
Sports Equipment	2	5	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Stationery	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Photos/frames	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cultural art	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Miscellaneous	8	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	0
Total Miscellaneous	14	8	3	0	2	2	2	3	0	0	3	1	1	1

Table 5-5: Number of Females (F) and Males (M) providing Evidence in Support of Propositions, by Product Category

Product categories	Prop2		Prop3		Prop4		Prop5		Prop6		Prop7		Prop8	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Clothing	6	8	7	8	3	4	3	1	0	0	4	4	2	1
Shoes	7	2	8	7	0	1	5	1	0	0	6	3	1	2
Bags & Wallets	1	3	7	3	0	0	3	0	0	0	3	0	2	0
Hats & Belts	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jewellery	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sunglasses & Reading glasses	1	0	3	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Watches	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Clothing/Accessories	11	9	14	13	3	4	9	1	0	0	11	5	6	3
Cosmetics (Make up related)	6	0	5	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	4	0	3	0
Perfumes & Deodorants	2	3	3	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Personal cleaning & grooming products e.g., body wash, shampoo, toothpaste, hair care	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1
Total Cosmetics	8	5	8	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	4	1	3	3
Laptops/Computers	7	3	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	1	0	0
iPods	4	3	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	4	1	0
Cell phones	5	2	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	0	0
TV sets	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Play station/X Box	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Hair straightener	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cameras	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Music system	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	1
CDs/DVDs	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	1
Domestic Appliances	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Miscellaneous (GPS system)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Miscellaneous (CD rewritable)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Electronics	11	9	6	8	0	0	2	0	0	0	11	7	3	2
Food	5	4	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Beverages & Soft drinks (non-alcoholic)	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Water	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Food	8	5	3	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	0
Drinks (alcoholic)	1	2	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Total Drinks (alcoholic)	1	2	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Cars	2	0	5	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	1
Total Cars	2	0	5	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	1
Books and magazines	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	1	0
Sports Equipment	2	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Stationery	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Photos/frames	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cultural art	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Miscellaneous	5	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	0
Total Miscellaneous	9	5	3	0	2	2	2	3	0	0	3	1	1	1

As can be observed from Table 5-4, participants use a single product category to communicate a number of aspects of the self. Indeed, a single photograph could support more than one construct. This is clearly the case as 391 constructs are linked to the 266 photographs.

Clothing and accessories, and *electronics* are the two main product categories that participants utilize to communicate aspects of their selves. Three product categories - *miscellaneous*, *cosmetics*, and *food & drinks* follow, and also feature strongly. *Group affiliation* (Proposition 2), *status* (Proposition 3) and *age* (Proposition 7) are the dominant aspects of self that participants seek to communicate. It can be concluded that

Proposition Two - Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to express affiliation, association, or belongingness with reference groups or community, and

Proposition Three - Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to indicate status

can be accepted.

Similarly, though not as substantial, there is some evidence across product categories that participants are interested in communicating that they are young. So

Proposition Seven - Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to communicate age related characteristics,

can also be accepted.

Though some participants seek to communicate *ethnicity* (Proposition 4), *uniqueness* (Proposition 5) or *gender* (Proposition 8), the number of instances is fewer. Yet, even though weaker, each of the three propositions -

Proposition 4: Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to indicate ethnicity.

Proposition 5: Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to communicate uniqueness.

Proposition 8: Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to communicate gender related characteristics

is accepted.

There is no evidence for Proposition Six, that

Young adult discourses are characterised by evidence of the use of products to communicate cosmopolitanism related characteristics of the self.

This could be due to a number of reasons - for example, physical location, specific socio-cultural context, or insufficient global experience. The bulk of the cosmopolitan literature includes a sample population of adults (e.g., Caldwell et al., 2006; Thompson & Tambyah, 1999), although a few studies, that involve young adults, specifically examine the link between geographical location and cosmopolitanism (e.g., Kjeldgaard, 2003; Wattanasuwan, 2007).

Table 5-5 provides further information on the number of female and male participants who utilize a specific construct in relation to a specific product category or sub-category. A total of 15 female participants and 13 male participants participated in the study. In view of the number of participants belonging to each gender, a comparison shows little difference between female and male participants who utilize a specific construct. However, there is a noticeable difference for the construct of *age* (Proposition 7) - female participants are more likely to utilize this construct across product categories than are males. Similarly, female participants are more likely to utilize *uniqueness* (Proposition 5) in relation to the *clothing and accessories* product category; *status* (Proposition 3) in relation to the *cosmetics* category; and *affiliation* (Proposition 2) in relation to the product sub-category of *laptops/computers* than are males. In other words, female participants are more conscious of *age*; *uniqueness*; *status* and *affiliation with their reference groups* in the product choices they make.

5.3.4. Photographs of products not linked to propositions

As noted in Section 5.3.3 and Table 5-2, participants do not speak of 48 photos (about one-sixth) in relation to any of the seven propositions. These photographs and the aspects of the self they represent are listed in Table 5-6 below.

Table 5-6: Participant Photographs not linked with Propositions and Corresponding Characteristics of the Self

Photo	Participant No. and gender	Description of Photo content	Aspects of self
1	P3 (M)	Running shoes (New Balance)	Serious about running and keeping fit
2	P3 (M)	Glasses	Loves to read; looks smart with glasses on
3	P4 (M)	Hat (Horley)	Just very casual
4	P4 (M)	Sweat shirt (Quick Silver)	Likes certain colours; just very casual person
5	P4 (M)	Perfume	Clean
6	P4 (M)	Base	Multi-talented
7	P4 (M)	iPod(Apple)	Cool (because of new technology)
8	P4 (M)	Autobiography of favourite guitarist (Slash)	Listens to their music
9	P4 (M)	Self assembled computer (Enermax)	Technically savvy; talented
10	P4 (M)	Computer game (A world of warcraft)	Interested in playing games
11	P4 (M)	Posters	Fan of quality movies
12	P4 (M)	Squash racket	Plays sport
13	P5 (F)	Running shoes (Nike)	Cares about fitness and health
14	P6 (F)	Shoes (work shoes and two other kinds)	A little bit stuffy
15	P6 (F)	Paints	Relaxed, creative, efficient
16	P6 (F)	Workbook	Relaxed, creative, efficient
17	P7 (M)	Hat (Billabong)	Fun person
18	P8 (F)	Guitar and guitar pick	Likes to relax and listen to music; creative
19	P9 (F)	Book	Enjoys reading
20	P10 (M)	Printer	Preference for convenience and comfort
21	P10 (M)	Heater	Wants to keep healthy; doesn't want to get up sick or catch a cold
22	P10 (M)	Sunglasses	Stylish, fashionable, and up to date
23	P10 (M)	Chocolate	Likes chocolate
24	P11 (M)	Soft drink (Coke Zero)	Avoids sugar and watches weight
25	P11 (M)	Turntable	Enjoys DJ-ing as a hobby

Photo	Participant No. and gender	Description of Photo content	Aspects of self
26	P12 (F)	Make up and cosmetics (mascara, lipstick, nail polish, and foundation)	Likes to be well presented
27	P12 (F)	Music instrument (Guitar)	Enjoys music
28	P12 (F)	Electronics (Play Station)	Enjoys music (plays favourite game 'singstar' on playstation)
29	P12 (F)	Cartoon Mascot (Mickey Mouse)	Hates present day cartoons
30	P13 (F)	Jewellery	Loves her jewellery
31	P13 (F)	Bag	Likes old styled fashion
32	P13 (F)	Purses	Likes old styled fashion
33	P13 (F)	Stationery	Serious and enthusiastic about work, tries hard at study
34	P17 (M)	Fly Spray	Values functionality of products
35	P17 (M)	Speakers (Logitech)	Values functionality of products; not too bothered about the music speakers' brand
36	P18 (M)	Soft Toy (Teddy Bear)	Soft and cuddly
37	P20 (F)	Finger rings	Stylish in taste
38	P21 (F)	Art work	Enjoys what she does; very creative
39	P21 (F)	Drawing tools	Enjoys what she does; very creative
40	P22 (M)	Shorts	Competitive; doesn't really care about brands in sports; cares a lot more about winning than the clothes he wears
41	P22 (M)	Singlet	Competitive; doesn't really care about brands in sports; cares a lot more about winning than the clothes he wears
42	P23 (F)	Drinking chocolate (Cadbury)	Likes hot drinks
43	P23 (F)	Bus card	Uni student
44	P24 (M)	Computer monitor	Bit of a computer nerd
45	P24 (M)	Phone (Landline apparatus)	Connected to the outside world
46	P25 (F)	Tea (Fair Trade)	Conscious of ethical consumption
47	P27 (F)	Netball shoes	Serious about sports and netball
48	P28 (M)	Asthma and Hayfever pills	Looks after himself

Table 5-6 shows a range of items. The majority of the products featuring in Table 5-6 are spoken of as symbolic of personal characteristics rather than the social characteristics of the self expressed in the study propositions. Although the list includes a range of characteristics, a few (see, for example, *looks after himself*, *serious about sports and netball*, *wants to keep healthy*, *cares about fitness and health*, *serious about running and keeping fit*, *avoids sugar and watches weight*) relate to personal well being, caring for oneself, or fitness and health. It could be that participants are strongly conscious of the communicative function of personal care or health related products, both in terms of affirming physical fitness and health consciousness to their own selves, and also to others (their peers). Several speak of emotions (see, for example, *loves*, *enjoys*, *likes*) in relation to the product, and assume that these are communicated to others. Some focus on roles, such as a *student* role, or specific interests and talents such as *computer nerd*, *DJing as a hobby*, *plays sport*, and *multi-talented*.

Clearly then, most of the products featuring in Table 5-6 are linked with personal characteristics. These personal characteristics encompass a range of personal traits, interests, and characteristics that participants associate with their product choices. In other words, the findings provide evidence for the notion that consumers also use products to communicate personal characteristics of the self to others.

5.4. Identification of self-related characteristics

As noted in Section 5.3.3, propositions derived from the literature provide a pre-determined framework to examine if the key themes in the literature exist within each of the interview transcripts of participants in Study One. However, as it may not be possible to capture all characteristics specific to each participant in this way, the study applies another process of content analysis to generate a list of self-related characteristics. For the specific task of generating a list of self-related characteristics, each interview transcript from Stage One was content analyzed (Kassarjian, 1977; Kolbe & Burnett, 1991) to identify self-related characteristics. Self-related characteristics were defined as *expressed aspects of the self*. Expressed aspects of the self did not include explanations of how and why the photographed products and brands expressed particular aspects of the self. Rather, these included expressions of what the product or brand said about the participant or who they were to their own selves or to others. A self-related characteristic was only included once, even if there was a repetition of the same characteristic in relation to another product or brand in a similar expression. A list of self-related characteristics was drawn up for each of the 28 participants

from Study One (Appendix 10, Column 4). No attempt was made to analyse or separate dimensions of the self, say, in terms of the personal or the social. The sifting and ascertaining of what was being communicated by participants from Study One was left open to be gathered from responses of participants from Study Two. For purposes of reliability and producing coding descriptors which are sufficiently clear and discriminating (Kassarjian, 1977; Kolbe & Burnett, 1991), the content analysis task for an initial set of two profiles was undertaken separately by the chief supervisor, an independent judge, and the student researcher to identify any possible gaps or differences in reading, understanding, and extraction of terms. There were some minor differences which were resolved through discussion. The researcher repeated the same process for the remaining twenty six transcripts.

The lists of self-related characteristics for each of the 28 participants show that participants characterise their selves in terms of two broad dimensions - those that are more social oriented, and those that are more personal oriented. Such distinction is relative because it is difficult to classify any characteristic as purely personal or social. The discussion in this section takes the example of two lists of self-related characteristics - those of P1(F) and P28(M) (Appendix 10). One could assume, for example, that for P1(F), characteristics such as *life of the party (sociable)*, *always wants the best*, *different*, *fashion conscious*, *trend setter*, *trendy*, *posh*, *needs to be original*, *cares about personal grooming*, and *university student* are more socially oriented than personal in nature, because they acquire greater meaningfulness and value in a social context than in a personal context. Similarly, one could assume, in the case of P28, that characteristics such as *interested in the Arts*, *bit different*, *Maori*, *respects culture and people*, *respects body and looks after himself (personal grooming)*, *likes to fit in*, *likes the best* and *cool* are more social in nature.

A key observation is that a number of socially oriented characteristics as identified above (Appendix 10, Column 4) can be linked with applicable propositions in Column 2 (Appendix 10). In the case of P1(F), for example, characteristics such as *life of the party (sociable)* and *health conscious* can be linked with the construct of *affiliation, association, or belongingness with reference groups or community (C1)*; *always wants the best*, *trend setter*, *cares about personal grooming*, *posh*, *upstyle* could be linked with the construct of *status (C2)*; *different* and *needs to be original* with the construct of *uniqueness (C4)*; and *fashion conscious*, *trend*

setter, cares about personal grooming, posh, upstyle, and university student with the construct of *age and life stage* (C6).

Similarly, for P28(M), *likes to fit in, cool and into the outdoors*, can be linked with the construct of *affiliation, association, or belongingness with reference groups or community* (C1); *respects body and looks after himself, techno savvy, enjoys drinking and likes the best* with the construct of *status* (C2); *Maori and respects culture and people* with the construct of *ethnicity and culture* (C3); *bit different* with *uniqueness* (C4); *bit different, likes to fit in, and techno-savvy* with the construct of *age and life stage* (C6).

However, a number of characteristics that are more of a personal nature or inwardly oriented remain unlinked to propositions. These include, in the case of P1(F), characteristics such as *loves the outdoors, happy, free spirit, confident, courageous, strong personality and has had a good upbringing*. In the case of P28 (M), these characteristics include *exuberant, has a sense of humour, cares about family and likes to express himself*.

This finding then suggests, in concurrence with evidence in Section 5.3.4, that participants' product choices are not only symbolic of aspects as reflected in the propositions derived from the literature, but also that there is a strong component of personal related aspects in the product choices they make. Although the literature examines the congruency element between consumers' product choices and their selves (see, for e.g., Birdwell, 1968; Evans, 1959; Hughes & Guerrero, 1971), the question of whether consumers make product choices to communicate personal characteristics to others is relatively unaddressed. The evidence in this study is that participants recognize the use and symbolic value of products to not only affirm their selves to their own selves, but also to communicate such characteristics to others. Whether this is indeed the case remains to be seen in Study Two of this thesis.

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter set out to provide an overview of the data collected for Study One, Stage One and examine the validity of seven of the propositions identified in Chapter 3. Participants in the study refer to a number of product categories which together comprise seven key product categories. These product categories reflect selected product categories in the existing literature, and provide support for the first proposition. The three most significant categories are those of *clothing and accessories, electronics, and cosmetics* for both female and male participants. Three product sub-categories that have not evoked much interest in the

literature on product and brand choices in relation to the self also emerged. These are *computers, magazines and books, and sporting equipment*.

The constructs of *affiliation, association, or belongingness with reference groups or community* and *status* are the most significant aspects of the self communicated by both female and male participants followed by the constructs of *age and life stage, uniqueness* and *gender*. The construct of *ethnicity* is communicated by fewer participants, whereas *cosmopolitanism* is of no significance for the sample of participants in this study. Female participants, in comparison to male participants, are more conscious of *age; uniqueness; status* and *affiliation with their reference groups* in the product choices they make.

About one sixth of the total photographs of products communicated aspects of the self unrelated to the seven propositions. A possible explanation is offered in terms of the relevance of these products to personal characteristics. Lists of self-related characteristics generated from the 28 interview transcripts provide additional support to the notion that the sample of young adult participants in this study recognize and use the symbolic value of products to communicate personal characteristics to their own selves and to others. Study Two, Stage Two examines whether this is indeed the case. The next chapter identifies and analyses key discursive themes from the 28 interviews.

CHAPTER 6. Study One-Stage Two: Discursive themes

6.1. Introduction

This chapter reports Study One, Stage Two. The chapter presents the essence of participants' discussions about the products they selected to communicate the self. The 28 interview transcripts were thematically analysed following the process as outlined in Chapter 4 (Section 4.3.2.3), and the findings checked with a sample comprising one-third of participants. Three key discursive themes were identified - the *discourse of self-related characteristics; of belongingness or affiliation with social groups; and of power*.

The content of this chapter is structured as follows. Section 6.2 provides an overview of the key discursive themes. Sections 6.3, 6.4, and 6.5, report on each of the three key discursive themes. Section 6.6 discusses the findings of the study. Section 6.7 concludes the chapter.

6.2. Overview of the key discursive themes

The discourses show that participants talk about products in terms of three distinct facets - their *awareness of self-related characteristics; of belongingness or affiliation with a reference group* and their status therein, including membership of socio-economic, ethnic, and role-related (such as being a student) groups; and *of power* - power over their own selves, and social power (See Appendix 11 for a sample transcript). The discourse of self-related characteristics differs from the discourse of belongingness or affiliation in that it does not include social categorisations such as those of age, status, or ethnicity. The discourse of power, on the other hand, refers to power related issues in product choice in two ways - first, over the self in terms of self-regulation of behaviour or self-discipline, and second, power over others in terms of interpersonal influences and associated advantages or disadvantages. These key discursive themes interweave with aspects such as a concern with personal well being and recognition of talents, looking good, making the right impressions in connection with group affiliation, and status within and across groups. The areas of fashion, technology, and health dominate as the contexts within which these facets are expressed. The following sections report on each of the three discursive themes.

6.3. The discourse of self-related characteristics

In the discourse of self-related characteristics, participants show an awareness of who they are in terms of their characteristics, including feelings and emotions in relation to the products they choose. Participants' speak of their characteristics in terms of how they see themselves, and how they imagine others see them. How they see themselves is evidenced in statements such as:

I like to *"...be comfortable yet look good"* (Female - P1 - Photograph of Ksubi shorts);

I am a *"very casual"* person (Male - P4 - Photograph of Dickies' shorts);

"I am a confident person. I am more chatty and out there if I have got make-up on" (Female - P 23 - Photograph of Mac Make Up);

I am a person who *"like(s) to stay in contact with everyone I (she) know(s)"* (Female - P27 - Photograph of Cell phone).

Similarly, as the following statements illustrate, participants are able to project how others view them in relation to their product choices.

"If you wear Nike, people will sort of think you are cool I guess" (Male - P7- Photograph of Nike sports shoes);

"...tells others that I enjoy my music" (Male - P24 - Photograph of an iPod);

"they (his peers) would see a more exuberant kind of person maybe..." (Male - P28 - Photograph of dance sport gear).

Although participants do not generally make any conscious distinction in how they see themselves, and how they assume others see them, yet the two portrayals are complementary in that they provide a fuller, expansive, and holistic view of the self. Often, participants clarify that how they see themselves is also how they assume others view them. For example,

"...To me they (Nike running shoes) say that I care about myself and I want to get fit and look good and all of that. (To others) I suppose the same thing, that I care about my health and want to be fit" (Female - P5 - Photograph of Nike shoes);

"It is a hair product that I use. ... To myself it says I care about myself and to my peers it says the same thing" (Male - P15 - Photograph of Hair product).

Participants also express self when they speak of their product choices in terms of a range of feelings and emotions. These tend to be usually positive such as *likes* and *feelings*, and in some instances, a strong sense of personal beliefs, convictions, and values.

“I love food, I love to eat...and I have a sweet tooth so that is why I put the box of Roses there ...I really like it” (Female - P13 - Photograph of Chocolates (Box of Roses));

“I only buy Fair Trade stuff because workers are treated so unfairly in that sense and I feel I am doing my part if I buy Fair Trade now. I drink tea and coffee every day so maybe I do make quite an impact...For me I feel like I am doing something good, it is only a couple of dollars more, but I feel like I am doing a little part...Yeah I am conscious in that sense...To others it also says that I am conscious and I think that is important like image...” (Female - P25 - Photograph of Fair Trade Tea);

“...I am politically aware, which to me personally is important... And if you don’t know about the country you are living in and the political basis you are not really informed, and it is a bit of a waste really...personally your political opinions say something about your morals...” (Female - P5 - Photograph of Young Labour Party Flyer).

The underlying assumption in each of these quotes is that feelings, emotions and convictions relating to a product are not only relevant and meaningful to the self but are also communicated to peers or external audiences as self-related characteristics, such as those of love for food, or a set of values, or even a sense of ethics and consciousness about what one stands for.

The discourse essentially addresses the question of who and what kind of a person participants are, and their assumptions of how they come across to others. As most of the quotes above illustrate, participants are conscious of how they look, not only physically, but also in terms of how they come across to others. Clearly, there is an element of personal well being, looking good, and managing impressions in relation to social others. Participants recognize their own feelings and emotions in relation to their product choices, and assume that these are communicated to others.

6.4. Belongingness or affiliation with a reference group

The discourse of belongingness or affiliation with a reference group refers to association with a social group based on categorizations such as those of age, peer group, gender, economic or social status, class, ethnicity, specific interests, or simply being a student. Importantly, the discourse also refers to a sense of difference from others - those cast as being the out group.

This discourse presents significant evidence of status-based affiliations. As is evident in the quotes below, participants are very conscious of the status-related associations of their product choices. See, for example,

“...group of friends we all have sort of like a signature scent” (Female - P5 - Photograph of Yves Saint Laurent (YSL) Baby Doll perfume);

“Like business people, they wear Ralph Lauren” (Male - P18 - Photograph of Ralph Lauren T-Shirt);

“(We) use the same type of make-up, like the same brands. Mac make-up...a more expensive brand of make-up...shows that we do work or some of my friends’ families are more well off...rather than you pulling out some \$2 stuff that you got even if it did look the same” (Female - P23 - Photograph of Mac Make up).

The discourse of belongingness or affiliation with a reference group is also evident in relation to other self-related aspects, such as those of age and gender. The following statements illustrate such affiliation:

“My friends do wear that brand...my sister...she’s still young...she doesn’t really care” (Female - P1 - Photograph of Ksubi Jeans);

“Mostly girls my age” (Female - P5 - Photograph of Yves Saint Laurent (YSL) Baby Doll perfume).

A sense of peer group affiliation is evident in phrases such as

“...many who have an iPod” (Female - P2 - Photograph of an iPod);

“...most people these days have an iPod” (Male - P24 - Photograph of an iPod);

“I am a typical teenager with his mobile and things” (Male - P 26 - Photograph of a Mobile phone).

However, those who do not own similar technology are cast as different sort of people

“who don’t care about what others think of them and also people who don’t listen to music” (Male - P24 - Photograph of an iPod); or

“like my grandma...and also younger people... who don’t really know how to use cell phones and also people with a lower amount of money” (Female - P27 - Photograph of cellphones).

Disassociation is most apparent in contexts of health and physical well being. Participants clearly disassociate themselves from those who do not bother about keeping in good health,

or indulge in unwise health choices. In other words, in such quotes, they affiliate with those who are health conscious. For example,

“I think people that don’t really bother about their physique or health, they probably wouldn’t worry about eating Nutrigrain” (Male - P7 - Photograph of cereal - Nutrigrain);

“The bottle of water...From other people that have Coke and stuff....Yes this is a better option.... Because I want myself to be healthy so if I compare myself to them they are unhealthy” (Female - P14 - Photograph of a bottle of water).

Participants also speak of belongingness in terms of ethnicity and culture and especially so, in the context of clothing and accessories. They speak of their product choices to affirm a sense of identification.

“To remember I am still Australian and..uhh...that’s a lot to do with my identity and... ..(people who wouldn’t wear this would be) Umm...Either they’re just...they’re not Australian...or....maybe they don’t feel the need to sort of express that they are Australian...because maybe they...like Australians in Australia wouldn’t usually need a jersey to show they’re Australian ..this is sort of almost like affirming that identity... ..I guess there needs to be a bit of an obvious sign that I am Australian because you can’t tell otherwise” (Male - P3 - Photograph of Australian Rugby jersey);

“Yeah you wear it (lavalava) around your waist...it shows that I am Tongan...yeah it shows my culture, where I am from and what I believe in...yeah it means respect....people look at us and it looks like skirts, but it is not....respect for everyone around you and it shows that we are on the same level and no one is different” (Male - P18 - Photograph of the Lavalava dress).

They recognize belongingness in their references to personal interests and talents. P 5, for example, recognizes the club like nature of the political party she affiliates with -

“This is a flyer for Young Labour, which I joined at the end of last year....It is basically the youth wing of the Labour party and it is sort of like a club on campus at Uni of Auckland....It sort of depends on what their interests are....Just people that share the same values, which is nice (Female - P5 - Photograph of the Young Labour Party Flyer).

In other words, she is not only aware of the political party she affiliates with, but is also aware of those with different value sets - the ones she does not affiliate with.

While the majority of the participants speak of belongingness or affiliation with social groupings, in a few instances, participants also speak of a lack of identification with majority

groups. In such instances, participants speak of a sense of difference, or even a sense of being at odds with what most others do. P28, for example, refers to dance sports-related items and says,

“I would think I would be the exception to my age group... if you say a classic teenager they wouldn’t be in to the trombone and stuff, it wouldn’t be cool, it would be more like an electric guitar or they would be listening to their radio rather than playing a trombone you know...” (Male - P28 - Photograph of dance sport gear)

P6 is clearly uncomfortable about the shoes she has to wear to her workplace:

“they are really ugly and I really hated them...because they looked really bad..that (I) can’t dress properly...doesn’t feel very good...That I am a little bit stuffy” (Female - P6 - Photograph of shoes).

She does not wish to be perceived as someone who does not share a sense of fashion with others - ‘they’ (her peers). The shoes make her feel different, as someone who does not belong to her peer group; this perception of lack of identification is a cause of angst. In other words, both P6 and P28 refer to a sense of norms that qualifies belongingness to what most others in their peer group do, and by virtue of the product choices they are associated with, both P6 and P28 do not belong to that majority group.

Clearly, as each of the above quotes illustrates, differences whether in terms of social and economic status, class, age, life stage, gender, ethnicity or specific interests, delineate subgroups within the larger population group. The discourse of belongingness or affiliation with a reference group shows that participants are aware of how product choices are symbolic of whether and where they belong in terms of social categorisations. They recognize how products are a means of managing impressions, affirming belongingness or affiliations with individuals or social groups one identifies with, and etching out boundaries with those one does not affiliate with.

6.5. Power

The discourse of power refers to two kinds of power - power over the self in terms of self-regulation of behaviour and self-discipline, and power over others, in terms of advantages or disadvantages in social interactions.

Power over the self involves self-regulation of behaviour and a regular regime, especially so in the context of self-presentation and care for one's health. Participants speak of the regulated action and effort in the practices they associate with products. For example,

"...I care about what I look like and make an effort to stay up and be in fashion and style ...sort of want to look your best" (Female - P5 - Photograph of earrings);

"Always usually wear(s) make-up more when I am going out and less if I am just coming to Uni" (Female - P23 - Photograph of Mac Make Up);

"always carry water with me...have to drink water and not Coke (Female - P14 - Photograph of bottle of water);

"doing the gym", "weights", "runs", "if you really want to get there you have to put more effort into it" (Male - P18 - Photograph of Gym).

As each of these quotes demonstrates, practices such as those of 'effort', 'carrying' and 'doing' are integral to concerns with self-presentation and personal well-being. Self-discipline is also evident in quotes such as:

"Carry the iPod wherever I go" (Male - P24 - Photograph of an iPod);

"The first thing I check, before my wallet, is my mobile" (Male - P26 - Photograph of Mobile);

" A bottle of Tui, that is probably the one that we drink the most apart from Speights...we basically try and keep everything to be cost effective" (Male - P17 - Photograph of Beer (Speights, Tui).

As each of these quotes illustrate, discipline involves checking, monitoring, and operating within limited budgets. It involves effort, focus, and the avoidance of all distractions as evident in the following quotes -

"Everyone can take photographs, but it just takes the effort to bring a camera...I try to carry it around as much as you can" (Female - P13 - Photograph of Camera);

"Reading is quite an art...I'm going to avoid the temptation of all these other options and do some...a bit of mental work you know" (Male - P3 - Photograph of Book).

Power over others, on the other hand, relates to advantages or disadvantages in social contexts. Such interpersonal power is particularly evident in relation to fashion and cosmetics. See, for example,

“That is my Yves St Laurent Baby Doll perfume... ... you know like if you can tell that someone is wearing perfume and that, and trying to dress nicely...I would say, if we are talking about when you are out in town and when you are out clubbing and stuff like that... say if you are wanting to meet guys or whatever, obviously if you have more self-confidence and you know you look good and you are wearing nice things and stuff you have the advantage in that way”; the (‘others’)...I suppose they’d be disadvantaged” (Female - P5 - Photograph of Yves Saint Laurent (YSL) Baby Doll Perfume);

“My make-up...say if I was going for a job interview or something people would look at me that I do take pride in myself and they might think that that could continue in to my work or something like that” (Female - P23 - Photograph of Mac Make Up).

As is evident in the above quotes, participants’ choices of products enable social advantages, especially so in terms of gaining acceptability in interpersonal or even professional contexts.

P18 clarifies how, depending on product choice, he may be at relative disadvantage or advantage. He observes:

“Like say if I wear baggy clothes, boat clothes, XL t-shirts, I won’t be approachable, people will be scared of me... About the way you look. ... You look like a criminal, like a gangster...so if people see you wearing Ralph Lauren they say ‘oh yeah he is a high achiever... how he is dressed’. ..That they will come to me and I am friendly... So it helps in making friends” (Male - P18 - Photograph of Ralph Lauren T-Shirt).

While it could be a question of choice in fashion-related products, the mere possession or the lack of it could facilitate or hinder social advantages in product categories such as those of technology. P26 recounts the feeling of being left without a mobile, and a consequent sense of isolation from his peer groups. He expresses powerlessness as he is unable to communicate with anyone:

“...that whole week I sort of felt like I was an outsider because I couldn’t really talk with anyone, I couldn’t text whoever I wanted to and to be honest I would find it a disadvantage if you just didn’t have a mobile because you need it in this time and age” (Male - P26 - Photograph of Mobile).

Participants rarely talk of their product choices in terms of disadvantages they face in social contexts. P28 is an exception who speaks of disadvantages in terms of the downside of being different and not sharing interests with the majority:

“...it disadvantages me through that people don’t fully understand what I do. So if I am in a social environment they will be talking about, I don’t know - another sport like soccer or something that most people know about, well I can’t come in to the conversation and say ‘hey I do dance sport this is what I do blah-blah-blah’ they

won't understand it. So they won't be interested, so I have to comply with everyone else's conversations rather than start my own so in that kind of sense, yeah" (Male - P28 - Photographs of Dance Sport Gear).

The discourse of power illustrates that participants are cognisant of the advantages or disadvantages they stand to gain from the product choices they make. While personal power gained from self-regulation of behaviour and self-discipline benefits participants at a personal level, such self-discipline ultimately facilitates the goal of social power.

6.6. Discussion

The three key discursive themes confirm and build on the literature on products as repositories of meaning "serving as a means of communication between the individual and his significant references" (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967, p. 24). That the self includes both personal and social dimensions is particularly evident in the discourse of self-related characteristics, and of affiliation or belongingness. Power over the self in terms of discipline and self-regulation is integral to practices associated with product choices, which in turn facilitate or constrain social advantages. This section discusses and analyses the three key discursive themes.

6.6.1. The discourse of self-related characteristics

As the discourse of self-related characteristics illustrates, young adult consumers are cognisant of the symbolic role of products and are able to articulate how they use them to affirm, construct or communicate aspects of their self. They use them to construct who they are, and to reinforce that construction through an assumed validation by the *other*; so by definition, they assume shared meaning. The concept of reflexivity provides useful understanding of the processes of self-construction that take form and exist at an individual level in what is the socially contingent nature of the self. Widely used across many disciplines, reflexivity as a term is used with a diverse range of connotation and sometimes with no meaning at all (Atkinson & Coffey, 2002). However, it is frequently discussed in two contexts. The first, epistemological reflexivity, concerns attributes of research activity where it describes a mode of data gathering, getting the respondent to reflect on aspects of the condition being investigated, and also describes the requirements of the researcher in relation to the research activity. A goal of the researcher was to get participants to consciously reflect on self-related characteristics in relation to their product choices. The essence of such reflexivity is captured in each of the three discursive themes.

The second context pertains to a characteristic or an activity of ordinary people, commonly labelled *personal reflexivity*. This usage of the term was introduced by Garfinkel (1967) who conceived of reflexivity as an essential condition of social life. The key interest for marketers in relation to reflexivity lies in particularly understanding how individuals' product choices communicate aspects of the self to themselves and to others. Lash suggests that underlying this process is a form of aesthetic reflexivity (Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1994; Lash & Urry, 1994). Aesthetic reflexivity is where self-interpretation and realisation are formed through the use of symbols; in this study products function as symbolic resources relevant to the construction and the interpretation of the self.

As Giddens (1991, p. 70) notes:

What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone...and ones which, on some level or another, all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day social behaviour.

In other words, products help participants answer who they are both discursively and through day-to-day consumption behaviour. Central to the notion of reflexivity is the idea that humans are able to simultaneously experience subjective and objective views of their self. It is this notion that has relevance for this study. Even though empirical evidence is scarce, the findings of this study support the notion that consumers do engage in reflexivity when describing their self in relation to the product choices they make. Products are valuable as a means through which consumers experience and express personal and social dimensions that comprise their selves. That is, participants refer to the self in terms of both subject and object, requiring the individual to stand outside himself and to react to himself as an object of observation. While the subjectification of the self refers to subjective thoughts and feelings, or even states of being and activities that are personal to the self such as *I like, I enjoy, or I feel*; the objectification of the self commodifies the self in terms of the social such as *people will sort of think, they would see me or to others it says*. As Cooley's (1902) looking glass theory suggests, participants objectify their selves in terms of projecting others' judgments or appraisals of their selves.

Further, both personal (subjectification) and social (objectification) aspects of the self, are not exclusive to each other, and appear interdependent. Both co-construct the self in what Giddens (1991, p. 244) refers to as a biographic way, "the self as reflexively understood by the individual in terms of his or her biography". Reflexivity, thus, gives form to specific

discourses of the self. Such reflexivity includes consideration of product choice as a means to monitor and construct a coherent self. Even though, as Warde (1994) suggests, not all choices may be available or open to all, and one may not have exercised choice at all, yet one will be judged by others to have done so, resulting in consequences for social stratification. Reflexivity, therefore, by means of subjectification and objectification, plays a significant role in the negotiation and construction of a valued sense of self not only at a personal, individual level, but also from a social perspective, thus incorporating both the individual or the personal, and the social or the inter-personal.

6.6.2. *Group belongingness or affiliation with a reference group*

While participants state who or what kind of a person they are, they also express who they are 'like/not like' or which group they belong to. By virtue of owning similar products, they reinforce belongingness in terms of social categorisations such as those of age, gender, life stage, status and class, and ethnicity. Such finding supports previous research with young adult consumers (Banister & Hogg, 2004; Berger & Heath, 2008; Elliott, 1994; Hogg, 1998; O'Cass & Frost, 2002; O'Cass & McEwen, 2004; Oswald, 1999; Lindridge et al., 2004; White & Dahl, 2006) that reports on the use of products to communicate the same aspects in relation to the self. Those who do not belong together, the 'others', are deemed to be underprivileged, in some way socially-disadvantaged, or simply different.

Participants also normalize self-related choice and practice. They establish norms and measures, such as what to wear, where and what it means, for example, "*everyone our age pretty much uses this stuff so this is normal*" (P15). Or as P 2 clarifies - "*Normal meaning kind of fitting in. It would be the odd person out who didn't have an iPod*". Such normalization accords with Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherell's (1987) observation that when individuals define themselves as members of a distinct social category, they appropriate expected or desirable behaviours to define the category and adopt stereotypical norms to do so. Norms invoke comparison and differentiation, marking inclusion or exclusion in social groupings. In this sense, then, normalization operates as a strategy that consumers mobilize to construct and position themselves in relation to social groupings.

6.6.3. Power

Importantly, the study provides evidence of participants' recognition of both personal and social power gained through product choice. Participants view and access products as resources to gain an edge in their life worlds. The notions of power in this study link with the works of French and Raven (1959) and Foucault (1977, 1980, 1990). While formal power is generally represented by established institutions and is accorded via consensus or force and managed via regulation or law, informal power exists at the personal and social level and is accorded via acquiescence or consensus. French and Raven (1959) recognize five bases of power: reward, coercive, legitimate, referent and expert power. They contend that "social influence and power is limited to the influence on the person that is produced by a social agent" (French & Raven, 1959, p. 151). The social agent can be another person, role, norm, or a group. From the standpoint of this study, consumers themselves are social agents, the influencers and the influenced, who make product choices to wield power over one another. French and Raven's notion of reward, referent and expert power links to such interpersonal influence.

For Foucault, on the other hand, power is everywhere, "not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault, 1990, p. 92-93). For French and Raven, power is something that is exerted over another, and while Foucault recognizes this, he also argues that power over the self is an important element. Foucault (1977) draws upon Bentham's Panopticon, a 19th Century apparatus in which prison cells were arranged around a central watchtower from which inmates were watchfully guarded. As inmates were never sure of whether they were being observed at any given moment, they constantly monitored their own actions and behaviours giving rise to the idea of power over the self through the exercise of self-discipline. The findings in this study provide a parallel in terms of participants' self-discipline and self-regulation of behaviours. In contrast to Bentham's Panopticon, however, modern day young adult consumers submit themselves to external surveillance willingly and of their own accord. The obvious advantages from the exercise of such self-discipline are social in nature, which in turn increase personal power in terms of opportunities and goals. This means personal power enables social power and vice versa.

The findings of this study call for a more overt recognition of power in product choice in relation to the self. Studies within the realm of marketing and consumer behaviour tend to address power in relation to consumer sovereignty (e.g., Friedman, 1991, 1996; Sirgy & Su,

2000; Smith, 1976, 1987, 1990) that assumes rational and self-interested consumers who combine resources and skills to make producers do what they would not do otherwise; or in terms of a cultural power perspective (e.g., Fiske, 2000; Murray & Ozanne, 1991; Penaloza & Price, 1993) that refers to movements of consumer resistance to political and market forces beyond their control. There is little written in terms of the power dynamic in consumers' product choices in relation to their own selves in personal and social contexts. Thompson and Haytko (1997) come close in their study of how consumers' fashion discourses are a means to align with certain cultural view-points and resist or subvert others. Similarly, Jantzen et al. (2006) focus on women's consumption of lingerie as a power instrument in terms of how it enhances their experience of inter- and intra-psychological identity. This study draws attention to the need to clearly acknowledge and apply the relevance of power interplay in consumers' product choices.

6.7. Conclusion

Study One, Stage Two provides evidence of the discursive construction of the self in relation to product choice. The chapter identifies three key discursive themes that communicate self-related aspects of young adult consumers. These are - the discourse of self-related characteristics; of group belongingness or affiliation with a reference group; and of power. The three discourses together highlight participants' personal characteristics, the significance of the social groups that participants identify with or disassociate from, and the conscious recognition of power over the self and others in relation to the product choices participants make. The study confirms and extends the literature on the significance of group belongingness or affiliation with reference groups in relation to product choice (e.g., Berger & Heath, 2007, 2008; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Hogg & Michell, 1996; White & Dahl, 2006, 2007). Further, it extends extant research by demonstrating that self-related characteristics and the importance of maintaining, gaining or losing personal and social power are key determinants of the product choices young adult consumers make. The study suggests analyses of the power dynamic at intra-personal, inter-personal and intergroup levels to enrich understanding of consumer behaviour in relation to product choice.

CHAPTER 7. Study Two-Stage One: Descriptions of Sender Characteristics

7.1. Introduction

Chapters 7 and 8 report the findings from Study Two. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the data collected for Study Two, and to identify the self-related characteristics respondents attribute to four selected profiles from Study One when presented with a collage of photographs belonging to each participant, and when asked to describe the person owning the products in the photographs. As discussed in Chapter 4 (Section 4.3.3), respondents (henceforth referred to as receivers) were asked to complete an online questionnaire (See Appendix 12) which comprised of three parts. Part One asked receivers questions relating to gender, ethnicity, and length of stay in Auckland. Part Two asked receivers to write a paragraph describing a person from the photographs of the products belonging to the person. The task was to be repeated four times for four selected profiles, two females (Kate and Abby) and two males (John and Peter) - henceforth referred to as senders. Once Part Two was completed, receivers proceeded with Part Three in which they were asked to select from a master list, the characteristics that best described the owner of the products they saw in the photographs. Chapter 8 reports on the analyses of data from Part Three. The current chapter provides an overview of data collected for Parts One and Two of the questionnaire before content analysing respondents' descriptions of senders' from Study One.

Section 7.2 explains the process of the generation of the master list of self-articulated characteristics. Section 7.3 describes the sample for Study Two. Section 7.4 reports on descriptions of sender characteristics. Section 7.5 describes the process of content analysis of receiver descriptions. Section 7.6 compares characteristics attributed to senders by receivers with senders' self-attributed characteristics. Sections 7.7 and 7.8 finally discuss and conclude the chapter.

7.2. Generation of the master list of characteristics

As discussed in Chapter 4, each interview from Study One was content analysed for the purposes of generating a list of characteristics that said something about the participant or who they were. These characteristics, as noted earlier, were defined as *expressed aspects of the self associated with photographed products* and excluded explanations of how and why the photographed products expressed particular aspects of the self. As noted in Chapter 4, the study aimed to select four profiles from a total list of 28 participants. To do so, twelve profiles comprising of both female and male participants were shortlisted from a total set of 28 participants (Appendix 9). Profiles with fewer photographs and relatively short lists of self-characteristics were excluded from the short list to allow for a range of photographs and self-characteristics that could be presented to audiences. However, it became difficult to choose four profiles based solely on the basis of gender and range of photographs and descriptors. At this stage, another criterion was developed. This criterion involved examining each of the transcripts for the short listed profiles to identify and sift participants in terms of levels of proficiency in communicating self-related characteristics. This meant gauging the ability of participants to speak of their self-related characteristics in relation to selected products in sufficient depth. All shortlisted participants were moderately or highly successful at doing so. Four profiles - P1(F), P5(F), P18(M), and P28(M) - who were moderately successful, and who met the criteria of gender, and range of characteristics, were finally selected. It was assumed that if this set of participants could communicate self-related characteristics in relation to selected products, and was successful in doing so, so would be the others.

The characteristics listed by all four profiles - P1(F), P5(F), P18(M), and P28(M) (Appendix 9) henceforth referred to as Kate, John, Abby, and Peter were compiled to construct an initial list of characteristics as in Table 7-1.

Table 7-1: Initial List of Characteristics

1. Aims High	19. Hard working	39. Maori
2. Different from others	20. Has a sense of humour	40. Politically aware and believes in democratic socialism
3. Busy	21. Has had a good upbringing	41. Posh
4. Cares about their family	22. Health conscious	42. Raised around music
5. Cares about personal grooming	23. High achiever	43. Relaxed
6. Catholic	24. Intelligent and clever	44. Religious
7. Confident	25. Interested in the Arts	45. Represents a well known school for Rugby
8. Cool	26. Pacific Islander	46. Respects culture and people
9. Courageous	27. Likes music	47. Sociable
10. Easy going	28. Likes the best	48. Soft and cuddly
11. Enjoys drinking	29. Enjoys the outdoors	49. Strong personality
12. Exuberant	30. Likes to express themselves	50. Talented
13. Fashion conscious	31. Likes to fit in	51. Techno savvy
14. Fit and active (physically)	32. Likes to have fun	52. Tough
15. Free spirited	33. Likes to stand out from the crowd	53. Trend setter
16. Friendly	34. Loves Rugby	54. Trendy
17. From New Zealand	35. Loves what they are studying	55. University student
18. Happy	36. Needs to be original	56. Upstyle
	37. Organised	57. Well off financially
	38. Outgoing	

Most words on the initial list of self-descriptors were the same or very close to those used by participants. However, there were some instances in which participants used similar words, phrases or statements, communicating the same meaning to express a particular characteristic, in which case a common umbrella term was used. For example, *cares about personal grooming* was also an umbrella terms for *cares about how he looks* (Profile 4). Similarly, *health conscious* was an umbrella term for *cares about fitness and health* (Profile 3). Other umbrella terms were *sociable* and *enjoys the outdoors*. Had these umbrella terms not been used, the initial master list would have become not only very lengthy, but could have also ended up including a number of similar phrases, expressions, or terms communicating the same characteristic.

Once the initial list of characteristics was tabulated, an informal test was conducted with groups of volunteers aged 18 to 21 to check for comprehension of words and meanings, and whether original meanings were retained in the case of umbrella terms. The results showed that for most volunteers, most terms on the master list of descriptors retained or were very close to the original meaning. For example: The term *busy* was described in phrases such as *has a lot of things going on his life, very active with work, full, almost full on schedule, no time, always on the go, 100% occupied, has many things to do, and not a lot of free spare*

time. Similarly, *cares about family* was described as *loves their family and cares how they feel; close to family; always thinks about family; family is first; does everything family related; family values important; and brought up close to family*.

Oral feedback received indicated that there was some duplication of meaning, that some words or phrases could go together, and that the items on the initial master list could be reduced. In the light of these comments, and to reduce duplication, some further words and phrases were combined. These included the following combinations:

1 and 23 (*Aims high* and *High achiever*); replaced by *Aims High*;

2, 30, 33 and 36 (*Different from others*, *Likes to express themselves*, *Likes to stand out from the crowd*, and *Needs to be original*); replaced by *Different from others*;

3 and 19 (*Busy*, and *Hard working*); replaced by *Busy*;

10 and 43 (*Easy going*, and *Relaxed*); replaced by *Relaxed and easy going*;

12 and 38 (*Exuberant*, and *Outgoing*); replaced by *Lively and outgoing*;

13, 54 and 56 (*Fashion conscious*, *Trendy*, and *Upstyle*); replaced by *Trendy and fashion conscious*;

14 and 22 (*Fit and active*, and *health conscious*); replaced by *Healthy, fit and active*;

27 and 42 (*Likes music*, and *Raised around music*); replaced by *Likes music*;

28 and 41 (*Likes the best*, and *Posh*); replaced by *Likes the best and posh*;

32 and 47 (*Likes to have fun*, and *Sociable*); replaced by *Sociable and likes to have fun*;

6 and 44 (*Catholic*, and *Religious*); replaced by *Catholic*;

34 and 45 (*Loves Rugby*, and *Represents a well known school for Rugby*); replaced by *Loves Rugby*;

9, 49, and 52 (*Courageous*, *Strong personality*, and *tough*); replaced by *Dominant and determined personality*.

Even though the merging together of words and expressions in the above list may not be perfect from a purely linguistic perspective, yet, the merging is justified on the grounds that the meanings of combined words or phrases are exactly the same or very close to the original word or phrase and context. The feedback received from the pilot study also indicated that

two words - *exuberant* and *upstyle* were difficult for participants to understand. While *exuberant* was replaced with *lively*; *upstyle* was subsumed under *trendy and fashion conscious*. A suggestion to replace *techno-savvy* with *techno-smart* was also followed.

As a next step, the initial list of characteristics was now refined (see Table 7-2).

Table 7-2: Refined List of Characteristics

1. Aims high	18. Healthy, fit and active (physically)	35. Talented
2. Busy	19. Intelligent and clever	36. Techno smart
3. Cares about their family	20. Interested in the Arts	37. Trendy and fashion conscious
4. Cares about personal grooming	21. Likes music	38. Trend setter
5. Catholic	22. Likes the best and posh	39. University student
6. Confident	23. Likes to fit in	40. Well-off financially
7. Cool	24. Lively and outgoing	
8. Different from others	25. Loves Rugby	
9. Dominant and determined personality	26. Loves what they are studying	
10. Enjoys the outdoors	27. Maori	
11. Enjoys drinking	28. Organized	
12. Free spirited	29. Pacific Islander	
13. Friendly	30. Politically aware and believes in democratic socialism	
14. From New Zealand	31. Relaxed and easy going	
15. Happy	32. Respects culture and people	
16. Has a sense of humour	33. Sociable and likes to have fun	
17. Has had a good upbringing	34. Soft and cuddly	

At this stage, ten new items that did not feature on any of the previous lists were included in the master list. The rationale for inclusion of these items was to make the checklist task of Study Two respondents more challenging (i.e., to select from a list of 50 which included ten items that described none of the four profiles), and thus enhance the robustness of the statistical tests.

The ten items were:

1. Does not like to waste money
2. Humble
3. Is rebellious
4. Likes to spend time on their own
5. Lacks self-confidence

6. Physically big
7. Likes to cooperate with others
8. Sincere and caring of others
9. Undisciplined and self indulgent
10. Unsympathetic and unfeeling

The final master list of characteristics for the rating task of respondents was thus produced (See Table 7-3 below).

Table 7-3: Final List of 50 Characteristics

1. Aims High	18. Has a sense of humour	35. Pacific Islander
2. Busy	19. Has had a good upbringing	36. Physically big
3. Cares about their family	20. Humble	37. Politically aware and believes in democratic socialism
4. Cares about personal grooming	21. Intelligent and clever	38. Relaxed and Easy going
5. Catholic	22. Interested in the Arts	39. Respects culture and people
6. Confident	23. Is rebellious	40. Sincere and caring of others
7. Cool	24. Lacks self-confidence	41. Sociable and likes to have fun
8. Different from others	25. Likes music	42. Soft and cuddly
9. Does not like to waste money	26. Likes the best and posh	43. Talented
10. Dominant and determined personality	27. Likes to cooperate with others	44. Techno-smart
11. Enjoys drinking	28. Likes to fit in	45. Trendy and fashion conscious
12. Enjoys the outdoors	29. Likes to spend time on their own	46. Trend setter
13. Healthy, Fit and active (physically)	30. Lively and outgoing	47. Undisciplined and self-indulgent
14. Free spirited	31. Loves Rugby	48. University student
15. Friendly	32. Loves what they are studying	49. Unsympathetic and unfeeling
16. From New Zealand	33. Maori	50. Well-off financially
17. Happy	34. Organized	

The final lists of self-articulated characteristics for each of the four selected profiles - Kate, John, Abby, and Peter - is tabulated in Tables 7-6, 7-8, 7-10, and 7-12 respectively.

An online survey was posted on November 2009 and remained open for a period of six months, to May 2010.

7.3. Sample Description

This section describes the sample for Study Two. All receivers were residents of Auckland and between 18 to 21 years of age. A total of 230 receivers completed the survey. Out of a total of 230 receivers, 224 specified their gender (See Table 7-4). A total of 149 (64.8%)

females responded as compared to 75 (32.6%) males. Four key ethnic groups were identified (see Table 7-4). Out of a total set of 230 receivers, 95 were identified as European (41.3%), 77 as Chinese and Asian including those of Korean, Vietnamese, Filipino, Malaysian and Thai ethnicity (33.5%), 33 of Maori and Pacific Islander ethnicity (14.3%), and 25 of Indian and South Asian ethnicity (10.9%).

Table 7-4: Profile of Respondents

	Female		Male		Gender not declared	Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	N	%
European	64	43.0%	29	38.7%	2	95	41.3%
Chinese and Asian	47	31.5%	28	37.3%	2	77	33.5%
Indian and South Asian	19	12.8%	5	6.7%	1	25	10.9%
Maori and Pacific Islander	19	12.8%	13	17.3%	1	33	14.3%
	149	100%	75	100%	6	230	100.0%

185, 206, 213, and 211 receivers respectively provided descriptions of the four senders - Kate, John, Abby, and Peter respectively. The difference in the numbers of receiver descriptions for each sender is because not all receivers completed Part Two of the questionnaire.

7.4. Descriptions of sender characteristics

An overview of the data shows that respondents describe sender characteristics from the product portfolios they view, in two key ways - in a holistic story-like manner, or by relating characteristics attributed to senders based on specific products.

Holistic story-like descriptions do not necessarily refer to specific products; however tend to provide a snapshot of the sender. That is, the focus tends to be on the conglomerate of products in each sender's portfolio rather than on any single product or brand. This is evident in representative quotes below (See Exhibit 7-1):

Exhibit 7-1: Representative Quotes - Story-like Descriptions of Senders

Mid 20s female, living in Auckland. Working in a good job, well off, probably from a wealthy family. Confident, very social, a lot of entertaining, eats healthy and most likely goes to the gym/works out. (Quote 1 - Description of Kate)

I believe the person who owns all these items is a female in her mid 20's. A beach babe that enjoys the sun and is a social and friendly person. She has beach blonde hair or brunette, worries about her image a lot and likes to maintain a healthy diet BUT has a junk food gene in her. She isn't the tallest but looks good and is definitely idolised as a true kiwi girl. She has blue/hazel eyes olive skin with hair that is long. She is definitely fashion conscious and am unsure whether she brought these items herself or her mother and father paid for them. Generally I think this girl is very fun. (Quote 2 - Description of Kate)

A man who is very active and spends a lot of their time and money on these activities. Someone who values their health. Not into fashion, rather a man who wears surf and skate branded items, with a heavy kiwi culture influence (Quote 3 - Description of John)

Skinny girly girl who likes her antioxidants and the colour pink, oversized sunglasses and parties. She likes to dress best, keep fit and socialize. Eats healthy. (Quote 4 - Description of Abby)

Very social, bubbly female, in her early 20s. Very social, likes to go out clubbing and drinking with friends. Girly and takes pride in appearance. Works out and tries to take care of her health/fitness. Organised and technology savvy. (Quote 5 - Description of Abby)

Brought up in Onehunga this young male has had an average upbringing. He is loyal to his family and background. He is possibly Maori or Pacific Islander. His interests are Rugby, working out, reggae music and cars. (Quote 6 - Description of Peter)

These images symbolise a typical bloke who enjoys the gym, playing rugby, occasional alcohol, good music and driving a good car. (Quote 7 - Description of Peter)

In each of the above quotes, receivers draw inferences about a sender's age, income, career or role, appearance, family, state of health, activities or interests, and specific characteristics such as sociability, or being organised. A striking feature is that even though receivers do not have any information on what the sender might look like, they tend to refer to physical characteristics and features from the products they see. For example, the detailed physical appearance description in Quote 2 - "*beach blonde hair or brunette...isn't the tallest...idolised as a true Kiwi girl...blue hazel eyes olive skin with hair that is long*", or the reference to "*Skinny girly girl*"(Quote 4). Along similar lines are references to physical location or residence. For example, quote 1 - "*mid 20s female, living in Auckland*", or a guess at where the sender might have been brought up as in quote 6 - "*Brought up in Onehunga*". Similarly, other sender descriptions are derived from characteristics attributed to the product conglomerate. For example, a "*typical bloke*" (Quote 7) is one who enjoys the gym, plays rugby, drinks alcohol, listens to good music and also drives a good car.

On the other hand, when receivers relate specific products to senders, they tend to refer to specific self-related characteristics the products symbolise. See, for example, the following quotes (Exhibit 7-2):

Exhibit 7-2: Representative Quotes - Linkages of Specific Self-Related Characteristics with Products

This person is male, very fit and very adventurous by scuba diving equipment, fishing gear... likes to have a good time socialising by the alcohol and look good and be clean while out referencing shampoo and deodorant... (Quote 8 - Description of John)

The choice of shoes being a very 'in' design suggests to me she's quite up to date in her fashion. The fruit tells me that she's quite healthy and likes to look after her body which can be supported by the size of clothing displayed. The barbeque table could mean she's social and likes to entertain people. Or it could be linked to her amount of disposable income which to afford a luxury item like that at that age would mean she's well paid. (Quote 9 - Description of Kate)

This person looks that they it's obviously a Woman who would be in the 18- 25 age range, this suggests that it is a woman because of the colour of the products such as Perfume Yves Saint Laurent (YSL) Baby Doll Pink and the Laptop (Sony Vaio) is pink...The Flyers such as Get Shaky dance party suggest she is young and is a party goer just loves partying and is suggested by the alcohol. (Quote 10 - Description of Abby)

He's quite fit I would assume looking at the photographs of the gym and the rugby player shirt and he plays for his school team so is committed and sociable in order to be part of a team...Likes to drink 42 below and nothing else which is obviously something else he splurges on as that is quite an expensive brand. He might be quite the drinker as well seeing as there's two bottles there and its very strong stuff. (Quote 11 - Description of Peter)

In quote 8, for instance, the *scuba diving equipment* and *fishing gear* communicate that the owner is someone who is male, very fit and adventurous. The *alcohol* suggests that John likes to have a good time socialising. The design of the *shoes* in quote 9 communicates that Kate is fashion-conscious; the *fruit* clearly suggests health-consciousness, and this in turn is linked to her body figure. The *barbeque table* communicates that she is sociable, and possibly has a good amount of disposable income. The colour pink and products such as the *Yves Saint Laurent (YSL) Baby Doll perfume* and the *Sony Vaio* in quote 9 are associated with someone who is 18-25. The *Get Shaky Flyer* and *alcohol* (quote 9) communicate that the person is social and loves partying. In quote 11, the specific brand and the number of bottles suggest that the person is a strong drinker. The *gym* and the *rugby player T-Shirt* (see quote 11) suggest someone who is fit and sociable.

In both cases, in story-like descriptions and in the linkage of sender characteristics with specific products, the notion that products symbolise certain characteristics and these in turn are transferred to the sender is accepted by the receivers.

7.5. Process of content analysis of receiver descriptions

Next, as per the research design in Chapter 4 (Section 4.3.4), a content analysis of the entire set of receiver descriptions of the four profiles was undertaken. Thought units (words or expressions) that communicated who or what the sender was like, or what the word or phrase said about the sender were extracted from receiver quotes. As Sillars (1986) notes, a thought unit is a remark expressing an idea that is not dependent on contiguous segments for meaning. For example, in the sentence *I would describe her as an active teenager*, the two words *active* and *teenager* were counted as separate units. *A sporty, young male* included three thought units - *sporty*, *young*, and *male*. Phrases or words that expressed a single idea were counted as single thought units. For example, *feminine and girlie* was counted as a single thought unit that expressed the idea of a *gender related stereotype*; similarly *easy going nature and goes with the flow* was counted as a single thought unit that expressed the idea of *easy going nature*; likewise, *love of partying and socialising* expressed the *sociable* aspect of the self.

The researcher conducted an initial content analysis of five sample paragraph descriptions for each sender, and checked on the same with her supervisor. Once the process was approved, she proceeded with the remaining data set of descriptions for each sender.

Next, extracted words and phrases were studied to identify cluster themes. That is, those words or phrases that expressed a similar focus in thought or meaning were grouped together. Section 7.6 describes groupings of similar words or phrases expressing similar meaning for each sender in more detail.

A respondent master list of characteristics attributed to each sender (see Table 7-13) was thus generated for all four senders.

7.6. Characteristics attributed to senders by receivers

This section reports on the results of the content analysis. It discusses and compares first, the characteristics attributed to each sender by receivers, with those attributed to the sender by his or her own self. The characteristics attributed to each sender are discussed as follows.

Kate's portfolio of photographs included the following 10 items:

Table 7-5: Portfolio of Photographs for Kate

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Barbeque table• Bag (Louis Vuitton)• Handbag• Fruit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Jeans (Ksubi)• Sunglasses (Gucci)• Perfumes (Lancome and Christian Dior)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shoes• Shorts (Ksubi)• Car (VW Golf)
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A total number of 185 receivers described Kate.

93 receivers specifically identify Kate in terms of **gender** - as a *female, girl* or *woman*.

82 receivers comment on the **age and life stage** of Kate. A majority of the receivers comment on the sender as *young*, with age estimates ranging from late teens, through the twenties.

A total of 145 comments relate to **income, class, status and spending**. With the exception of three comments that characterise Kate as *middle class* or *middle income person*, and only one receiver who said *are not necessarily wealthy*, the vast majority of receivers describe Kate as a person who is *upper middle class, relatively affluent, wealthy, has high income, high disposable income, or substantial income, of mid to high socio economic status*, and someone who *can afford to host parties, can afford things this expensive, doesn't mind spending lots of money on accessories* and *has earned a reasonable income in order to purchase some of the items*.

There is however, mixed and scarce opinion on **ethnicity**. Out of a total of 9 comments on ethnicity, three identify Kate as *Asian*, one as *someone from the Chinese/East Asian origin*, one as *European*, another as *Western in culture*, while still another said *should/would be a White person*. Two comments are open in terms of *any ethnicity* and *any New Zealand home owner*.

91 receivers describe Kate in terms of ***fashion-related*** expressions, that is, as someone who is fashionable, fashion conscious, or stylish. These expressions include comments such as *in tune with fashion; fashion oriented; fashion conscious; all her clothes and accessories are up to date; very into fashion; fashionable taste; and stylish*.

Several comments describe Kate as a person who is ***health conscious*** (49), is someone who ***eats healthy*** (31), and also ***pursues sport and exercise*** (10). With the exception of one person who says *but has a junk food gene in her*, all comments were positive in description. The range of comments include *healthy; healthy habits; healthy lifestyle; health conscious; most likely goes to the gym/works out; eats healthily; and quite petite who likes multi grain bread and enjoys tea rather than coffee*. 41 comments refer to ***cares about appearance***, these included - *very self conscious about both their looks and their weight, and awareness of staying slim to be able to look good in labelled clothing*.

31 expressions are ***role and profession related***. No clear consensus emerges in this category. Comments ranged from *a housewife without kids; professional; to trophy wife, or working* with only 2 identifying P1 as a *student*.

57 expressions specifically refer to being ***brand or label conscious***. These are articulated in terms of *cares way too much about branding; she likes her label brands; believes brands is important in life, and enjoys top of the range stuff*.

Some clusters of items are closely connected. These are ***loves the summer and the beach*** (6), ***outdoors lifestyle*** (11), ***enjoys outdoor meals*** (8), ***enjoys the outdoors*** (16), ***outgoing*** (12) and ***sociable*** (50). For example, expressions such as *enjoys time with friends in the sun and at the beach* although classified under *loves the summer and beach*, do not negate the sociable aspect. Other terms that reflect these clusters include - *outgoing and enjoys entertaining friends, very sociable, likes to socialise with her friends and have a good time, and likes to entertain*.

Two other clusters are - ***image conscious*** (23 terms) and ***materialistic*** (8). Phrases or expressions included under these clusters are *cares a lot about their image in the society; image is of high importance to her; trying to display a certain image about themselves; materialistic; material girl who likes nice things; and material type of person*.

Participants also attribute a range of **miscellaneous** characteristics (75 terms) to Kate. These include a mix of descriptions such as - *most likely a politically positioned citizen; loves cleanliness and tidiness; very cute and cool; modern; confident; independent and has a sense of personal style, refinement, and beauty*. Included within this category are also a few negative connotations. These are *superficial person; probably mean; maybe a little arrogant; may not be too bright either; rather pretentious, and a bit of a snob*.

Eleven expressions relate to **residence or location** such as *seems to live in a well furnished house indicating an upper or middle class area; lives in a nice suburban area; and most likely still lives at home with her parents in Remuera*.

Table 7-6: Kate - Self-Articulated Characteristics (15 Items)

1. Aims High	6. Enjoys the outdoors	11. Likes the best and posh
2. Cares about personal grooming	7. Healthy, fit and active	12. Sociable and likes to have fun
3. Confident	8. Free spirited	13. Trendy and fashion conscious
4. Different from others	9. Happy	14. Trend setter
5. Dominant and determined personality	10. Has had a good upbringing	15. University student

A comparison of Kate's self-articulated characteristics with those articulated by receivers' shows that there is a match on the following characteristics (highlighted in bold in Table 7-6). **Enjoys the outdoors** with *loves the summer and the beach; enjoys outdoor meals; enjoys the outdoors and outdoors lifestyle (a total count of 41 words or expressions)*; **healthy, fit and active** with *health conscious; eating healthy; sports and exercise related (a total count of 90 words or expressions)*; **likes the best and posh** with *brand or label conscious; income, class, status and spending related (a total count of 202 words or expressions)*; **sociable and likes to have fun** with *sociable; outgoing (a total count of 62 words or expressions)*; and last, **trendy and fashion conscious** and **trend setter** with *fashion related; cares about appearance and image conscious (a count of 155 words or expressions)*. Such observation suggests a possible match on six characteristics out of a total of 15.

The possible match also indicates that the most strongly perceived self-related characteristics for Kate relate to **likes the best and posh; trendy and fashion conscious; trend setter and healthy, fit and active**.

However, two categorizations that do not demonstrate sufficient shared meaning amongst receivers are - ***role and profession***, and ***ethnicity***.

John's portfolio of photographs included the following 22 items:

Table 7-7: Portfolio of Photographs for John

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dance sport gear (dress) • Dance sport gear (dress) • Dance sport gear (Latin Shirt) • Dance sport gear (Trombone) • Dance sport gear (dance shoes) • Dance sport gear (Dress jacket) • Necklaces (with Maori symbols) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • T-Shirt (with Maori symbol) • Jandals (Maori pattern) • Bag (Billabong) • Belt (Quicksilver) • Shorts (Mossimo) • Shampoo • Deodorant • Asthma and hay fever pills • Scuba tank for diving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diving watch • Fishing rod and map of huts in Fiordland • Vodka (Smirnoff) and Beer (Tui) • iPod, computer and mobile phone • T-Shirt (Coma) • Soccer T-Shirt
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A total number of 206 receivers described John from the photographs they saw. 114 respondents refer to John in terms of ***gender*** - as a *male*, *guy* or a *boy*. Only one person referred to John in terms of *she*. A total number of 139 words or phrases refer to John in terms of ***age or life stage***, as *young*, with one person referring to John's *intentions of not having a family in the near future*. Most responses tend to agree with *late teens or early 20s*, *in their early 20s*, and *early 20s to early 30s*. Only two say John is someone *middle aged*.

21 comments are ***income, class, status and spending related***. There is no clear consensus in this area with descriptions such as *financially comfortable*; *relatively well off financially*; *has a decent amount of money*; *would not be described as rich and sassy*; *would be middle class*; *has an average income*; *does not have enough money*; *with no personal income, seems he's poor*; *lower income*; and *buys rip off clothing, not enough money to buy branded clothing*.

68 words/phrases refer to ***ethnicity and culture*** in terms of being someone of *Maori or Pacific Island heritage* (30), as *simply Kiwi or New Zealand guy* (16), or in terms of *cultural affiliations* (22). Examples include *Maori ethnicity*; *possibly Maori*; *Maori heritage*; *Maori/Kiwi*; *New Zealander*; *most likely to be a Kiwi*; *takes pride in their culture and country of origin*; *likes cultural symbols*; *love for New Zealand culture and identifies with his culture well*.

38 items within three closely connected clusters are ***fashion related*** - *sense of fashion* (7), *casual dressing* (18), and *specific clothing choices* (13). These aspects are expressed in terms of *fashionable*; *very into fashion*; *a casual dresser*; *values comfort over high fashion*; *doesn't follow fashion trends*; *has a sense of style*; *likes sporty clothes*; *likes surfer type brands*; and *likes to accessorize*.

A number of closely related clusters are ***values sports and fitness*** (82), is ***active*** (41), ***loves the outdoors*** (19), has ***health related problems and allergies*** (28), is ***hygienic*** (18) and enjoys ***certain sports*** (147). Expressions under the *values sports and fitness* category include *values their health*; *typical sporty*; *very sporty person*; *into sports* and *quite fit*. Active is expressed as *likes to keep active*; *has an active lifestyle*; and *very active*. Examples of *health related problems and allergies* are *has some allergy and health problems but doesn't let that hold them back in life*; *has limitations with asthma and hayfever*; and *understands his body and its limits*. Phrases referring to *loves the outdoors* include *quite an outdoor person*; *very physical and loves the outdoors*; *enjoys being in the outdoors, at the beach, having a BBQ; and a beer, outdoorsy man*. Examples of *hygienic* are *rather hygienic*; *good personal hygiene*; and *likes to keep clean*. Examples of *enjoys certain sports* are *into sports and recreational activities*; *likes dancing, fishing, diving, enjoys scuba diving*; *a dancer and a soccer player*; *seems like a surfy person*; and *likes dancing as a sport*.

32 receivers refer to ***cares about appearance*** in phrases such as *well presented in his appearance*; *takes good care of his appearance* and *well maintained on the outside*.

A total number of 56 receivers refer to John in terms of ***technology related*** expressions; as someone who is *into technology* (12), *someone up to date with technology* (16), *someone who is techno savvy* (3), and *someone who enjoys technology* (25). Examples include *very much into technology*; *technology is what he lives on*; *up to date with the technology*; *keeps up with technology*; *catches up with technology*; *loves to surf the internet, texting*; *kind of tech savvy with the electronics*, and *enjoys accessing the internet*.

58 expressions are ***role and profession related***. Receivers refer to John as *student* (19), *dancer* (27), or in terms of *other careers* (12). For example, *university student*; *likely to be a student*; *professional dancer*; *teaches dance in his spare time*; *has a job as a dancer*; and *dancing as a career*. Some others refer to *may be a scuba instructor*; *not working*; *tourist* and *probably a successful musician because of the instrument and the suits*.

14 phrases such as *enjoys music and dancing* and *involved in music and jazz* refer to P2's interests in ***music and dance as recreation*** rather than as sport.

46 receivers refer to John as someone who enjoys alcohol in the ***alcohol related*** categorization. Examples include *likes to drink alcohol; loves drinking especially spirit and beer; enjoys drinking* and *drinks lover*. 19 comments relate to ***brand or label conscious***. However, there is no clear consensus in this area with comments such as *likes NZ products/sport products; brand conscious; they don't really care about brands; would not be that into labels; likes to use good products; not that into brands* and *doesn't mind buying imitation clothing*.

43 expressions refer to activities spoken of in terms of ***hobbies and personal interests***. These include phrases such as *likes to travel; might like lifestyle living; has many different hobbies and interests; all rounder; and has many sides to him*. 13 receivers suggest that John has a sense of ***humour and fun***, for example, *has a sense of humour* and *sarcastic personality*. 65 refer to ***miscellaneous*** characteristics such as *very competitive; full of life; down to earth; cultured; eloquent* and *confident*.

83 suggest the ***sociable*** nature of John. Terms include *enjoys socialising; enjoys going out and partying; social* and *enjoys hanging out with mates*. 20 refer to John as ***outgoing***, for example, *very outgoing* and *outgoing person*. 20 responses suggest the ***easy going and laid back*** nature of John. Such phrases include *laid back personality*, and *quite a relaxed person*.

14 phrases refer to ***gender or ethnicity related stereotypes*** such as a *normal Kiwi "bloke"*, *typical New Zealand bloke, trying to fit a stereotype guy*, and a *guys guy*.

Table 7-8: John - Self-Articulated Characteristics (16 Items)

1. Cares about their family	6. Enjoys drinking	11. Likes the best and posh
2. Cares about personal grooming	7. Enjoys the outdoors	12. Likes to fit in
3. Cool	8. Healthy, fit and active (physically)	13. Lively and outgoing
4. Different from others	9. Has a sense of humour	14. Maori
5. Dominant and determined personality	10. Interested in the Arts	15. Respects culture and people
		16. Techno-smart

A comparison of John's self-articulated characteristics with those articulated by receivers shows that there is a match on the following characteristics (as highlighted in bold in Table 7-8) - ***cares about personal grooming*** with *cares about appearance* (a total count of 32 words or expressions); ***enjoys drinking*** with *alcohol related* (a count of 46 words or expressions); ***enjoys the outdoors*** with *loves the outdoors; enjoys certain sports; hobbies and personal interests* (a total count of 209 words or expressions); ***healthy, fit and active (physically)*** with *values sports and fitness; active; health related problems and allergies; hygienic* (a total count of 169 words or expressions); ***has a sense of humour*** with *humour and fun* (a count of 13 words or expressions); ***interested in the arts*** with *hobbies and personal interests; music and dancing as recreation and ethnicity and culture* (a total count of 125 words or expressions); ***lively and outgoing*** with *outgoing and sociable* (a total count of 103 words or expressions); ***Maori*** with *ethnicity and culture* (a total count of 68 words or expressions); and ***techno-smart*** with *technology related* (a total count of 56 words or expressions). This observation suggests a possible match on nine characteristics out of a total of 16.

The possible match also indicates that the most strongly perceived self-related characteristics for John relate to ***enjoys the outdoors*** and ***healthy, fit and active (physically)***. *Ethnicity and culture* relates with two self articulated characteristics - ***interested in the Arts*** and ***Maori*** suggesting that both these characteristics have overlaps.

However, with the exception of two categorizations - *income, class, status and spending related*, and *brand or label conscious* - that do not demonstrate sufficient shared meaning, words and expressions in all other categorizations demonstrate a high degree of shared meaning amongst receivers.

Abby's portfolio of photographs included the following 18 items:

Table 7-9: Portfolio of Photographs for Abby

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health care book • Running shoes (Nike) • Alcohol (Lindauer) • Alcohol (Malibu) • Cellphones • Dress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High waisted skirt • Wall planner • Sunglasses • Shoes • iPod • Laptop (Sony Vaio) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flyer (Get Shaky dance party) • Flyer (Rhythm and Blues) • Flyer (Young Labour Party) • Earrings • Strawberries • Perfume (Yves Saint Laurent (YSL) Baby Doll)
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A total number of 213 receivers described Abby.

133 receivers refer to Abby in terms of **gender** - as a *female, woman, lady* or *girl*. 126 describe Abby in terms of **age or life stage** - for example, being *young; quite young* and *someone in her teenage years or early twenties*. Only a small number of receivers (19) refer to **income, class, status and spending related** characteristics. With the exception of three descriptors - *slightly upper class, from a wealthy background, and seems well off*, others describe Abby as someone who has *an average income; is a middle income person; not very rich; aren't very wealthy* and *not really affluent*.

81 receivers describe Abby in terms of **fashion related** characteristics; these characteristics are spoken of in terms of fashion, dress and style. Only one person says *not much a fashion kind of person*, while another says *not style conscious*. However, all other descriptors refer to Abby in positive terms - as someone who is *fashionable; dress(es) up in style; dresses well; up to date with the fashion; very fashion orientated* and *likes dressing pretty*. Several pick on details such as *enjoys black shoes to suite any outfit, and wearing dresses and skirts and not pants*.

A total number of 140 descriptors figure on four closely connected clusters. These are **health conscious** (75), **eating healthy** (16), **sports and exercise related** (38), and **image conscious** (11). Typical examples include *health conscious; enjoys keeping fit; likes to keep fit and looking after her body; healthy lifestyle; eats healthy; likes her antioxidants; sometimes go for a run or do some exercise; likes to keep fit by doing exercise* and *active sports person*. One expression *pretending to be sporty* is negative in tone.

27 receivers express **cares about appearance**. Examples include *keeps slim and trim; cares about her physical appearance* and *conscious of their physical appearance*. A connected cluster is that of **takes care of herself** (7).

A smaller number of comments (22) such as *up to date on the latest electronics; likely to text frequently* and *likes technology* describe Abby as someone who is **technology friendly**. 70 comments are **role and profession related**; they refer to the student status of Abby - *probably a university student; studies health care* and *studying and following politics*. Only two receivers describe Abby as a *typical Auckland socialite* or a *typical socialite*.

Some other clusters are - *music and dance as recreation* (26), *alcohol related* (24), and *politically conscious* (10). A few (9) refer to *brand or label conscious* in terms of the lack of brand consciousness, for example, *brands are not so important to her; not overly brand conscious and does not seem to buy brand clothing and accessories but does make an exception with the perfume*.

A large number of receivers (160) refer to Abby as someone who is *sociable*. For example, *very sociable person; party girl; likes going out with family/friends; party animal; loves parties and likes to socialise*. A closely linked cluster is that of *outgoing* (10).

66 descriptors refer to Abby as someone who is *busy and organised*. Examples include *schedules her time; is an organised person; busy and well organized lifestyle; very busy and likes to have their life in order*.

21 describe Abby in terms of *gender stereotypes* such as *an average teen party girl; very girly girl; stereotypical 'girly girl' image and like typical teenage females*.

A relatively large number of items (80) figure under *miscellaneous* characteristics. These include phrases or expressions such as someone who is *sophisticated; laid back; balances out her youth party life with responsible things such as health care book, running and Labour Party meetings; not a get out in the mud and gumboots girl and quite innocent*. Only one expression is negative in tone - *very promiscuous, also known in today's society as unoriginal skank*.

Table 7-10: Abby - Self-Articulated Characteristics (14 Items)

1. Busy	6. Healthy, fit and active (physically)	11. Politically aware and believes in democratic socialism
2. Cares about personal grooming	7. Intelligent and clever	12. Sociable and likes to have fun
3. Confident	8. Lively and outgoing	13. Trendy and fashion conscious
4. Different from others	9. Loves what they are studying	14. University student
5. Enjoys drinking	10. Organized	

A comparison of Abby's self-articulated characteristics with those articulated by receivers shows that there is a match on the following characteristics (as highlighted in bold in Table 7-

10). **Busy** and **organized** with *busy and organized* (a total count of 66 words or expressions); **enjoys drinking** with *alcohol related* (a count of 24 words or expressions); **lively and outgoing** with *outgoing* (a count of 10 words or expressions); **healthy, fit and active** with *health conscious; eating healthy; sports and exercise related* (a total count of 129 words or expressions); **politically aware and believes in democratic socialism** with *politically conscious* (a count of 10 words or expressions); **sociable and likes to have fun** with *sociable* (a count of 160 words or expressions); **trendy and fashion related** with *fashion related; cares about appearance; and image conscious* (a total count of 119 words or expressions); **university student** with *role and profession related* (a count of 70 words or expressions). Such observation suggests a possible match on nine characteristics out of a total of 14.

The possible match also indicates that the most strongly perceived self-related characteristics for Abby relate to **sociable and likes to have fun** and **healthy, fit and active**.

There is a high degree of shared meaning in relation to all the self-related categorisations amongst receivers.

Peter's portfolio of photographs included the following 13 items:

Table 7-11: Portfolio of Photographs for Peter

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soft toy (with motto "Born to Fly") • Painting • Perfume (Ralph Lauren) • T-Shirt (Ralph Lauren) • Belt (Bob Marley) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guitar • Car (Holden Commodore) • Car (Honda) • Gym 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rugby Jersey (De La Salle School) • De La Salle College • NZ Flag • Alcohol (42 Below)
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A total number of 211 receivers described Peter from the photographs of products they saw. 113 specifically describe Peter in terms of **gender** - as *male; guy* or *boy*.

89 expressions refer to Peter in terms of **age or life stage** - as someone who is *young*, or a *teenager*. Many refer to the age group of late teens to early or late twenties. Only three receivers suggested *in their 20s or early 30s; around the age 35 or more; and from 15-40*.

20 expressions are **income, class, status and spending related**. A general consensus on middle income or middle class emerges with descriptions ranging from *must be wealthy* to *aren't well to do; not too wealthy; belong to a middle to lower income family* and *mid-high income*.

A total of 95 items are **ethnicity and culture related**. These expressions refer to Peter as someone of New Zealand or Kiwi ethnicity (30), of Maori or Pacific Island ethnicity (29), or as someone who is proud of their country, culture and ethnicity (36). Phrases referring to these categories include *New Zealander; Kiwi; born and bred Kiwi; likely to be Maori/Islander; probably a Maori/Polynesian; proud of their ethnicity; proud to be New Zealander; proud of culture and heritage*.

A few phrases (13) are **fashion related** and refer to Peter's fashion sense. These include a range of descriptions such as *likes to dress up flash; has a semi good fashion sense; likes art designer clothes etc.; makes wrong fashion statements by having a Bob Marley belt; does not pay much attention to fashion; likes to dress casually; and doesn't follow fashion trends*. Consequently, there is no clear consensus on this self-related characteristic.

156 phrases refer to four related clusters. These are - **rugby player** (34), **likes sports, works out and goes to the gym** (88), **health conscious** (20) and **cares about appearance** (14). Phrases representative of these clusters include - *keeps fit to maintain his figure and to keep fit for rugby training; loves his rugby; probably very into rugby; goes to gym quite often; dedicated sports person; enjoys working out; cares about his health and body; takes care of his looks; health conscious person; tough and strong; fit and athletic and playing sports and the gym*.

A reasonable consensus (50 items) emerges on Peter's status as a student in the categorisation of **role and profession related**. Most describe Peter as a *secondary school student, college student, has just finished his college* or as *university student*.

Some clusters of items refer to Peter's interests in terms of the following categorizations - **car related interests** (34), **brand or label conscious** (27), and **guitar, music and art related interests** (103). For example, phrases referring to *car related interests* are *enjoys his toys; hobby for cars; enjoys working on cars; interested in cars*. For *brand or label conscious*, these are *likes to wear famous people he/she likes on his/her accessories; loves branded products; fan of Ralph Lauren; likes to wear brands; label shopper; cares about brands*. Examples for *guitar, music and art related interests* include *likes to jam reggae on his guitar; a Bob Marley fan; interested in music, the guitar, art; respects classic idols such as Bob Marley and likes to paint, listen to old school music as well as playing the guitar*.

A cluster of expressions (38) such as *enjoys to drink; probably likes to have a drink; he is a drinker but not an alcoholic; social drinker* and *enjoys a casual drink with the boys* are **alcohol related** and indicate that Peter enjoys drinking.

39 receivers refer to Peter as someone who is **tough yet soft**. Examples include *tough got a soft side to him and isn't afraid to show it; hard on the outside, while he is actually quite soft on the inside; and got a bit of child in them, still in touch with his inner child, very mature for his age but still a kid at heart*.

25 receivers speak of Peter as a person who is **sociable** in nature. These include phrases such as *social; party person* and *probably has lots of friends*. 7 phrases refer to Peter as **outgoing** while 8 refer to the **image conscious** characteristic of Peter.

A total number of 104 characteristics figure on the **miscellaneous** list. These include a range of aspects such as *may have a slightly nerdy side; creative; down to earth; likes to be part of a team; not materialistic; has no fears but big dream; just a kick back easy going guy; loyal to his family background; rasta man, and has experienced the tough times of life and has come through successfully*.

17 and 25 phrases suggest Peter is **proud of their school**, and **patriotic and proud of their country**. 25 phrases reflect **gender and cultural stereotypes** such as *fits the stereotype of a typical young NZ male judging from the rugby jersey (rugby is big in our NZ culture) and the alcohol; typical Kiwi bloke; looks like a man's man; likes to think of himself as a 'guys guy'; typical guy; enjoys typical guy things such as working out, rugby, cars and playing the guitar; typical teenage guy and, typical guy who likes his cars, his sport, and his alcohol*. 8 respondents are **residence or location related** such as *probably from the Shore; bought up in Onehunga, South Island young adult, and from South Auckland*.

Table 7-12: Peter - Self-Articulated Characteristics (16 Items)

1. Aims high	6. Healthy, fit and active (physically)	11. Pacific Islander
2. Cares about their family	7. Friendly	12. Relaxed and easy going
3. Cares about personal grooming	8. From New Zealand	13. Sociable and likes to have fun
4. Catholic	9. Likes music	14. Soft and cuddly
5. Dominant and determined personality	10. Loves Rugby	15. Talented
		16. Well-off financially

A comparison of Peter's self-articulated characteristics with those articulated by receivers shows that there is a match on the following characteristics (as highlighted in Table 7-12). **Healthy, fit and active** with *health conscious* and *likes sports, works out and goes to the gym* (a total count of 108 words or expressions); **from New Zealand** with *patriotic and proud of their country* (a count of 25 words or expressions); **likes music** with *guitar, music and art related interests* (a count of 103 words or expressions); **loves Rugby** with *Rugby player* (a count of 34 words or expressions); **Pacific Islander** with *ethnicity and culture related* (a count of 95 words or expressions); **sociable and likes to have fun** with *sociable and outgoing* (a count of 32 words or expressions); **soft and cuddly** with *tough yet soft* (a count of 39 words or expressions). This observation suggests a match on seven characteristics out of a total of 16.

The possible match also indicates that the most strongly perceived self-related characteristics for Peter relate to **healthy, fit and active** and **likes music**.

The two categorizations that do not demonstrate sufficient shared meaning amongst receivers are **income, class, status and spending related** and **fashion related**.

Table 7-13 presents the key characteristics attributed to each sender.

Table 7-13: Key Characteristics Attributed to Each Sender and the Number of Times Identified by Receivers

Kate		John		Abby		Peter	
Income, class, status and spending related	145	Enjoys certain sports	147	Sociable	160	Gender	113
Gender	93	Age or life stage	139	Gender	133	Miscellaneous	104
Fashion related	91	Gender	114	Age or life stage	126	Guitar, music and art related interests	103
Age or life stage	82	Sociable	83	Fashion related	81	Ethnicity and culture related	95
Miscellaneous	75	Values sports and fitness	82	Miscellaneous	80	Age or life stage	89
Brand or label conscious	57	Ethnicity and culture	68	Health conscious	75	Likes sports, works out and goes to the gym	88
Sociable	50	Miscellaneous	65	Role and profession related	70	Role and profession related	50
Health conscious	49	Role and profession related	58	Busy and organized	66	Tough yet soft	39
Cares about appearance	41	Technology related	56	Sports and exercise related	38	Alcohol related	38
Eats healthy	31	Alcohol related	46	Cares about appearance	27	Rugby player	34
Role and profession related	31	Hobbies and personal interests	43	Music and dance as recreation	26	Car related interests	34
Image conscious	23	Active	41	Alcohol related	24	Brand or label conscious	27
Enjoys the outdoors	16	Fashion related	38	Technology friendly	22	Sociable	25
Outgoing	12	Cares about Appearance	32	Gender stereotypes	21	Patriotic and proud of their country	25
Outdoors lifestyle	11	Health related problems and allergies	28	Income, class, status and spending related	19	Gender and cultural stereotypes	25
Residence or location	11	Income, class, status and spending related	21	Eating healthy	16	Income, class, status and spending related	20

Sports and exercise	10	Outgoing	20	Image conscious	11	Health conscious	20
Ethnicity and culture related	9	Easy going, and laid back	20	Politically conscious	10	Proud of their school	17
Enjoys outdoor meals	8	Brand or label conscious	19	Outgoing	10	Cares about Appearance	14
Materialistic	8	Loves the outdoors	19	Brand or label conscious	9	Fashion related	13
Loves the summer and the beach	6	Hygienic	18	Takes care of herself	7	Outgoing	7
Gender stereotypes	5	Gender or ethnicity related stereotypes	14			Image conscious	8
		Music and dancing as recreation	14			Residence or location related	8
		Humour and fun	13				

7.7. Discussion

The findings from this study suggest that receivers do indeed use products separately and also as part of a product conglomerate, to construct a holistic sense of senders' selves. While much of the literature focuses on symbolic meanings of researcher-driven product categories or brands in relation to specific aspects of the self, evidence (e.g., Belk, 1980) on the significance of conglomerates comprised of certain combinations of products to construct holistic story-like descriptions of consumer selves is scant. The findings from this study indicate that receivers infer and construct holistic snapshots of senders from the different configurations of products they see, and that such inferences and constructions can vary depending on product choices in each conglomerate. These conglomerates also provide support to the construct of product constellations referring to a cluster of complementary products, specific brands, and/or consumption activities organized in an associative network (Englis & Solomon, 1995; Englis & Solomon, 1996; Solomon & Assael, 1987; Solomon & Englis, 1994). In other words, consumers choose sets of associated products laden with symbolic meanings to communicate certain characteristics, and affiliation with certain values, reference groups, or social categorizations.

Yet, at the same time, as is evident in Section 7.4, receivers also use products separately to construct self-related aspects of senders. This means that receivers infer self-related characteristics from the products they see as separate units, and also as part of a conglomerate that represent an individual.

A comparison across identified characteristics for all four senders (see Table 7-13) shows that receivers attribute senders with two characteristics (*gender* and *age or life stage*) relatively consistently, and with *income* to a lesser extent. This finding supports and extends research that suggests consumers encode gender-specific meanings in choices of products or product categories (e.g., Allison et al., 1980; Fugate & Philips, 2010). The current study demonstrates that such encoding of meaning is indeed effective, as quite clearly even though the receivers in this study are not able to see any image of the sender, they are able to decode the gender of the sender from the products they see. Similarly, this study confirms the literature on age-specific meanings (Auty & Elliott, 1998; Elliott, 1994) of products. A majority of the sample group in this study agree on the age of the four selected profiles.

Another aspect of the study is the differential attribution of meaning across participants. For example, receivers attribute *income, class, status and spending* more frequently to Kate than to the other three senders. Most descriptors in the *income, class, status and spending* category for Kate refer to high income, upper middle or upper class, and also high status; this suggests that Kate's choice of products communicates these aspects more strongly in comparison to others. This finding is consistent with the literature on inferences of income, social status and class from consumers' product choices (Belk, 1981; Belk et al., 1982; Munson & Spivey, 1981). The finding suggests that stereotypes do indeed exist for the users of specific products. However, an interesting aspect is that while Munson and Spivey (1981) found differences in product user-stereotypes between respondents belonging to upper, middle and lower social class categories, there is a fair degree of consensus and associated meaning amongst receivers in this study. That is, products are communicating similar meanings to the sample of receivers in this study.

Receivers also attribute some other self-related characteristics in relation to product choices to all four senders. These include the recognition of *health consciousness*, and *valuing sports and exercise*. The consistent recognition of these characteristics suggests that these self-related aspects are not only well communicated by the four selected senders, but are also well identified by their receivers. Similarly so, some receivers attribute the *cares about*

appearance self-related characteristic to all senders from the product choices they see. Quite clearly, similar product choices across all sender portfolios enable such inferences to be made.

The findings also show that *fashion* and *image* related aspects in product portfolios associated with females (Kate and Abby) are more readily identifiable and more strongly communicated than in the case of males (John and Peter). This finding supports previous work (see Gould & Stern, 1989) on women in general being more fashion-conscious than males, and this self-related aspect is well recognised by receivers.

Conversely, *ethnicity and culture related* come across as very strongly communicated by two senders (John and Peter). One could speculate that this could be due to the prominent display of specific ethnicity and cultural-related affiliations in the product choices of the two male senders (one Maori and the other Pacific Islander), in comparison to the females who are both of European ethnicity. This finding also lends support to the literature on the symbolic value of products to communicate ethnicity and culture (e.g., Chattaraman & Lennon, 2008; Crane, Hamilton, & Wilson, 2004; Oswald, 1999; Penaloza, 1994).

A significant category is that of *miscellaneous*. Most *miscellaneous* characteristics, as noted in Section 7.6, tend to be personal, inward oriented, and not socially observable. Even though receivers attribute a range of self-related characteristics to each sender in the miscellaneous category, there is not enough shared meaning in relation to any characteristic. Only in very few instances, do a negligible number of receivers (less than five) attribute the same characteristic to a sender as attributed by the sender themselves. For example, only three receivers use *confident* to describe Kate; four receivers describe Peter in terms of *loyal to his family* and *relaxed*. It follows then that there is no clear consensus amongst respondents on such inwardly-oriented characteristics that are not sufficiently socially observable. An interesting aspect is that none of the senders speak of their own selves in any negative way; however, as is evident in the range of miscellaneous self-related characteristics, receivers also attribute some negative self-related characteristics to senders in relation to the product choices they make.

On the other hand, there is consensus amongst receivers on some self-related characteristics that could well be argued to be of more of a personal nature than a social nature. These include characteristics such as *likes the best and posh* (Kate); *has a sense of humour* (John);

being *organised* (Abby) and *likes music* (Peter). The explanation for consensus on such self-related characteristics lies in the observable nature of these self-related characteristics. By virtue of being recognisable in a social context, these characteristics also take on a social dimension. In other words, such self-related characteristics in relation to product choices straddle the spheres of both - the personal and the social.

The findings demonstrate that there is, indeed, shared meaning amongst receivers on self-related characteristics in relation to a product when the characteristics in question are socially oriented and/or socially observable in nature. The symbolic value of products, as per the findings in this study, lies in the socially oriented and/or socially observable self-related characteristics these products communicate. However, there is negligible shared meaning on characteristics that are personal, inwardly oriented, and not sufficiently socially observable. This means that even though senders assume they communicate a range of personal characteristics via the product choices they make, and the selected products do indeed communicate a range of personal characteristics to receivers, the consensus on shared meaning of a product in relation to the self-related characteristics the product communicates is only on those that are of a socially observable nature. The core of the findings being, that products do indeed have symbolic value, and this lies in the socially observable self-related characteristics they are associated with, irrespective of whether these characteristics are more personal-oriented or social-oriented.

7.8. Conclusion

To conclude, Study Two, Stage One has examined the self-related characteristics receivers attribute to senders. The study finds evidence first, that product choices communicate self-related characteristics even when receivers are not able to see the sender in person. Second, these self-related characteristics derive from the symbolic properties attributed to products. Third, that there appears a notable degree of shared meaning amongst senders and receivers. Fourth, characteristics of senders on which there is greatest shared meaning amongst receivers are more of a social and observable nature rather than personal or inwardly oriented.

The next chapter examines whether receivers correctly identify senders' self-articulated characteristics, and the degree to which they can do so.

CHAPTER 8. Study Two-Stage Two: Success rate of female and male senders in communicating aspects of their selves.

8.1. Introduction

This chapter addresses the question of whether young adult consumers are successful in communicating aspects of their selves to others, and if so, to what extent. In Study One, interviewees were asked to photograph those products that best communicated who they are to their peers. The photographs of four interviewees (hereafter referred to as the communication “senders”) were compiled as a collage, one collage per sender. As mentioned in Chapter 7, participants in Study Two (hereafter referred to as the communication “receivers”) completed an online survey, in which each sender collage was presented, one at a time, and communication receivers were asked to write a paragraph on the person owning these possessions; then each sender collage was presented once more, and receivers were asked to check from a list of 50 characteristics, those characteristics they believed best described the sender. The entire process comprised of three sets of questions. The previous chapter has reported on the first two sets of questions. The current chapter reports on results from the last set of questions, receivers’ responses to the 50-item checklists, for each sender collage.

A total number of 345 respondents commenced the survey; 230 completed the same. For purposes of comparisons across responses, this chapter reports on completed responses only.

Data is analysed in phases to provide both macro and micro perspectives on collected results. Section 8.2 provides a macro description of the dataset and lists characteristics correctly (‘hits’) or incorrectly (‘false hits’) identified by respondents. Section 8.3 examines senders’ success at communicating aspects of the self. Section 8.4 compares the success rate of male and female receivers for each of the four sender profiles, then the success rate of female and male receivers for each item, and finally identifies those self-articulated characteristics not picked by a majority of receivers. Section 8.5 considers whether shared ethnicity between senders and receivers plays a role in successful communication. Section 8.6 concludes the chapter.

8.2. Phase One - Gender and ethnicity of receivers; correctly and incorrectly identified sender characteristics

As noted in Chapter 7, out of a total of 230 receivers, 224 specified their gender. A total of 149 (64.8%) females responded as compared to 75 (32.6%) males. Four key ethnic groups were identified. Out of a total set of 230 receivers, 95 were identified as European (41.3%), 77 as Chinese and Asian including those of Korean, Vietnamese, Filipino, Malaysian and Thai ethnicity (33.5%), 33 of Maori and Pacific Islander ethnicity (14.3%), and 25 of Indian and South Asian ethnicity (10.9%).

This sub-section lists those characteristics correctly identified ('hits') by 50% or more of receivers for each sender. This is followed by a categorization of incorrectly identified characteristics ('false hits') by 50% or more of receivers for each sender.

Tables 8-1 – 8-3 report on characteristics of senders decoded from the collages by receivers. Table 8-1 lists the characteristics of senders correctly identified ('hits') by 50% or more receivers. Table 8-2 shows characteristics incorrectly attributed to senders by more than 50% of receivers ('false hits'); that is, characteristics identified in the collage that senders had not used to describe themselves. Table 8-3 shows common characteristics (hits and false hits) picked by 50% or more receivers across senders.

Table 8-1: Characteristics of Senders Correctly Identified (Hits) by more than 50% of Receivers

Kate	John	Abby	Peter
Aims High (56.5%)	Cares about personal grooming (59.6%)	Busy (56.9%)	Healthy, fit and active (73.9%)
Cares about personal grooming (79.1%)	Cool (55.2%)	Cares about personal grooming (63.0%)	
Confident (76.1%)	Enjoys drinking (85.2%)	Confident (56.5%)	From New Zealand (67.8%)
Enjoys the outdoors (57.4%)	Healthy, fit and active (76.9%)	Enjoys drinking (79.6%)	
Healthy, fit and active (56.1%)	Lively and outgoing (61.7%)	Healthy, fit and active (59.1%)	Likes music (66.1%)
Likes the best and posh (65.2%)		Lively and outgoing (53.5%)	Loves Rugby (74.8%)
Sociable and likes to have fun (66.9%)		Sociable and likes to have fun (62.6%)	
Trendy and fashion conscious (74.8%)		University student (53.5%)	

As seen in Table 8-1, receivers correctly identify 8 out of 15 self-attributed characteristics for Kate, 5 out of 16 for John, 8 out of 14 for Abby, and 4 out of 16 for Peter. Thus, receivers are successful at decoding more than 50% of characteristics of female senders, yet only a quarter for characteristics of male senders.

Table 8-2: Characteristics Incorrectly Attributed (False Hits) to Senders by more than 50% of Receivers

Kate	John	Abby	Peter
Cool (64.8%)	Busy (65.2%)	Cool (51.7%)	Cool (50.9%)
Well-off financially (73.8%);	Confident (69.1%)	Likes music (57.8%)	Confident (50.4%)
	Enjoys the outdoors (73.0%)	Likes to keep in touch with friends (59.6%)	Enjoys drinking (80.9%)
	Free-spirited (56.1%)		Physically big (67.8%)
	From New Zealand (59.6%)		
	Sociable and likes to have fun (57.8%)		

As noted, Table 8-2 shows characteristics not self-articulated by senders, yet identified and marked by receivers from a master list of characteristics. In other words, receivers attribute the above characteristics to senders from the photographs of products they see, even though senders do not use these characteristics to describe themselves. Table 8-2 shows receivers attribute more false characteristics to males in comparison to females.

Table 8-3: Common Characteristics Picked by 50% or more Receivers

Characteristic	Kate	John	Abby	Peter
Cares about personal grooming	√	√	√	?
Healthy, fit and active	√	√	√	√
Sociable and likes to have fun	√	X	√	?
Cool	X	√	X	X
Confident	√	X	√	X
Enjoys drinking	-	√	√	X

√ = self-stated and identified (by 50% or more of respondents)

? = self-stated but not identified

X = not self-stated but chosen

- = neither self-stated nor identified

Table 8-3 shows commonly identified characteristics across senders. The lists of photographs in Appendix 9 show that each sender selected a range of products to communicate aspects of their selves. The photographs show little or no commonality of brands across profiles, other than similar product categories. The common characteristics identified across senders (Table 8-3) provide a snapshot of ‘*who*’ or ‘*what*’ these young adult consumers are like. Such identification complements the ‘*how*’ aspect as addressed in the discursive themes in Chapter 6. Essentially, a list of common characteristics as captured in Table 8-3 means that young adult consumers who opt for such conglomerates of products are communicating to others that they *care about personal grooming*, are *healthy, fit and active*, *sociable and like to have fun*, *cool*, *confident*, and *enjoy drinking*. It also follows that these specific characteristics might be cherished in this sub-population of young adult Auckland University students. Even though only one sender uses the word *cool*, and only two senders articulate that they are *confident*, yet both these words feature as common characteristics, picked up by 50% or more of respondents across all profiles. It follows then, that similar sets of products would communicate the same or similar sort of senders’ self characteristics to receivers. In other words, this finding provides further support to the notion of product ‘constellations’ as referred to in Section 7.7, Chapter 7. That receivers associate senders’ choices of similar product categories with similar characteristics reinforces the value of the specific product groupings, which lies in their ability to communicate similar messages to the sample age group of this study.

8.3. Phase Two - Senders' success at communicating aspects of the self

Phase two examines senders' success at communicating aspects of the self (see Table 8-4).

Table 8-4: Success at Communicating Self-Characteristics

Kate		John		Abby		Peter	
Hit	Miss	Hit	Miss	Hit	Miss	Hit	Miss
8 or more	Fewer than 8	8 or more	Fewer than 8	7 or more	Fewer than 7	8 or more	Fewer than 8
143	87	87	143	118	112	68	162
62.2%	37.8%	37.8%	62.2%	51.3%	48.6%	29.6%	70.4%

The receiver task of selecting 14 (or 15 or 16) characteristics of the sender from a checklist of 50 items is equivalent to the task of selecting a sample from a population, without replacement. The probability of selecting the correct 14 (or 15 or 16) items out of a population of 50 is modelled by the hypergeometric distribution (Black, 2009; Kazmier, 2003; Miller et al., 2010).

In statistical testing, the researcher typically looks for the likelihood of an event occurring by chance less than five percent of the time ($p < 0.05$). Such an event is deemed to be statistically significant. For the task of correctly identifying 15 items out of 50, a receiver could choose up to 7 items purely by chance, with a likelihood greater than five percent. But the probability of selecting 8 or more items correctly is only 0.019. In other words, any receiver who selects 8 or more of Kate's characteristics has successfully decoded the sender message at levels beyond chance occurrence; we thus refer to 8 as being the *critical value* in this test of probability.

The same process was applied to calculate the critical value for the remaining three senders. John used 16 descriptors to describe himself. After viewing John's profile as presented in the collage of photographs, receivers were asked to choose exactly 16 items from the checklist of 50. The critical value for this task is 8 ($p = 0.047$).

Abby used 14 descriptors to describe herself. After viewing Abby's profile as presented in the collage of photographs, receivers were asked to choose exactly 14 items from the checklist of 50. The critical value for this task is 7 ($p = 0.031$).

Peter used 16 descriptors to describe himself. After viewing Peter's profile as presented in the collage of photographs, receivers were asked to choose exactly 16 items from the checklist of 50. The critical value for this task is 8 ($p=0.047$).

As seen in Table 8-4, in the case of Kate, 143 receivers hit 8 or more, 87 hit fewer than 8; in the case of John, 87 receivers hit 8 or more, 143 fewer than 8; in the case of Abby, 118 receivers hit 7 or more; 112 fewer than 7; and finally in the case of Peter, 68 receivers hit 8 or more, and 162 fewer than 8. In other words, 62.2% of receivers successfully decoded Kate's self-articulated characteristics; 51.3% successfully decoded Abby's characteristics; 37.8% successfully decoded John's characteristics; and 29.6% successfully decoded Peter's characteristics.

In terms of aggregate scores, as shown in Table 8-5, one can conclude that female senders (Kate and Abby) were more successful at communicating self-characteristics than are male senders (John and Peter). Female senders gained significantly more hits compared to male senders ($\chi^2=49.303$, $df=3$, $p<0.000$, S)

Table 8-5: Female versus Male Success at Communicating Aspects of their Selves

	Female sender	Male sender
Hit by receivers	261 (56.7%)	155 (33.7%)
Miss by receivers	199 (43.3%)	305 (66.3%)

8.4. Phase three - Success rate of male and female receivers for each sender; characteristics not picked by 50% or more of receivers

Phase three comprises three parts. First, it compares the success rate of male and female receivers for each of the four senders - Kate, John, Abby, and Peter. That is, how many and what percentage of male and female receivers were successful in decoding ('hits') or unsuccessful in decoding ('misses') senders' self-articulated characteristics. Tables 8-6 – 8-11 show the total count and percentages of hits and misses for each sender, by male and female receivers respectively. Second, phase three examines and compares male and female receivers' success rates at decoding each item. The purpose of the second part in this phase is to check if certain characteristics are more strongly identified by either gender group. Third, phase three identifies those self-articulated characteristics NOT picked by 50% or more of receivers.

Table 8-6: Female versus Male Receivers' Success at Decoding Kate

Gender		Sender 1(F)		Total
		Miss	Hit	
Female	Count	50	99	149
	% within Gender	33.6%	66.4%	100.0%
Male	Count	34	41	75
	% within Gender	45.3%	54.7%	100.0%
Total	Count	84	140	224
	% within Gender	37.5%	62.5%	100.0%

Table 8-7: Female versus Male Receivers' Success at Decoding John

Gender		Sender 2(M)		Total
		Miss	Hit	
Female	Count	89	60	149
	% within Gender	59.7%	40.3%	100.0%
Male	Count	50	25	75
	% within Gender	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
Total	Count	139	85	224
	% within Gender	62.1%	37.9%	100.0%

Table 8-8: Female versus Male Receivers' Success at Decoding Abby

Gender		Sender 3(F)		Total
		Miss	Hit	
Female	Count	61	88	149
	% within Gender	40.9%	59.1%	100.0%
Male	Count	47	28	75
	% within Gender	62.7%	37.3%	100.0%
Total	Count	108	116	224
	% within Gender	48.2%	51.8%	100.0%

Table 8-9: Female versus Male Receivers' Success at Decoding Peter

Gender		Sender 4(M)		Total
		Miss	Hit	
Female	Count	97	52	149
	% within Gender	65.1%	34.9%	100.0%
Male	Count	60	15	75
	% within Gender	80.0%	20.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	157	67	224
	% within Gender	70.1%	29.9%	100.0%

Table 8-10: Female Sender - Comparison of Female versus Male Receivers

	Miss	Hit	TOTAL
Male	81 (54.0%)	69 (46.0%)	150
Female	111 (37.2)	187 (62.8%)	298
TOTAL	192	256	448

Looking first at the messages communicated by female senders, Table 8-10 shows that female receivers were significantly more successful than male receivers at decoding the messages communicated by female senders (chi-square=10.602, df=3, p=0.0141, S).

Table 8-11: Male Sender - Comparison of Female versus Male Receivers

	Miss	Hit	TOTAL
Female	186 (62.4%)	112 (37.6%)	298
Male	110 (73.3%)	40 (26.7%)	150
TOTAL	296	152	448

Looking at the messages communicated by male senders, Table 8-11 shows there is no difference between female and male receivers in their success at decoding the messages communicated by male senders (chi-square=5.306, df=3, p =0.1507, NS). Both female and male receivers were poor at decoding the messages of male senders.

The next step in phase 3 examines each hit item in terms of male and female success rates. The purpose of this step is to check for any pattern in terms of response by gender.

For each of the four senders, Tables 8-12 – 8-15 show the ‘hit’ items in the first column, the percentage of correct responses on each ‘hit’ item in the second column, the percentage of correct responses by male receivers in the third, and the total percentage of correct responses by female receivers in the fourth column.

Table 8-12: Percentage Comparisons of Total Response, and Male and Female Response separately for each 'Hit' Item for Kate

'Hit' item	Percentage of total sample identifying 'hit' item	Percentage of male receivers identifying 'hit' item	Percentage of female receivers identifying 'hit' item
Aims High	56.5%	53.3%	58.4%
Cares about personal grooming	79.1%	73.3%	83.2%
Confident	76.1%	77.3%	77.9%
Enjoys the outdoors	57.4%	60.0%	56.4%
Healthy, fit and active	56.1%	49.3%	59.1%
Likes the best and posh	65.2%	56.0%	69.8%
Sociable and likes to have fun	66.9%	60.0%	71.1%
Trendy and fashion conscious	74.8%	60.0%	83.2%

Table 8-13: Percentage Comparisons of Total Response, and Male and Female Response separately for each 'Hit' Item for John

'Hit' item	Percentage of total sample identifying 'hit' item	Percentage of male receivers identifying 'hit' item	Percentage of female receivers identifying 'hit' item
Cares about personal grooming	59.6%	60.0%	58.4%
Cool	55.2%	50.7%	57.0%
Enjoys drinking	85.2%	78.7%	87.9%
Healthy, fit and active	76.9%	84.0%	72.5%
Lively and outgoing	61.7%	61.3%	63.1%

Table 8-14: Percentage Comparisons of Total Response, and Male and Female Response separately for each 'Hit' Item for Abby

'Hit' item	Percentage of total sample identifying 'hit' item	Percentage of male receivers identifying 'hit' item	Percentage of female receivers identifying 'hit' item
Busy	56.9%	60.0%	61.1%
Cares about personal grooming	63.04%	60.0%	67.8%
Confident	56.5%	70.7%	57.7%
Enjoys drinking	79.6%	78.7%	81.2%
Healthy, fit and active	59.1%	84.0%	65.8%
Lively and outgoing	53.5%	61.3%	56.4%
Sociable and likes to have fun	62.6%	52.0%	68.5%
University student	53.5%	24.0%	57.7%

Table 8-15: Percentage Comparisons of Total Response, and Male and Female response separately for each 'Hit' Item for Peter

'Hit' item	Percentage of total sample identifying 'hit' item	Percentage of male receivers identifying 'hit' item	Percentage of female receivers identifying 'hit' item
Healthy, fit and active	73.9%	68.0%	65.8%
From New Zealand	67.8%	66.7%	28.9%
Likes music	66.1%	57.3%	61.1%
Loves Rugby	74.8%	72.0%	2.7%

As noted above, Tables 8-12 – 8-15 compare the percentage of male and female receivers who correctly identified characteristics for each of the four senders. The figures in bold identify characteristics where the percentage of correct response is higher for female receivers than for male receivers. Table 8-16 lists those self-characteristics more often correctly identified by male receivers than by female receivers.

Generally, female receivers are more successful in identifying 'hit' items compared to males. For example, in Table 8-12, the percentage of female receivers identifying hit items is higher

compared to percentage of male receivers for 7 out of 8 'hit' items; in Table 8-13, it is so for 3 out of 5 items; in Table 8-14, it is so for 5 out of 8 items. The only exception is in the case of Table 8-15 in which the percentage of female receivers identifying 'hit' items is higher for only a single item out of a total of 4 items. A possible explanation follows Table 8-16. Generally speaking, it would be fair to infer from Tables 8-12 to 8-15, that the female respondents had better abilities at decoding self-related characteristics than did the male respondents.

Table 8-16: Characteristics with a Greater Percentage of Male Response relative to Female Response for each 'Hit' Item

Profile Number	Characteristic	Percentage of total sample identifying 'hit' item	Percentage of male receivers identifying 'hit' item	Percentage of female receivers identifying 'hit' item
Kate	Enjoys the outdoors	57.4%	60.0%	56.4%
John	Cares about personal grooming	59.6%	60.0%	58.4%
John	Healthy, fit and active	76.9%	84.0%	72.5%
Abby	Confident	56.5%	70.7%	57.7%
Abby	Lively and outgoing	53.5%	61.3%	56.4%
Peter	Healthy, fit and active	73.9%	68.0%	65.8%
Peter	From New Zealand	67.8%	66.7%	28.9%
Peter	Loves Rugby	74.8%	72.0%	2.7%

We now look at the obverse situation: those characteristics more often identified by male receivers than female receivers (see Table 8-16). There are marked differences in the percentage of males and females identifying *confident*, *from New Zealand* and *loves Rugby* as characteristics of the senders. One could speculate this could be due to male receivers being more inclined to or simply being better at picking characteristics such as *confidence* and *New Zealand ethnicity* in comparison with female receivers. Similarly, a possible reason for the difference between male and female responses on *loves Rugby* could be strong male-related

interests associated with displayed products. Perhaps these characteristics are symbolic of, or are perceived as, male role specific.

On the other hand, some self-attributed characteristics of senders are NOT picked up by 50% or more receivers (see Table 8-17).

Table 8-17: Self-Stated Characteristics NOT picked up by 50% or more Receivers

Kate	John	Abby	Peter
Different from others	Cares about their family	Different from others	Aims high
Dominant and determined personality	Different from others	Intelligent and clever	Cares about their family
Free spirited	Dominant and determined personality	Loves what they are studying	Cares about personal grooming
Happy	Enjoys the outdoors	Organized	Catholic
Has had a good upbringing	Has a sense of humour	Politically aware and believes in democratic socialism	Dominant and determined personality
Trend setter	Interested in the Arts	Trendy and fashion conscious	Friendly
University student	Likes the best and posh		Pacific Islander
	Likes to fit in		Relaxed and easy going
	Maori		Sociable and likes to have fun
	Respects culture and people		Soft and cuddly
	Techno-smart		Talented
			Well-off financially

As seen in Table 8-17, self-stated characteristics not picked by receivers include 7 items for Kate; 11 for John; 6 for Abby; and 12 for Peter. Most characteristics are inwardly /internally oriented or personal in nature. It could be that it is difficult for receivers to be able to decode these characteristics. This also means there is no clear consensus amongst receivers on the internally oriented or personal characteristics that products communicate. As seen in the Tables 8-12 – 8-17, self-related characteristics that are socially observable have a better chance of being correctly decoded. This means that even though people may assign internally oriented characteristics to their selves and assume that these are communicated to others, yet these internally oriented characteristics, if not socially observable, are best communicated to their own selves, rather than also to their peers.

8.5. Phase Four - Hits and misses for senders and receivers with shared ethnicity

This phase considers whether shared ethnicity between senders and receivers plays a role in successful decoding of sender characteristics. It examines the number of ‘hits’ and ‘misses’ for each sender across four key ethnic groups - European, Chinese and Asian, Indian and South Asian, and Maori and Pacific.

Table 8-18: Kate (European Ethnicity)

Ethnicity		Sender 1		Total
		Miss	Hit	
European	Count	34	61	95
	% within ethnicity	35.8%	64.2%	100.0%
Chinese and Asian	Count	29	48	77
	% within ethnicity	37.7%	62.3%	100.0%
Indian and South Asian	Count	8	17	25
	% within ethnicity	32.0%	68.0%	100.0%
Maori and Pacific Islander	Count	16	17	33
	% within ethnicity	48.5%	51.5%	100.0%
Total	Count	87	143	230
	% within ethnicity	37.8%	62.2%	100.0%

Table 8-18 shows the percentage of hits and misses when the sender is female and of European ethnicity. A chi-square test indicates no significant difference between ethnic groups in their ability to decode the communication (chi-square=2.123, df=3, p=0.547, NS).

Table 8-19: John (Maori Ethnicity)

Ethnicity		Sender 2		Total
		Miss	Hit	
European	Count	55	40	95
	% within ethnicity	57.9%	42.1%	100.0%
Chinese and Asian	Count	49	28	77
	% within ethnicity	63.6%	36.4%	100.0%
Indian and South Asian	Count	16	9	25
	% within ethnicity	64.0%	36.0%	100.0%
Maori and Pacific Islander	Count	23	10	33
	% within ethnicity	69.7%	30.3%	100.0%
Total	Count	143	87	230
	% within ethnicity	62.2%	37.8%	100.0%

Table 8-19 shows percentage hits and misses when the sender is male and of Maori ethnicity. A chi-square test indicates no significant difference between ethnic groups in their ability to decode the communication (chi-square=1.639, df=3, p=0.651, NS).

Table 8-20: Abby (European (New Zealander) Ethnicity)

Ethnicity		Sender 3		Total
		Miss	Hit	
European	Count	41	54	95
	% within ethnicity	43.2%	56.8%	100.0%
Chinese and Asian	Count	42	35	77
	% within ethnicity	54.5%	45.5%	100.0%
Indian and South Asian	Count	11	14	25
	% within ethnicity	44.0%	56.0%	100.0%
Maori and Pacific Islander	Count	18	15	33
	% within ethnicity	54.5%	45.5%	100.0%
Total	Count	112	118	230
	% within ethnicity	48.7%	51.3%	100.0%

Table 8-20 shows percentage hits and misses when the sender is female and of European ethnicity. A chi-square test indicates no significant difference between ethnic groups in their ability to decode the communication (chi-square=2.893, df=3, p=0.408).

Table 8-21: Peter (Pacific Islander)

Ethnicity		Sender 4 Hits		Total
		Miss	Hit	
European	Count	61	34	95
	% within ethnicity	64.2%	35.8%	100.0%
Chinese and Asian	Count	62	15	77
	% within ethnicity	80.5%	19.5%	100.0%
Indian and South Asian	Count	20	5	25
	% within ethnicity	80.0%	20.0%	100.0%
Maori and Pacific Islander	Count	19	14	33
	% within ethnicity	57.6%	42.4%	100.0%
Total	Count	162	68	230
	% within ethnicity	70.4%	29.6%	100.0%

Table 8-21 shows percentage hits and misses when the sender is male and of Pacific Island ethnicity. The table shows that Maori and Pacific Island receivers are significantly better at decoding the communication of this sender, compared to receivers from other ethnic groups (chi-square=9.247, df=3, p=0.026, significant). The last finding is significant, and calls for further research to examine the reasons for the same.

8.6. Discussion

The results of Study Two, Stage Two show that all four senders share a common ability to communicate some characteristics of the self. These are - *cares about personal grooming; healthy, fit and active; sociable and likes to have fun; cool; confident; and enjoys drinking*. Even though this finding is limited to the sample of respondents in this study, the strong

match suggests that these characteristics may be central to young adult consumers' construction, affirmation and communication of their selves, and are indeed effectively communicated through the product choices they make.

This finding is indicative of the significance of product conglomerates in the construction or communication of the self. That is, certain conglomerates of products are indicative of characteristics such as *care about personal grooming; healthy, fit and active; sociable and likes to have fun; cool; confident; and enjoys drinking*. This means, young adult consumers who choose conglomerates comprising of similar products can be expected to be characterized in terms of these aspects of their selves. This finding is resonant of the notion of product constellations (Englis & Solomon, 1995; Englis & Solomon, 1996; Solomon & Assael, 1987; Solomon & Englis, 1994). In other words, similar groupings of products elicit similar ascriptions of meanings for the population studied here.

At an individual level, the four selected senders are also able to successfully communicate further aspects to respondents. These include characteristics such as *aims high; confident; enjoys the outdoors; likes the best and posh; trendy and fashion conscious; lively and outgoing; busy; lively and outgoing; university student; from New Zealand; likes music; and loves Rugby*.

Receivers also attribute other characteristics to senders even though these are not articulated by senders. These characteristics include *busy, cool; confident; enjoys drinking; enjoys the outdoors; free-spirited; from New Zealand; likes music; likes to keep in touch with friends; sociable and likes to have fun; and well-off financially*. This means that even though selected senders did not consciously communicate these aspects, yet, the conglomerate of products in their portfolio attributes such characteristics to their selves. In other words, products may be communicating more meaning than the sender intends.

Characteristics, articulated by selected senders, yet not picked by 50% or more of respondents for a specific profile include: *aims high; cares about their family; cares about personal grooming; Catholic; different from others; dominant and determined personality; different from others; enjoys the outdoors; free spirited; friendly; happy; has had a good upbringing; has a sense of humour; intelligent and clever; interested in the Arts; likes the best and posh; likes to fit in; loves what they are studying; Maori; organized; Pacific Islander; politically aware and believes in democratic socialism; relaxed and easy going;*

respects culture and people; sociable and likes to have fun; soft and cuddly; talented; techno-smart; trendy and fashion conscious; trend setter; university student and well-off financially.

The reason for these characteristics not being picked up by an audience of peers could lie in the personal or inward nature of these characteristics. Even though such characteristics may affirm the self to their own selves, these are not communicated as well to an audience of peers because of the very nature of the characteristics in question in that these may not be socially observable in relation to specific product choices. In terms of the basic premise of the self in this study, the findings of Study Two, Stage Two point to a distinction between personal and social characteristics. Characteristics that are social in orientation and socially observable may well be better communicated than those that are personal, inward-oriented and not as socially observable in nature.

The findings also suggest the relevance of gender into the sending and receiving of messages (e.g., Belk et al., 1981; Dittmar et al., 1995; Morris & Cundiff, 1971; Patterson & Hogg, 2004). Overall, the study finds evidence that females are better at coding and decoding self-related characteristics in relation to products than are males.

The study finds no significant difference between ethnic groups in their ability to decode a communication when the sender is of European or Maori ethnicity, the only exception being when the sender is of Pacific Island ethnicity. In this case, the findings show that Maori and Pacific Island receivers are better at decoding the communication of senders compared to those of European, Chinese and Asian, or Indian and South Asian ethnicity. In other words, the study suggests that ethnicity can be a factor in both communicating and receiving messages.

8.7. Conclusion

The findings of Study Two, Stage Two demonstrate that young adult consumers are able to successfully communicate some common characteristics of their selves in relation to their product choices. This finding supports *Proposition Nine: Receivers are able to successfully interpret the message implicit in the products selected by the sender* to the extent that aspects that are successfully communicated tend to be socially-oriented and socially observable. On the other hand, the young adults studied are not especially successful in communicating self-related characteristics when these are personal, inwardly-oriented, and not socially observable.

Overall, the study finds evidence that females are better at coding and decoding self-related characteristics in relation to product choices than are males. This finding lends support to *Proposition 10: Young adult females are more successful than young adult males in communicating aspects of the self*; and also *Proposition 11: Young adult females are more successful than young adult males at interpreting the aspects of the self that the product intends to communicate*.

The study suggests that ethnicity can play a role in both sending and receiving characteristics of the self. However, *Proposition 12: Young adults are more successful at communicating aspects of their self to an audience of the same ethnicity, rather than an audience of differing ethnicity* is partially supported in that it applies to only one specific ethnic group (Pacific Island ethnicity). The study finds no significant difference between ethnic groups in their ability to decode a communication when the sender is of European or Maori ethnicity.

CHAPTER 9. Conclusion

9.1. Introduction

This chapter revisits the research questions introduced in Chapter 1 and reflects on the study: process, procedures, and findings. The theoretical, methodological, and managerial contributions of the research are outlined, and limitations of the research explained. Finally, directions for future research are proposed.

The study examined four questions: *Q1 - What products do young adults select to display or communicate aspects of their self to an audience of peers? Q2 - What aspects of the self do they identify? Q3 - What common themes emerge when young adults talk about products in relation to aspects of their self? Q4 - How successful are young adult consumers in communicating aspects of the self? Is there evidence of shared meaning between message senders and message receivers?*

A mixed-method research design directed data collection and analysis of this field based study. The research task comprised two studies (Study One and Study Two). Study One addressed the first three questions; Study Two the fourth. Twenty-eight young adults (fifteen females and thirteen males) were asked to photograph the products that they use to communicate aspects of their self to others. The participants were then directed to explain what aspect(s) each product communicated. The photographs and transcribed interviews (the data) were subjected to both quantitative and qualitative content analysis, enabling the self-related aspects and common discursive themes to be identified. For Study Two, lists of self-related characteristics for each participant were generated, following which four (two female and two male) participant profiles and accompanying portfolio of photographs were selected. These sets of photographs were presented online to respondents (an audience of peers) who were asked to describe each participant from the photographs of products displayed, and then identify characteristics of the person who owned these products from a master list of characteristics.

This chapter is organized as follows. Section 9.2 reflects on the research questions; Section 9.3 reflects on the concept of the self. Sections 9.4 and 9.5 address the key theoretical and methodological contributions of the study. Section 9.6 considers the implications for

practice. Section 9.7 addresses the limitations of the study, and the scope for future research. Section 9.8 closes the chapter.

9.2. Reflections on the research questions

The intent of the first three questions – (1) *What products do young adults select to display aspects of their self to an audience of peers?* (2) *What aspects of the self do they identify?* (3) *What common themes emerge when young adults talk about products in relation to aspects of their self?* - was to examine young adult consumer responses when given the opportunity to self-select products that communicate aspects of the self to their peer group. Extant research identifies aspects of the self that people use products to sustain; much of this research examines aspects of the self prescribed by the researcher rather than the research subject. To provide structure for the analysis, testable propositions were formed. This section reflects on and discusses the significance of the findings of the study in relation to the first two questions (propositions 1 to 8).

9.2.1. Reflection on Question One

Question One asked - What products do young adults select to display or communicate aspects of their self to an audience of peers. Based on the literature review, proposition 1 was formed: *Young adults in the research population select from a limited set of products to communicate aspects of their selves.*

Existing research has considered a range of products in relation to the self. These include: clothing and accessories, automobiles, cigarettes, mobile phones, cosmetics, food and drinks, home decor and furnishings, and magazines and books (e.g., Birdwell, 1968; Chan, Berger & Boven, 2009; Elliott, 1994; Evans, 1959; Franke & Schreier, 2008; Fung, 2002; Green et al., 1969; Grubb & Hupp, 1968; Hogg, 1998; Holt, 1997; Jantzen et al., 2006; Kjeldgaard, 2003; Lamont & Molnar, 2001; Lindridge et al, 2004; Morris & Cundiff, 1971; O'Cass & Frost, 2002; Oswald, 1999; Patterson & Hogg, 2004; Thompson & Haytko, 1997; Vitz & Johnson, 1965; Wang & Wallendorf, 2006). The study assumed, on the basis of the extant research, that these product categories would also be identified by participants in the current study. Other than two product categories (cigarettes and home decor and furnishings), the findings in this study provide concurrence with the product categories addressed in the literature. A possible explanation for the lack of inclusion of the two categories (home decor and furnishings, and cigarettes) could lie in the age and life stage of participants, and also health

consciousness in terms of the harmful effects of smoking. The study, however, identified two new product categories often used by the sample to communicate self: computers/laptops and MP3 players, and sport-related equipment. The study identified seven key product categories. *Clothing and accessories* and *electronics* were the two main product categories that participants selected. Three product categories - *miscellaneous*, *cosmetics*, and *food & drinks* also featured strongly. Such finding indicates that *clothing and accessories* and *electronics* are the most significant product categories for young adults in this study to communicate aspects of the self.

9.2.2. Reflection on Question Two

Extant literature has identified aspects of the self that consumers use products to communicate. These, primarily, are to indicate: *affiliation, association, or belongingness with reference groups or community; status; ethnicity; uniqueness; cosmopolitanism; age and life stage; and gender.*

In this study, *group affiliation* (Proposition 2), *status* (Proposition 3) and *age and life stage* (Proposition 7) are the dominant aspects of the self that participants use the products to communicate. This finding suggests that young adults are likely to select those brands or product categories that communicate these aspects. In comparison, the support for *ethnicity* (Proposition 4), *uniqueness* (Proposition 5) and *gender* (Proposition 8) is weaker. Weaker support indicates that these aspects are not as significant for the young adult participants in this study. *Cosmopolitanism* (Proposition 6) receives no support. This could be because of the specific socio-cultural context in that not much value is attached to cosmopolitanism, or in view of the diverse population, the participants in the study already consider themselves as cosmopolitan and do not see the need to specifically emphasize the same. The lack of specific linkage with cosmopolitanism could also simply be because of insufficient global experience of the participants. Further, in comparison to male participants, female participants are more conscious of *age; uniqueness; status* and *affiliation with their reference groups* in their product choices. This means females utilize a specific construct in relation to a specific product category or sub-category more in comparison to males.

Of the 314 photographs taken, 48 represented aspects of the self were not linked with propositions. Instead, these photographs were linked with a range of personally oriented characteristics.

A content analysis of self-related characteristics for each of the 28 transcripts indicates that participants characterise themselves in terms of two broad dimensions - those that are more socially-oriented, externally observable, and those that are more personally-oriented and internal in nature. The findings suggest that participants' product choices are not only symbolic of aspects as reflected in the propositions derived from the literature, but also that there is a strong component of personal-related aspects in the product or brand choices they make. Research on whether consumers make product choices to communicate personal aspects such as those identified in this study is relatively unaddressed in the literature. This study points towards exploring this aspect further in greater depth.

9.2.3. Reflection on Question Three

This section reflects on findings in relation to question three - *What common themes emerge when young adults talk about products in relation to aspects of their self* - and the significance of these findings.

The study finds that consumers speak of their product choices in three broad discursive contexts - of self-related characteristics; of belongingness or affiliation with a reference group; and of power.

The discourse of self-related characteristics is significant in that it provides an additional perspective on existing research. The literature notes self-related characteristics most often in studies relating to self-product congruency (e.g., Birdwell, 1968; Evans, 1959; Green et al., 1969; Tucker & Painter, 1961; Vitz & Johnson, 1965), or in relation to the decoding literature (see Chapter 2, Section 2.5). However, as the discourse of self-related characteristics demonstrates, participants are not only able to articulate self-related characteristics as communicated to their own selves with reference to the product choices they make, but they also assume that certain personal characteristics are communicated to peers, audiences or observers too (see Chapter 5, Section 5.3.4) via the product choices they make. In other words, participants are conscious of the personal characteristics they communicate to peers or observers via their product choices. These personal characteristics are very much part of product-related message ensembles. This part of the study concurs with the findings in Section 9.2.2 and suggests the need for research to engage further from a consumer perspective, on product choice as symbolic of personal characteristics, as communicated to peers or significant others.

The discourse of belongingness or affiliation with a reference group is clearly resonant of the literature on product choices to indicate belongingness or affiliation with a reference group (see Chapter 2, Section 2.4.1). A feature of this discourse is a sense of disassociation. That is, the use or non-use of products to denote non-membership of specific social groups. In other words, products communicate both - belongingness and also non-belongingness.

The third discourse provides evidence of the role of social power as a driver of product choice. Even though existing research recognizes how product choice enables social advantages such as greater acceptance (e.g., Lamont & Molnar, 2001, Oswald, 1999) in specific contexts, the issue of how consumers exercise self-discipline in practices associated with product choice and how such control over the self interweaves with social power is neither clearly identified nor defined in the empirical literature within the realm of consumer behaviour. Two studies that come close to doing so are Thompson and Haytko (1997) who examine how consumers appropriate fashion to make sense of complexities relating to the self, and Jantzen et al. (2006) who examine how women's consumption of lingerie enhances experiences of inter and intra psychological identity. This study advances the direction these studies take. It posits that practices associated with consumers' product choices in relation to the self, involve a degree of self-discipline, however small, say, from making the effort to change and wear a specific dress when going out, or resisting the temptation of soft drinks and only drinking water, to making a persistent effort to excel in a sport. Such effort and discipline is conceived of as control over the self which in turn leads to interpersonal benefits, gaining social power, and enabling the cycle and circle of personal power. This nexus of personal and social power drives consumer behaviour.

Holman (1981) contends that if a product (or brand label) is not visible in use, observers will not have the opportunity to see the product nor observe associated behaviour, and hence it will not be interpersonally communicational. While such theorization is applicable to this study in principle, in view of the findings of this study, there is scope for an addendum. This study argues that depending on the nature of a product and the context in which it is used, the domain of visibility may restrict audience or observer numbers. For example, a soft toy in a room may only be visible to one's close friends or associates; similarly so in the case of household gadgets or appliances. In other words, inferences of self-associated characteristics for products with limited visibility would be limited to an audience that has access to a consumer's private or restricted domains.

Finally, in relation to question 3, this study contests Holman's position on personalizability of a product as a necessary condition of communication. Holman (1981) contends that it would be unwise to attribute status or personal characteristics to an individual on the basis of products that lack 'personalizability' defined in terms of joint ownership, or when the choice of a product is involuntary. This study however provides evidence to the contrary in that participants often use products that may not necessarily be completely personalizable as in the case of several miscellaneous items, such as a barbecue table, or in the case of flyers that can be considered as property or products jointly owned by the initiating authority, such as a political party or the event organizer, to communicate aspects of their selves. Yet, participants speak of such products in terms of characteristics they share with others who affiliate with the same product.

9.2.4. Reflection on Question Four

This section reflects on findings in relation to Question Four - *How successful are young adult consumers in communicating aspects of the self? Is there evidence of shared meaning between message senders and message receivers?*

This question took more specific form in terms of Propositions Nine to Twelve as below:

Proposition 9: Receivers are able to successfully interpret the message implicit in the products selected by the sender.

Proposition 10: Young adult females are more successful than young adult males in communicating aspects of their self.

Proposition 11: Young adult females are more successful than young adult males at interpreting the aspects of the self that the brand/product user intends to communicate.

Proposition 12: Young adults are more successful at communicating aspects of their self to an audience of the same ethnicity, rather than an audience of differing ethnicity.

As noted in Section 9.1, four profiles (two female and two male participants) referred to as *senders* were selected from Study One for the purposes of Study Two. A total number of 230 respondents (receivers) completed an online survey. Receivers provided information on their gender, ethnicity, and length of stay in Auckland. They were then asked to describe each

sender from the photographs of the products they saw that belonged to the person in a paragraph. Following this task, they were instructed to mark a set of characteristics from a compiled master list of self-articulated characteristics for each of the four senders. The literature provides mixed evidence that gender and ethnicity impact the ability of people to use products to send self-related information and their ability to interpret the message(s) from others. The study assumed that females are better at communicating and interpreting information compared to males.

Study Two, Stage One examined respondent descriptions of senders. The findings from this study suggest that receivers construct a holistic sense of senders' selves from both products separately and also from the conglomerate of products associated with each sender. Quite obviously, such inferences and constructions could vary depending on the product choices comprising each conglomerate. As noted in Chapter 7 (Section 7.7), the findings from Study Two, Stage One show that receivers attribute senders with two demographic characteristics (*gender and age and life stage*) relatively consistently, and with *income, class, status and spending* to a lesser extent. *Fashion and image* related aspects are more strongly associated with females than with males. Males in this study are interpreted as more *ethnicity and culture* oriented than are females. Participants also recognize other aspects such as *health and sports related, role and profession*, and *gender or ethnicity* related stereotypes aspects for both female and male senders. A number of inward oriented characteristics attributed to both female and male senders comprise the *miscellaneous* category.

Stage Two of Study Two examined receivers' responses to the 50-item checklists for each sender collage. The results of Stage Two of this study show that all four senders are successfully able to communicate some common characteristics. These are - *cares about personal grooming; healthy, fit and active; sociable and likes to have fun; cool; confident; and enjoys drinking*. As in Stage One, Study Two, the finding suggests that certain conglomerates of products are indicative of characteristics such as *care about personal grooming; healthy, fit and active; sociable and like to have fun; cool; confident; and enjoys drinking*. At an individual level, the four selected senders are also successfully able to communicate some more self-related aspects to respondents such as *aims high; confident; enjoys the outdoors; likes the best and posh; trendy and fashion conscious; lively and outgoing; busy; lively and outgoing; university student; from New Zealand; likes music; and loves Rugby*. This finding lends support to the notion of product 'constellations' (Englis &

Solomon, 1995; Englis & Solomon, 1996; Solomon & Assael, 1987; Solomon & Englis, 1994). Product conglomerates in this study comprise of similar product categories which communicate similar self-related characteristics to receivers, thereby reinforcing the construct of shared meaning of products amongst receivers.

Receivers also attribute some more characteristics to senders even though these are not articulated by senders, for example, *busy; cool; confident; enjoys drinking; enjoys the outdoors; free-spirited; from New Zealand; likes music; likes to keep in touch with friends; physically strong, fast and fit, big; sociable and likes to have fun; and well-off financially* (see Chapter 8, Section 8.2). This means that products communicate much more than what is attributed by individual senders.

Characteristics, such as *aims high; cares about their family; cares about personal grooming; Catholic; different from others; dominant and determined personality; different from others; enjoys the outdoors; free spirited; friendly; happy; has had a good upbringing; has a sense of humour; intelligent and clever; interested in the Arts; likes the best and posh; likes to fit in; and loves what they are studying*, are not picked up by (at least 50 % or more) of peers. The explanation could lie in the personal, inward and the not sufficiently observable nature of these characteristics. The study also suggests that socially oriented and socially observable aspects of the self are more strongly communicated, and that ethnicity may have a possible impact on the decoding of self-related characteristics of people.

Further, as shown in Chapter 8, Section 8.3, female senders are more successful at communicating self-characteristics than are male senders. Also, female receivers are significantly more successful than male receivers at decoding the messages communicated by female senders. On the other hand, as seen in Section 8.4, there is no difference between female and male receivers in their success at decoding the messages communicated by male senders. In other words, both female and male receivers were poor at decoding the messages of male senders.

In both stages of the study, the commonality of categorizations, and the success in decoding socially conspicuous aspects of the self are reflective of a social consensus amongst receivers about the meanings associated with participants' product choices. This observation also confirms the empirical literature on the ability of receivers to decode product meaning (e.g., Baran et al., 1989; Christopher & Schlenker, 2000; Shavitt & Nelson, 2000; Workman &

Johnson, 1991). Further, it clearly illustrates the commonality of product meaning in the participant sample of both Studies One and Two. This in turn could be a function of shared characteristics of the population sample - being based in Auckland, belonging to the same age group, and attending university at two close locations within the city hub. In other words, a possible explanation is that the participants in this study by virtue of these shared characteristics are members of a social community, which is exposed to the same communication - hence the shared meaning. To the extent that meanings associated with the products are widely distributed within the social community, consumers can rely on them to communicate to others who they are, or infer self-related characteristics associated with product meaning.

9.3. Reflection on the concept of the self

The study conceptualizes the self in terms of the conscious recognition of both personal and social aspects of individuals, as seen by their own selves, and by others. It postulates that both personal and social dimensions co-exist in the construct of the self (Chapter 3, Section 3.5). The study illuminates a range of perspectives in relation to this understanding through the two stages each of Studies One and Two.

The study provides evidence of a range of self-related characteristics in relation to product choices. Although some self-related characteristics can be classified as personal oriented (as in the miscellaneous categorization in Chapter 7, Section 7.6), most straddle the spheres of both - the personal and the social. The study lends credence to the notion that the social does not exist in isolation from the personal in product choice in relation to the self. Both co-exist and come through the two stages each of Studies One and Two.

9.4. Reflection on young adult consumers as a sub-population of consumers

The study provides evidence that young adult consumers in this study opt for specific products and sub-categories. There is a consensus on a range of socially observable characteristics they communicate via the product choices they make and those that are received by peer groups. Further, as illustrated in the key discursive themes, young adult consumers use products to communicate self-related characteristics, group belongingness or affiliation with a reference group, and power. In other words, the self-related characteristics and discursive themes identified in this study may be the norm for the population of young

adults studied. Those who adhere to the norm are likely to be typified as belonging to and characterising the population sample of this study.

9.5. Key theoretical contributions of the study

This section evaluates the key theoretical contributions of the study. This section first reflects on congruency of product related meanings in relation to the self and the match with the other as proposed in Chapter 3, Section 3.2. Next, it revisits the congruency model (Figure 3-3) as discussed in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2) and reflects on its relevance and application in understanding product choice in relation to the self and social others.

9.5.1. Congruency of product related meanings in relation to the self

Though research has examined both of the aspects addressed in this study, typically studies either examine consumer understanding and use of products to communicate aspects of their self, or they focus on examining the ‘decoding’ of meaning. Consequently, there is fragmented evidence of self-related aspects in relation to product choice and the congruency of shared meaning between senders and receivers. In this study, both aspects are examined as parts of a whole.

The ultimate question this study addresses is whether there is a match between self-related aspects associated with product choice between senders (participants in Study One) and receivers (respondents in Study Two). To the best of the researcher’s knowledge, only two studies (Feinberg et al., 1992; Grubb & Stern, 1971) come close to the matching process; however neither make the mark this study claims for reasons discussed in Chapter 2, Sections 2.5 and 2.6.4.

This study addresses the limitations raised in the two studies above by including both female and male participants and looking beyond a confined range of one or two products by allowing for participant driven choices of products. In other words, it is the first to investigate congruency of a range of self-related aspects in relation to self-selected conglomerates of products between consumers (senders) and observers (receivers). Furthermore, in terms of empirical contribution, the study provides the first substantive new data on this subject in over a decade and a half.

9.5.2. *Application of the Congruency model*

The findings through both Studies One and Two illustrate the close link between these three nodes - the self, the product, and the social other. First, as Study One (Stage One) demonstrates, consumers make product choices that reflect aspects of their selves. This finding provides support to the notion of congruency between product choice and the self. Consumers, as is evident in the discursive themes in Chapter 6, are able to express their own characteristics in relation to their own selves, and are also able to articulate the characteristics these product choices communicate to others. Chapter 5 provides evidence that consumers do indeed recognize and communicate aspects such as *affiliation, association or belongingness with reference groups or community, status, ethnicity, uniqueness, age and life stage* and *gender* through their product choices. Chapter 7 demonstrates that interpersonal congruency between participants (senders) and observers (receivers) exists in that respondents or 'receivers' are able to decode socially observable aspects of the self associated with product choices senders make. In other words, receivers are able to attribute product related meanings to senders (participants from Study One). Chapter 8 substantiates the principle of congruency and its application in terms of the successful meaning exchange between senders and receivers, even if meaning exchange is stronger in self-related aspects that are socially observable. Notions of impression management are integral in the discourse of power (Chapter 6, Section 6.5) which is premised on the need to cultivate and maintain socially favourable interpersonal relationships.

In view of the observations above, this study makes a case for supporting the theoretical models (See Figures 3-2 and 3-3) proposed in Chapter 3, Section 3.2, thereby bringing together notions of congruency proposed in Heider's Balance Theory (1946, 1958), Rokeach's Belief Congruence Theory (1960), Grubb and Grathwohl (1967), and Sirgy (1982, 1985, 1986). Because the study demonstrates congruency of self-related characteristics between senders and receivers in terms of socially observable self-related characteristics in relation to product choice, the study proposes interpersonal congruency in terms of socially-oriented and socially observable self-related characteristics. However, congruency on socially observable characteristics does not imply that observers do not make inferences about personal or inward oriented self-related characteristics from consumers' product choices. They indeed do so, as is evident in the range of such *miscellaneous* characteristics that receivers attribute to senders in Stage One of Study Two. However, this

study does not provide enough evidence of congruency between senders and receivers in this respect.

In view of the discussion above, this study re-states the model (Figure 3-3) as proposed in Chapter 3 with a minor amendment in the understanding of congruency on self-related aspects. That is, the study proposes congruency on socially observable characteristics in relation to product choice between consumers and observers. The theoretical model also suggests further avenues of future research, for example, examining processes associated with congruency of meaning including, how congruency of meaning defines and impacts on resulting relationships and consumption behaviour.

Implicit in the theoretical framework is the recognition of Goffman's proposition of impression management. The emphasis and congruency between senders and receivers on socially observable aspects of the self lends credence to Goffman's views on the role of impression management in the everyday lives of consumers. Senders make product choices to communicate certain aspects of their selves; and these, in turn, are well recognized by receivers.

9.6. Methodological contributions of the study

This section highlights the methodological contributions of the study. These include the relative autonomy offered to the participants of this study, the application of mixed methods, the application of auto-photography, the use of content analysis, and the process of matching of self-related characteristics between consumers (participants or senders) and observers (audiences or receivers) of messages.

9.6.1. Autonomy to self-select product choices

First and foremost, the study, in contrast to the general trend of pre-determined product categories by researchers offers participants the opportunity to self-select products and brands that they think best communicate aspects of their selves to their peers. In doing so, the study identifies products and associated discourses most significant to the sub-population of young adult consumers. In other words, such methodological approach is closer to capturing the real world choices, and related meanings of the participant sample.

9.6.2. The application of mixed methods

This study employed the use of mixed methods which allowed for greater flexibility to address the questions this study raises from diverse perspectives. The study made use of both interpretive and statistical analysis, and a range of lenses such as content analysis and discourse analysis to view the data. This diversity of perspective is in contrast to the usual approach in studies of product choices in relation to the self. Typically, studies adopt a choice between an interpretive study (Jantzen et al., 2006; Kjeldgaard, 2003; Lindridge et al., 2004; Patterson & Hogg, 2004) or an experimental design (e.g., Allison et al., 1980; Berger & Heath, 2007, 2008; O'Cass & Frost, 2002; Simonson & Nowlis, 2000; White & Dahl, 2006, 2007), or even if two methods are combined, the study takes the form of interviews in combination with surveys or scales (Hogg & Michell, 1996). The two studies (Feinberg et al., 1992; Grubb & Stern, 1971) that come close to the question of matching of self-related characteristics between senders and receivers are also limited in this sphere. The studies involve surveys and measurement in terms of semantic differential scales and bipolar adjective scales. In view of such observation, this thesis offers a novel approach of addressing a range of issues relating to self-related characteristics in relation to products, and the question of congruency of characteristics between product owners and observers. It reinforces the value of mixed methods to generate a comprehensive understanding of the questions this study addresses.

9.6.3. The application of auto-photography

Although auto photography has long been accepted as a useful and valid method of driving interviews, with the exception of Kjeldgaard's (2003) study, there has been little evidence in its application to research contexts with young adult consumers. Kjeldgaard's (2003) study specifically addressed young adult consumer discourses of consumption (as opposed to product choices only) in contexts of globalization and the significance of locality. This study confirms and provides evidence of auto photography as a useful method to drive consumer discourses within the realm of consumer behaviour in relation to the product choices, especially in the case of young adult consumers. It has proved to be an effective tool in providing answers that may have been difficult to gather otherwise, say through a straightforward process of interviews. A range of photographs allowed participants to talk through various aspects they found relevant to their selves. The visual element in the photographs would also have been hard to capture via any other data gathering process other

than in film form, which could have become a very complex task for the participants who were young and busy university students.

9.6.4. The application of content analysis

The study applies content analysis at three places (see Section 5.2 in Chapter 5; Sections 7.2 and 7.5 in Chapter 7). The two kinds of content analysis applied in Chapter 7 are straight forward in that they follow the usual procedure of predetermining the research task, and following a set of guidelines commonly applied in content analysis such as defining and deriving codes from the data, or interpreting and systematically analysing text (e.g., Krippendorff, 2004; Mayring, 2000; Rosengren, 1981). The first kind of content analysis in Chapter 7 (Section 7.2) involved extracting expressed aspects of the self associated with photographed products, from all 28 interview transcripts (from Study One). These extracted aspects excluded explanations of how and why the photographed products expressed particular aspects of the self. The second kind of content analysis involved identifying and extracting thought units (words or expressions) that communicated ‘who’ or ‘what’ the sender was like, or ‘what the word or phrase said about the sender’ from observer (respondents’ or receivers’ descriptions of participants from Study One) through Stage One of Study Two (see Section 7.5).

However, the study applies an innovative approach to the use of content analysis to test propositions. The research task for Stage One of Study One involved identifying proposition-related content in consumer discourses in the photographs each participant had taken. However, the photographs alone were difficult to interpret as a basis for the testing of propositions. Instead, the photographs and the interview transcripts relating to each photograph were examined together. Evidence to test each proposition was sought within the interview transcript relating to a specific photograph. This method proved to be effective, countered the problem of addressing the text or photographs in isolation from each other. It is in the context of unique research needs, that such adaptation is a contribution to conducting empirical research.

9.6.5. Matching process

As mentioned above, the two studies (Feinberg et al., 1992; Grubb & Stern, 1971) that come close to matching self-related characteristics between consumers (senders) and observers (audiences or receivers) relied on experiments and surveys involving semantic differential

and bi-polar scales. In both studies, the products were pre-determined, and so were the associated traits.

This study, has adopted an innovative method to check if self-articulated characteristics of senders match those attributed by receivers. First, participants in Study One were allowed to make their own product choices, which resulted in a range of self-selected product categories and brands. Discursive analysis provided insight into the self-related characteristics participants associated with their product choices. Receivers in Stage One of Study Two had full reign to describe or characterise the person to whom the photographs of the products belonged in their own words. Only once they had finished with such description, did they proceed to the next step of marking off self-related characteristics on a compiled master list of self-related characteristics. It is in terms of such research process and the various stages that the thesis makes a specific contribution for future research on the same subject or similar research areas.

9.7. Implications for practice

Clearly, as the study indicates, consumers' product choices reflect and communicate aspects of their selves to their own selves and to others. In terms of implications, this means that practitioners need to position and promote products as consistent or inconsistent with aspects of consumer selves as highlighted in this study. More specifically, marketing practitioners need to identify their target segment, investigate the symbolic aspects that most closely align, and accordingly develop various communication and promotional strategies in product offerings. This implication for practice is particularly relevant as with the exception of the iPod, there is no clear dominance of any specific brand within any product category. This could be because of a relative lack of differentiation between brands. Such lack of brand dominance calls for value addition in product offerings in terms of highlighting of specific self-related aspects, say for example, belongingness or non-belongingness to a social group of peers.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the significance of product conglomerates, very similar to the construct of product 'constellations' in communicating a holistic sense of the self. In view of this finding, promotional messages for young adult consumers could include complementary sets of products that communicate a specific set of desired characteristics for young adult consumers.

Importantly, both senders and receivers attribute a range of personal or inwardly oriented self-characteristics in relation to product choice. However, there is no clear consensus on what these are. In other words, there is no explicit or clear linkage of products with characteristics that are personal, inward oriented and not explicitly socially observable. The implications for marketing practitioners lie in establishing shared meanings of products in relation to such characteristics.

9.8. Limitations and future research

The first and foremost limitation of this study is that of scope, in that the findings of the study are limited to the sample of participants in this study at a specific time-period. These findings could vary across different groups depending on age and socio-cultural context. Future research could examine the applicability of the questions this study addresses to different age-groups and in diverse socio-cultural contexts.

Second, the study does not include the physical appearance of participants. Nor does it consider use contexts. It could be possible that physically discernible aspects such as facial expressions, gestures, grooming or ethnicity, or differences in use context, such as wearing a pair of jeans when hiking and the same pair, coupled with a designer jacket for evening wear, could have an impact on what a product means in relation to the participant. This in turn could influence perceptions of an individual. The degree to which physical appearance or use context could alter or impact on product related meaning and inferences of a product owner could be a direction of future research. For example, differences in the physical appearance and the use context of consumers could be described to respondents in an experimental situation and explanations could be sought on the variability of responses.

Third, the participants in Study Two saw the photographs of the products with brief descriptions. It could be the case that presentation of products in tangible form and in an actual consumption context could have influenced perceptions of self-related characteristics in some way.

Fourth, the use of product and associated behaviour in diverse situational contexts could have an impact on perceptions. This thesis has not examined self-related characteristics in relation to product use in diverse situational contexts. This aspect is yet another potential area of future research.

Fifth, the study presented the collages of four participants from Study One to respondents in Study Two. Presentation of all 28 sets of photographs could have offered more diversity in terms of findings and interpretation of results. However, presenting all 28 sets of photographs was impractical from a resource and time point of view. Future research could consider other possible options such as dividing complete sets of photographs into clusters of four photo collages, limiting the task to only marking off characteristics on a master list, and presenting to respondent groups varying on factors such as gender and ethnicity for further insight.

Sixth, the study recognises that the use of web based surveys (in Study Two) has its own limitations. The researcher, for example, could not exercise control on the selection of participants who chose to respond. Future research could consider pre-selecting groups on certain combinations of age, ethnicity and gender to examine possible impact on responses.

Seventh, a total number of 345 participants commenced the survey in Study Two. However, only 230 completed the same. It could be that the nature of the task was a bit long and perhaps draining, and as a result led to participants dropping out. This aspect could be addressed by limiting the nature of the task in future research.

Eighth, participants from Study Two did not know the participants from Study One. It could be that when consumers and their observers are known to each other, perceptions of both products and consumers could, to some extent, be a function of social closeness. This is another aspect for future research.

Finally, the study acknowledges that certain factors such as self-monitoring including high-low self-monitors, pre-adult socialisation, specific family and socio-cultural context, and individual personality could impact on consumers' ability to communicate. Future research could examine the role of such factors on the ability to communicate.

9.9. Conclusion

The extant literature on self-related characteristics in relation to products widely assumes the communicative properties of products. However, there is scant research on examining the truth of this assumption within the realm of consumer behaviour and marketing. To date, research on product choices in relation to the self has tended to be restricted to researcher-driven products or product categories and specific aspects of the self. Such research has

generally focused on examining self-related characteristics in relation to specific products or product categories, or has usually addressed how observers decode product related meanings. Only one previous study (Feinberg et al., 1992) has actually examined the match between self-related characteristics that are communicated and those that are received, and that study was limited to a single item of clothing as its subject matter.

This thesis examined four key questions - the products young adults select to display aspects of their selves to peers; the aspects of the self they identify; the common themes that emerge when young adults talk about products in relation to their selves; the nature and degree of their success in communicating aspects of their self, and the degree and nature of shared meaning in terms of self-related characteristics in relation to a product. Study One addressed the first three questions; Study Two addressed the last and final question. The study conceptualised the self as a construct comprising of both personal and social aspects. Study One provides evidence that participants assume that products communicate a range of self-related characteristics to others. These characteristics are both - of a personal and inward nature, and also inter-personal, social and externally oriented. Study Two demonstrates that there is a consensus amongst receivers on self-related characteristics that are externally oriented and socially observable in nature. In other words, shared meanings of products are associated with socially observable characteristics. By virtue of such shared meaning in relation to the product choices they make, young adult consumers comprising the participant sample in this study reinforce belongingness to a common social community. To the extent that meanings associated with products are commonly understood within a social community, consumers rely on them to communicate to others who they are, and to infer the identity of others. In doing so, they reiterate their own anthem - that they are young adults and consumers who choose specific products - for the expressive value of the products.

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Appendix 1. Representative Studies of Product Choice in Relation to the Self or Aspects thereof - Encoded Meanings

Researchers	Conceptualisation of the self or dimensions thereof	Data brief	Paper brief
Gardner and Levy (1955)	Multidimensional	Theoretical/conceptual	Highlights symbolism involved for consumers in product/brand selections
Levy (1959)	Multidimensional	Theoretical/conceptual	Goods people buy have social and personal meanings in addition to their functions
Evans (1959)	Personality characteristics	Simple random sample of seventy one Ford and sixty nine Chevrolet owners; Edwards Personal Preference schedule to measure manifest psychological needs as a basis for judging the ability of psychological factors to predict the brand of car owned. Demographic and other objective factors also obtained. Statistical analysis tests for discrimination between Ford and Chevrolet owners using ten need scores.	Tests the ability of psychological and objective methods to discriminate between owners of the two largest selling automobiles, Ford and Chevrolet. The relationship between the owner's personality needs and the brand images suggests that brand images are not the independent phenomena they are usually thought to be.
Tucker and Painter (1961)	Personality characteristics	Sample - 133 students; administration of the Gordon personal profile and a sales and marketing personality Index; results compared to determine the difference in personality trait scores for groups that professed to different rates of product use or interest.	Tests the hypothesis that marketing behaviour is related to personality traits; demonstrates that personality traits are often related to product use. Gordon Personal Profile distinguishes personality traits related to behavioural differences, although the four traits – ascendancy, responsibility, emotional stability, and sociability (have considerable independence) are not “independent”
Vitz and Johnson (1965)	Personality characteristics of masculinity-femininity	Experimental; students between the ages of 18 and 22 inclusive. Two measures of masculinity-femininity - the Fe (femininity) scale of the California Psychological Inventory (CPI) and the Mf (feminine interests) scale of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI). Each S given a three para booklet with instructions to write in the brand name of his regular cigarette and asked S to rank order the 13 different cigarette brands – most masculine to most feminine. Calculations of mean ratings, and correlations.	Hypothesizes and finds support for the following hypotheses: the more masculine the personality of a smoker, the more masculine the image of the smoker's regularly smoked cigarette. That is, masculine men smoke masculine image cigarettes and feminine men smoke feminine-image cigarettes. Likewise, masculine women smoke masculine-image cigarettes and feminine women smoke feminine-image cigarettes.

Grubb and Grathwohl (1967)	Psychological characteristics	Theoretical/conceptual	Proposes a theoretical foundation based on self theory and product symbolism; self formed in the interaction between the individual and others
Birdwell (1968)	Accepted construct of Personality; self-image (physical being and evaluations and definitions of one's self)	Sample - one hundred car owners; experimental; semantic differential as a technique of measurement	Demonstrates that a person's image of self is sufficiently projected into his choice of products to be measured. Also that the average perception of a specific car type and brand is different for several ownership classes
Grubb and Hupp (1968)	Multidimensional; self concept grows from reactions of parents, peers, teachers, and significant others; person strive for positive reactions from significant references; the self comprises of personal and social dimensions	Student sample; survey; modification of the semantic differential technique; questionnaires	Tests and finds support for hypotheses - that consumers of a specific brand would hold self concepts similar to self-concepts attributed to other consumers of the same brand; and consumers of a specific brand would hold self-concepts significantly different from self-concepts attributed to consumers of a competing brand
Green, Maheswari, and Rao (1969)	Multidimensional	45 second year graduate business students; questionnaires involving collection of data by the method of 'n-dimensional' rank order; and semantic differential scales	Examines the relationship of image congruity to brand perception and preference for automobile models; for a number of subjects in this study preference is not positively related to image closeness.
Dolich (1969)	The "actual", how a person sees himself and the "ideal" self, the way a person would ideally be	Congruence between a self image and a brand image obtained by computing the absolute arithmetic difference, scale by scale, between two semantic differential instruments; statistical testing	Examines congruence relationships between self images and product images through testing differences between: most preferred and least preferred brands; socially consumed and privately consumed products; real self image and ideal self image. Study finds support for greater congruity of self concept and most preferred brands than with least preferred brands
Hamm and Cundiff (1969)	Self-actualization	Sample - 100 housewives from two middle class neighbourhoods in central Texas; Q sort technique; calculation of discrepancy scores.	Measures the degree of satisfaction of the need for self-actualization; "most descriptive" allow for expression of the respondent's unique personality and for differentiation of the self from others, "least like" products describe how respondent perceives her self or her ideal self
Grubb and Stern (1971)	Unified construct	Sample comprised of staff and students; usage of differential scales, questionnaires	Replicates the Grubb-Hupp study, and finds support for hypotheses

Hughes and Guerrero (1971)	Unified construct	Experiment; 12 semantic differential scales to measure attitudes of 58 businessmen towards themselves, their first choice automobile brand, their present automobile, and the importance of these attitudes in the buying situation; factor analysis of the 12 scale questions	Questions the two concepts of the self-congruity model – self image and congruence towards equilibrium; calls for expansion of congruity models to include social congruity
Morris and Cundiff (1971)	Sex role identification	Experimental; 223 male undergraduate students. Three measuring instruments: Taylor's manifest anxiety scale, Gough's femininity scale, and Osgood's semantic differential.	Measures the reactions of individuals with different levels of anxiety to a familiar product considered by a majority to have feminine appeal, hair spray. The hypothesis on the interaction of sex role identification and manifest anxiety in reaction to attitudes about hair spray is accepted.
Ross (1971)	Actual self (the way a person actually sees himself to be – self concept); ideal self (the way a person would ideally like to be)	Experimental; female subjects; product categories – automobiles and magazines; semantic differential scales; composition of self concept and brand image dimensions.	Proposes and finds support for the hypothesis that subjects prefer brands of products which are more rather than less similar to their own self-concept; hypothesis that ideal self-concept will be more closely related to consumption preference than actual self-concept when the object of consumption is more rather than less conspicuous to others is not supported. Actual self concept more similar to consumption preference than ideal self-concept for each of the six brands of both products.
Landon (1974)	Self image or ideal self image	Sample - 179 male and 173 female college freshmen and sophomores; questionnaires and rating scales.	Evaluates the relationship between self and ideal self concepts and purchase decisions. Factors relating to products and individuals determine impact of self image or ideal self image on purchase intentions.
Rosenfeld and Plax (1977)	Personality traits	Experimental; sample - 122 males and 118 females; questionnaires; battery of psychological and personality tests.	Examines the relationship between dress and personality for males and females. Males and females who score high on clothing consciousness are compliant and anxious, while those who score low are characterized as independent and aggressive.
Park and Lessig (1977)	Affiliation with or identification with reference group	Sample – housewives and unmarried junior and senior marketing students at university. T-tests to compare the informational, utilitarian, and value expressive reference group influence scores of housewives to students	Examines differences in susceptibility of housewives and students to reference group influence. Significant differences between housewives and students in terms of the influence which the three types of reference groups have upon brand selection.
Allison, Golden, Mullet, and Coogan (1980)	Masculinity and femininity and sex roles	Experimental design - questionnaires, 174 male and 133 female undergraduate business students; products presented on nine point horizontal scale; second part obtained female	Investigates first, how sex and sex-role concept influences masculine and feminine product perceptions for twenty four product categories; second, whether masculine and feminine product imagery is

		perceptions of the 24 stimuli using the same type of scale; the third part consisted of Bem's (1974) measure of sex-role self-concept.	perceived as two separate constructs, or as a unidimensional construct. Sex was a more important influence on product sex typing; products tended to be sex typed with 23 of the 24 products having significantly different masculine and feminine perceptions, very strong indication that masculinity and femininity are perceived as separate constructs
Bearden and Etzel (1982)	Affiliation with or identification with reference group	Convenience sample of nonstudent adults aged between 31 to 35 years; survey design	Investigates reference group influence on product and brand purchase decisions; results support hypotheses
Sirgy (1982)	Symbolic or personality related attributes	Review	Discusses need for self concept literature to consider symbolism in attitudes towards brands
Solomon (1983)	Social identity and social roles	Theoretical propositions and argument	Proposes that consumers employ product symbolism to shape self image and for purposes of defining behaviour patterns associated with social roles
McCracken and Roth (1989)	Social interactions	Use of a graduated photo sort method consisting of a set of five photographs; respondents offered a range of stimuli that include well-formed messages and badly formed ones, and were asked to identify the well-formed messages; 360 subjects aged between 17 to 52.	Investigates whether clothing has language like properties, and whether the clothing-language comparison is a suitable model for the investigation of this and other product categories. Suggests the existence of a code that informs individuals' effort interpretation.
Leigh and Gabel (1992)	Symbolic interactionism, especially in terms of affiliation with or identification with reference groups	Theoretical/conceptual	Discusses the concept of symbolic interactionism, in terms of product/brand purchases and their symbolic significance, especially so in relation to reference groups
Kleine, Kleine, and Kernan (1993)	Roles or work related identity	Student sample, questionnaires, Callero's (1985) four term version scale	Examines mundane consumption and the self; tests and finds support for hypothesis that salience of an identity drives people to enact behaviours using identity associated products
Englis and Solomon (1995)	Lifestyles, and the affiliation or the lack of it with reference groups	Sample - drawn from a homogeneous population of predominantly white, middle-class, undergraduate business majors from suburban communities in the north-east United States. Method - sorting task to identify lifestyle clusters; open-ended product elicitation task, questionnaire, monopolar scales	Examines the correspondence between the products used by consumers to define a set of lifestyles that are meaningful to them, and those contained in widely used, commercial "snapshots" of consumption patterns which operate as positive or negative reference group influences
Dittmar, Beattie, and Friese (1995)	Gender as a social construction; personal identity that represents one's unique qualities, values	Sample - mature students with reasonably extensive adult consumer experience as respondents; individual interviews employing a mixture of quantitative and open-ended	Presents a new model of impulse buying and predicts that products are impulsively bought to reflect self-identity. Gender, as a major social category, influences both the products bought impulsively and the buying

	and attitudes, personal history and memories, and interpersonal relationships; and social identity as expressed in social standing, wealth and status and group memberships	measures; card presentations, ratings on 7-point Likert scales.	considerations used. Men tend to impulsively buy instrumental and leisure items projecting independence and activity, while women tend to buy symbolic and self-expressive goods concerned with appearance and emotional aspects of self. Personal identity is particularly important for men, and social identity for women.
Hogg and Michell (1996)	Social roles, social identity and social groups	Quantitative and qualitative data - first phase involved extraction of data across a range of products and services – correspondence analysis; second phase sought confirmation for the patterns of consumption found in the quantitative analysis, using qualitative data via semi-structured interviews with marketing managers	Proposes and confirms relationship between social roles, social identity and consumption constellations
Thompson and Haytko (1997)	Personal dimensions and in relation to society	Phenomenological interviews with 20 volunteer participants ranging in the age from 20 to 30, of Caucasian, African American, Asian, Hispanic, and Native American descent	Explores the ways in which consumers use fashion in relation to prevailing ideological systems of self and society; Consumers appropriate fashion (for e.g., clothing, footwear) to make sense of complexities of self identity
Holt (1997)	Lifestyle and associated boundaries	Interpretive study, 23 adult participants, ethnographic interviewing, observations administration of VALS survey. Product categories - food, clothing, home decor and furnishings, music, television and movies, reading, the arts, sports, and hobbies.	Examines the social patterning of consumption; proposes that people evaluate and use consumption objects reflection of lifestyles.
Hogg (1998)	Roles, and actual, avoidance, and aspirational selves	Three stage research design - paper and pen generative task; semi-structured in-depth interviews; mini-group discussion; sample - undergraduate students.	Investigates the role of negative choice in symbolic consumption
Oswald (1999)	Ethnicity and culturally related aspects	Ethnography - participant observation, unstructured long interviews, field trips, written questionnaires, and group interviews - participants - extended family of first generation Haitians	Examines the role of consumption in the construction of Haitian-American identity.
Vigneron and Johnson (1999)	Prestige seeking	Conceptual/theoretical	Combines concepts of existing research on prestige consumption
Thompson and Tambyah (1999)	Specific cosmopolitan orientation	Phenomenological oriented depth interviews; fourteen expatriate participants; hermeneutic process to post-structuralist interpretation	Examines the manifestation of cosmopolitanism in the life of expatriate professionals

Simonson and Nowlis (2000)	Uniqueness	Series of studies with between 300 to 450 respondents per study; experimental.	Investigates the interaction between a very common task, explaining decisions, and an individual difference, need for uniqueness (NFU), on buyer decision making. Finds support for the proposition that buyers who explain their decisions and have high NFU are more likely to make unconventional choices
Jamal and Chapman (2000)	Ethnicity and culturally related aspects	Ethnographic study - participant observation, and long qualitative interviews. Two groups of people - the people of Pakistani origin living in Bradford and the 'white' people of the local host culture in Bradford.	Explores how the feeling of belonging to an ethnic community influences consumption choices. Informants experience multiple realities of self identification through various consumption practices, and in particular food consumption.
Lamont and Molnar (2001)	Status and acceptance seeking	Qualitative research - interviews with marketing specialists in black advertising agencies in New York and Chicago	Studies how Blacks use consumption to affirm or shape their collective identity
Tian, Bearden, and Hunter (2001)	Uniqueness	15 items to reflect the three facets of consumers' need for uniqueness formatted into a five point Likert type response scale; two samples - first sample of 273 undergraduate business students, the second, more heterogeneous sample obtained through a mail survey; examination of a three factor correlated measurement model; check for counterconfirmatory motivation to pursue differentness as an end goal. Data collected at two separate periods from 121 students by means of questionnaires and surveys, in another test, undergraduate students administered questionnaires and also asked to evaluate 20 photographed product pairs	Addresses consumers' need for uniqueness, and the role products play in people's sense of identity
O'Cass and Frost (2002)	Status seeking	Non-probabilistic convenience sample of 18-25 year old students; product category – fashion clothing and sun-glasses; surveys; factor analyses, linear regression, T-tests.	Examines the effects of non-product related associations on status and conspicuous consumption. The higher the perceived symbolic characteristics, the stronger the positive feelings towards the brand, and the greater the congruency between the brand's image and the brand-user's image, the greater the perception of that brand having status.
Fung (2002)	Gender identity and also a specific cosmopolitan orientation	Semi-structured interviews of five working class Hong Kong female readers along with participant observation	Examines how cultural consumption relates with and constructs female and cosmopolitan identity

Kjeldgaard (2003)	Geographical location within the global cultural economy	High school student sample. Auto-Driving, auto-photography, qualitative - 'Multi-sited study based on an ethnographic approach	Analyses the role of the local in young people's discourses of identity and consumption.
O'Cass and McEwen (2004)	Status seeking	Non probabilistic sample of 18 to 25 year old students; product category – fashion clothing and sun-glasses; surveys; confirmatory factor analysis, partial least squares analysis, and t-tests.	Explores consumer status and conspicuous consumption; even though empirically separated are related. Males and females are similar in their status consumption tendencies; however males may be more materialistic and have a stronger orientation towards conspicuous consumption.
Lindridge, Hogg, and Shah (2004)	Ethnicity and culturally related aspects	Ethno-consumerist framework, oral data collected via a mini focus group comprising of four student participants, followed by 10 semi-structured personal interviews, purposive sampling and theoretically driven, age comprising 18 to 25, higher education degrees, females of South Asian descent	Examines consumption in the worlds of young adult South Asian women in Britain, and how their consumption manifests culture and ethnicity.
Thompson and Arsel (2004)	Identification with or the lack of it with influences of globalization	Sample drawn from regular patrons of six specific coffee shops from a range of backgrounds; photographs; field notes, interviews; hermeneutic approach to analysis	Examines how a hegemonic brandscape (in the study hegemonic brandscape formed by Starbucks iconic status and the competitive positions occupied by other coffee single site establishments, regional chains, national franchise etc.) provides a constellation of meanings that consumers incorporate into their worldviews and put to a wide variety of interpretive and identity constructive uses. Consumption choices is one way via which consumers take stands on globalization
Patterson and Hogg (2004)	Gender as a biological concept	Four participants (two males and two females) between the ages of 18 and 24; semi-structured interviews	Aims to establish the gender identity of respondents; to identify the salience of gender identity in participants' interpretation and consumption of products (i.e. gendered consumption symbolism)
Escalas and Bettman (2005)	Affiliation with or identification with reference group	Two hundred and eight undergraduate student participants; experimental.	Proposes that the symbolic properties of reference groups become associated with the brands those groups are perceived to use, associations transfer from reference groups to consumers as consumers select brand meanings congruent to aspects of their self concept
Cova and Pace (2006)	Social communities built around products or brands	Case study of the web community "my Nutella the Community". Multiple methods - interviews with key informants, netnography and document analysis	Analyses the power that a virtual brand community exerts over a brand of a mass-marketed convenience product; shows a new form of sociality and customer empowerment,

			not based on interaction between peers, but more on personal self-exhibition in front of other consumers through the marks and rituals linked to the brand
Caldwell, Blackwell, and Tulloch (2006)	Specific cosmopolitan orientation	Qualitative research study - referral sampling, in-depth face to face interviews, photo-elicitation.	Aims to increase understanding of cosmopolitanism as a consumer orientation
Jantzen, Ostergaard, and Veira (2006)	Symbolic interactionism (Mead 1934) that the self is intersubjective and is constituted as a 'me' through social interactions in which people assume the role of the other in order to gain a sense of themselves; social level directed towards an external world of shared values and symbols and an intra-psychological level directed towards an internal world; interconnectedness of social and personal identity	White middle-class women aged 21 to 41 (the majority being in the range of 23 to 32 years), brought up and living in Denmark; semi-structured interviews with a total of 22 women.	Investigates how women's consumption of lingerie may enhance their experience of inter- and intra-psychological identity. Lingerie is consumed in order to express women's social, inter-psychological identity as well as to thrill and arouse it – thereby enhancing an intra-psychological identity. Helps women demonstrate publicly that they are knowledgeable of the code: creates a field of 'competence'; personality constructing function involves strengthening of users' self-esteem.
Wang and Wallendorf (2006)	Social status	Experimental - two studies, sample - college students (211); fourteen product categories; questionnaires, Likert type scales; products - sunglasses and sweatshirts; multiple regression; Study 2 - adults (270); products – athletic shoes and automobiles.	Explores how materialism is linked to consumers' evaluations of products they have purchased. Consistent evidence that materialism is negatively related to product satisfaction in product categories with high potential for status signalling, but unrelated to product satisfaction in product categories with lower potential for status signalling.
White and Dahl (2006)	Self image and dissociative reference group	Study 1 -Student sample; questionnaires; chi-square analysis; study 2 - 190 paid male participants from a large North American university; questionnaire, mixed model; ANOVA; study 3 - 84 male participants; questionnaire; regression analysis.	Explores the effects of dissociative reference groups on consumer preferences. Males had more negative evaluations of, and were less inclined to choose a product associated with a dissociative (i.e., female) reference group than a neutral product (Study 1). This finding was moderated by whether the product was consumed in public or private (Study 2) and public self-consciousness (Study 3).

White and Dahl (2007)	Affiliation with or identification with social reference groups	Experimental; sample comprising of undergraduate students	Rather than examining out-groups more generally, the study examines the effects of specific types of out-groups; demonstrates that products associated with reference groups have a greater impact on consumers' negative self-brand connections, product evaluations, and choices than do products associated with out-groups more generally.
Berger and Heath (2007)	Social approach to divergence from reference groups	Four experiments ; survey tasks for participants; sample groups - university students for three experiments, and respondents from a broad Web survey database with mean age of 38.	Focuses on how choices can signal particular identities to the broader social world; finds support for hypotheses – Individuals more likely to diverge from a majority in domains that others use to infer identity; the identity of the other people who share one's tastes will have a greater influence on divergence in domains others use to infer identity.
Wattanasuwan (2007)	Gender, geographic and cosmopolitan identity	Qualitative methods - interpretive research via ethnographic fieldwork – observations, auto driving like collages as well as diaries, interviews. Six female students – about twenty years old	Explores how women from rural areas employ consumption to negotiate their identities in cosmopolitan Bangkok.
Berger and Heath (2008)	Social approach to divergence from reference groups	Seven experimental studies; experiment one - students, rating lists, regression; study two - undergraduate students, questionnaires; study 3 - undergraduate students, tasks; study 4 - undergraduate students, administered a taste change questionnaire; study 5 - students and staff completed questionnaires; study 6 - undergraduate students, linear regression; study 7 - participants with mean age of 32 years recruited through a nationwide web based survey database	Proposes and finds evidence for the notion that instead of assuming people diverge to better understand their place in the social environment or reduce their uncertainty about who they are, people diverge to ensure that others understand who they are.
Franke and Schreier (2008)	Sense of uniqueness	Experimental design; 127 participants; test of discriminant validity by means of exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, and the Fornell-Larcker criteria; questionnaires; in-depth interviews	Finds support for the hypothesis that perceived uniqueness of a product enhances value beyond the product's aesthetic and functional fit.

Goulding and Saren (2009)	Gender related aspects	Primarily a quasi-ethnographic approach involving immersion in the setting and context of the experience through participatory observation of events and activities. Observations; interviews in the form of respondents telling their stories. In total, 14 interviews.	Draws on findings from a longitudinal study of participants of the Gothic subculture and discusses some of the multiple gender identities that are “performed”.
Fugate and Philips (2010)	Gender related aspects	Student sample; product lists; T-tests between each product’s masculinity and femininity; means, categorizations; questionnaires, Likert scale	Examines product gender perceptions, and finds evidence for the same.

Appendix 2. Representative Studies of Product Choice in Relation to the Self or Aspects thereof - Decoded Meanings

Researchers	Conceptualisation of the self or dimensions thereof	Data brief	Paper brief
Haire (1950)	Personal motivations and characteristics	Sample - women; experimental, application of projective tests using two shopping lists.	Applies a projective technique to understand characteristics and impressions of consumers who choose a specific brand of coffee (Nescafe or Maxwell House Coffee).
McKeachie (1952)	Personality	Sample - six male and female students, experimental; interviews.	Examines the influence of wearing lipstick upon personality ratings. Confirms existence of a stereotype.
Grubb and Hupp (1968)	Multidimensional	Student sample; product category - automobiles (Pontiac and Volkswagen); survey; semantic differential technique.	Tests and finds support for hypotheses - that consumers of a specific brand would hold self concepts similar to self-concepts attributed to other consumers of the same brand; and consumers of a specific brand would hold self-concepts significantly different from self-concepts attributed to consumers of a competing brand.
Grubb and Stern (1971)	Multidimensional	Sample comprised of staff and student; product category – automobiles (Volkswagen and Mustang); usage of differential scales, questionnaires.	Replicates the Grubb-Hupp study, and finds support for hypotheses.
Suedfeld, Bochner, and Matas (1971)	Interpersonal	Sample - adult population; experimental; manipulation of reference group similarity-dissimilarity in that the Ss, who were overwhelmingly young and unconventionally dressed, were asked to sign a petition either by a young hippie or by a young straight E.	Examines the importance of the implication of attitude by appearance. Two female experimenters, one dressed as a hippie and the other wearing straight dress, solicited signatures for an anti-war petition at the April 1971 Washington peace demonstration. The hippie condition has a higher rate of signing, as well as a higher rate of signing without looking.
Darley and Cooper (1972)	Social impressions	Six male students; experimental; three wore conventional sports clothing and kept their hair cut short; the other three were deviant in appearance with long hair, beards, dungarees, and old army jackets.	Investigates the relationship between a political campaigner's dress and appearance and campaign effectiveness. Regardless of the dress, age, or sex of the passersby, more shoppers accepted leaflets from the conventionally dressed students than from the hippies. Finally, a majority of the votes went to the candidate supported by the conventional campaigners.
Hamid (1972)	Perceptions and impressions	Sample - 52 subjects (26 male, 26 female); experimental; four female students unknown to the subjects asked to participate as social objects acting as the experimenter's helper; two variables: make up and whether the girl wore glasses or not; variance analysis.	Investigates the effect of manipulated dress variables on resulting judgments. Dress cues and sex of subject significantly affect the hemline estimates and attractiveness ratings, differences being more extreme for males in makeup/no glasses and no makeup/glasses conditions. The presence or absence of cosmetics and glasses significantly affect subjects' ratings of such

			traits as conventional, friendly, neat, religious, self-confident, snobbish, and sophisticated. In addition, individuals who wore cosmetics or no glasses were rated as more attractive than individuals who wore glasses or no cosmetics.
Woodside, Bearden, and Ronkainen (1977)	Self identification and social interactions	Undergraduate student sample; experimental; projective techniques using shopping lists.	Compares images on serving marijuana, beer, bourbon, and soft drinks at a small informal party with use of a post-test only with a control group experimental design. Substantial differences are found between the four groups on 14 dimensions.
Belk (1978)	Social impressions	Student sample; experimental.	Examines the impact of visible consumption of products and services on the impressions which others form about the consumers of these items. Even moderately visible and subtle consumption differences resulted in consistent differences in the impressions formed of the consumers of these products and services.
Holbrook and Hughes (1978)	Social impressions	Sample - 100 housewives from suburban areas; experimental - combines the indirect questioning method introduced by Haire with structured response scales.	Investigates hypotheses advanced but not tested in an earlier study; 100 Eastern housewives asked to evaluate shopping lists differing in their inclusion of convenience versus natural foods and instant versus regular coffee. Convenience foods users are perceived as significantly more busy, time-saving, quick, fast-working, outgoing, friendly, on-the-move, imaginative, urban, lively, and adventurous.
Felson (1978)	Social distinctions, lifestyles	Sample comprised of Chicago suburban households divided into two strata on the basis of median family income reported in the 1970 United States Census. Interviews, questionnaires, and rating scales.	Investigates the assumption that material lifestyle traits are clearly arrayed hierarchically. The study takes automobiles, clothing, and place of residence as important examples of visible consumer behaviour. Consensus on three hierarchies of lifestyle attributes is limited in sample; hierarchies are neither clear nor straightforward.
Holman (1980)	Social impressions	Sample - women students, one thousand slides of women students obtained through one week, photographs taken unobtrusively, a final sample of 392 different clothing ensembles put together, subjects asked to answer questions on impressions formed when first meeting with a person wearing an ensemble. Cluster/discriminant analysis.	Examines impact of clothing consumption on those observing, adopts a communication paradigm. Identifies six different clothing messages and meanings, some ensembles are perceived to be more fashionable/sexy compared to others

Belk (1981)	Personality and social class	Sample - undergraduate students; experimental; study 1 involved completing ratings of 39 products on a 5-point scale of agreement, regression analyses; study 2 investigates three consumption cues identified to be predictors of social class and personality in a factorial experimental design.	Investigates the characteristics of product and service choices that tend to serve as cues for inferences about the personality and social class of those being observed. Products and services that cost more and involve careful decision processes are more likely to be utilized in forming judgments of consumer personality and social class.
Graham and Jouhar (1981)	Personality and physical attractiveness	Sample - sixteen females and males; experimental; colour photographs rated along 7-point scales or dimensions for appearance and personality; three multivariate analyses of variance.	Investigates the notion that if cosmetics really do make people look more physically attractive, then with the use of cosmetics others should perceive people more favourably in terms of personality characteristics. Use of cosmetics led to enhanced ratings on eight of the fourteen personality dimensions, hair care led to more favourable ratings on ten of the scales.
Munson and Spivey (1981)	Social class	Sample - females; experimental; evaluations on semantic differential scales; one-way, univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) coupled with a form of the chi-square statistic.	Examines whether perceptions of brand and product user stereotypes differ across social classes. Significant differences between upper, middle and lower social classes are observed for both product and brand-user stereotypes.
Belk, Bahn, and Mayer (1982)	Social impressions, including social class	Sample - college students and adults; experimental; stimuli (colour photographs of houses and automobiles) differing in style, age, cost.	Examines children and adolescents in four age groups, from four through 14 years old. Measures and compares inferences about the owners of the same consumption stimuli between college students and among older adults. Examines developmental trends, with some further attention to the effects of gender and social class.
Belk, Mayer, and Bahn (1982)	Social impressions, including social class	Two sets of samples - undergraduate students, and non-college adults; experimental; stimuli (colour photographs of houses and automobiles) differing in style, age, cost. Cluster analyses, calculation of mean ratings and manipulation checks.	Examines differences between college students and older adults in their perceptions of the owners of the same set of houses and automobiles; substantial differences in impression formation between college students and older adults, males and females, and high and low social classes show between these groups; study interprets individual differences in light of theories of social status and gender roles.

Harris, James, Chavez, Fuller, Kent, Massanari, Moore, and Walsh (1983)	Personality variables	Sample - 149 men and 184 women with ages ranging from 14 to 81 years; experimental; questionnaire comprised of five stimulus pictures representative of five dress styles; ratings on eight 7-point rating scales. Chi square tests and variance analysis.	Examines effects of the different styles of women's clothing: formal skirt, formal pants, casual skirt, casual pants, and jeans. Finds evidence to support the view that models are characterised differently depending upon clothing style.
Paek (1986)	Personality traits	Sample - predominantly (over 90%) Caucasian, adolescent, and female students from undergraduate classes. Experimental; four female garment styles, conservative, daring, dressy, and casual chosen to serve as experimental stimuli for the study. Eighteen personal traits consisting of 11 intellectual (task oriented) attributes, 6 social attributes, and 1 physical attribute chosen to evaluate the cues conveyed by the four garment styles in the judgment of personal characteristics. Analysis involved mean personal trait ratings, ANOVA, Duncan's Multiple Range Test, and Pearson product-moment correlations.	Investigates personal traits formed by perceivers of a stranger clothed in two sets of polar garment styles, daring-conservative and dressy-casual. Conservative and casual styles are rated higher than daring and dressy styles and the daring style in turn, is significantly higher than dressy style.
Forsythe (1988)	Symbolic interactionism and social impressions	Sample - students; experimental; evaluation of videotapes of applicants for a middle management position. The majority of the respondents (69%) were 20 to 22 years old; 52% were women; 85% were seniors or graduate students; and 71% were marketing majors. Interviews; ratings on four point Likert scales, statistical analysis including gender of the rater as a "between" effect.	Replicates and expands previous research investigating the influence of masculinity of dress on the perception of selected management characteristics and favourability of hiring recommendations for women applying for management positions. Most positive responses went to applicants wearing a moderately masculine costume whereas the effectiveness of the other three costumes in conveying important management characteristics was less distinct. Perception of management characteristics increased as masculinity of the costume increased.

Frank and Gilovich (1988)	Personality characteristics, self perceptions and social perceptions	Experimental studies, semantic differential ratings, statistical records, videotapes, questionnaires.	Investigates whether a cue as subtle as the color of a person's clothing might have a significant impact on his or her behaviour. Examines whether professional football and ice hockey teams that wear black uniforms are more aggressive than those that wear nonblack, uniforms. Players in black uniforms are judged more harshly than those in white uniforms by nonpartisan judges and thus are more likely to be penalized for actions that would be overlooked if performed by members of another team.
Baran, Mok, Land, and Kang (1989)	Social interactions; social roles	Student sample; experimental involving shopping lists; responses elicited on a 5-point Likert type scale; data analyses involving factor analysis, group means and analysis of variance.	Examines the question of how we use information about various consumer products in making judgments of other people; based on only a list of supermarket purchases - upscale products or generic brands - people make different judgments about other men's and women's character and responsibility. Evaluations interact with the gender of the person being evaluated.
Forsythe (1990)	Synthesis of symbolic interactionism and perception	Sample - two groups of subjects, 55 persons in marketing and 54 persons in banking, totaling 109 respondents; videotapes of simulated interviews used to identify the effect of clothing masculinity on perceptions of women applicants for management positions. Experimental - Applicant ratings on 4-point Likert scales on five personal characteristics important for management success - forceful, self-reliant, dynamic, aggressive, and decisive - and on the likelihood of hiring the applicant for a middle management position. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) of all ratings was used to examine effects of costume, applicant, respondent rating the applicants, gender of the respondent, occupation of the respondent, and any interactions in the perception of management characteristics and subsequent hiring decisions.	Investigates the extent to which an applicant's clothing influenced interviewer's perceptions of management characteristics and decisions to hire women for management positions. Shows that increased costume masculinity result in more favourable perceptions of management characteristics, and more favourable hiring recommendations, regardless of the respondents' gender or occupation.
Bell (1991)	Symbolic interactionism	Sample - adults; experimental; stimuli - four male garment styles (daring, conservative, formal, casual); questionnaires; rating scales on items: intelligent,	Investigates the effect of male apparel styles (daring, conservative, formal, casual) on American adult perceptions of personal traits of men. Evidence of differences in

		mature, self-confident, sincere, popular, or attractive. Analysis includes variances and ANOVA techniques.	perception depending upon apparel style.
Fram and Cibotti (1991)	Personal motivations and characteristics	Sample - women, 45 years of age or younger, with children 13 years of age or younger; experimental - application of projective tests using two shopping lists.	Replicates the Haire (1950) study; instant coffee originally seen as a product used by lazy, poor planning, bad wives, now seen as a product that meets the needs of busy people.
Workman and Johnson (1991)	Impression formation	Sample - female college students from 18 to 26. Single factor experimental design with three levels of cosmetics (Heavy, moderate, none). Subjects asked to indicate on a 7-point scale the amount of cosmetics worn by the model (7=heavy, 1=none at all); analysis of variance.	Investigates the effect of cosmetic use on impression formation. Analysis of variance reveals no significant difference on impressions of personal temperament or personality traits based on cosmetics use. Cosmetics use significantly affects impressions of attractiveness, femininity, and morality.
Feinberg, Mataro, and Burroughs (1992)	Personality	Student sample; experimental design; bipolar adjective scale	Predicts and tests that, when clothing is selected to best represent the individual, there would be a strong correspondence between the meaning conveyed by clothing and the individual's identity. Observers are able to perceive the information presented in outfits, and these perceptions are significantly correlated with the individuals' views of themselves.
Christopher and Schlenker (2000)	Personality variables: social and personal dimensions	Sample - 150 undergraduates provided with vignettes; experimental; subjects asked to rate vignette character on 20 traits designed to tap six identity dimensions; estimations of annual income and number of expensive possessions owned; ANOVA; . regression analyses.	Discusses how the material possessions of a target person affect the person perception process. Further examines how personality factors, including aspects of identity, self-monitoring, and materialism, influence a perceiver's impressions of an affluent and not so affluent target person. The affluent target, as compared to the not so affluent counterpart, is perceived to possess greater personal abilities that are associated with success (e.g., intelligence, hard work, self-discipline), greater sophistication (e.g., cultured, successful, attractive lifestyle, a lot of friends), and a more desirable lifestyle. At the same time, affluence does not produce universally favourable evaluations. The affluent target is seen as being less considerate (e.g., less kind, less likable, less honest, less caring of others, less of a potential friend) than the not so affluent target.

Shavitt and Nelson (2000)	Social identity, personality and demographic characteristics	123 participants asked to consider the typical consumer of one of a variety of products in three function categories - utilitarian products, social identity products and multiple function products. Responses readily codable into three product categories: (a) personality traits, (b) demographic characteristics, and (c) other words.	Attempts to demonstrate the person perception implications of product attitudes and dimensionalise the person judgments made in response to those attitudes. Users of social identity products are described primarily in terms of their traits, interests, and activities. In contrast, users of utilitarian products are described primarily in terms of their product related needs and demographic characteristics. Users of multiple-function products are described mostly in terms of their traits, interests, and activities, along with a variety of demographic descriptors.
Johnson, Schofield, and Yurchisin (2002)	Social cognition and impression formation	Sample - Forty-one women between the ages of 20 to 60; interviews; transcriptions; responses arranged into sections by question.	Examines the following questions: What visual and non-visual dress and appearance cues do participants take into account when they form an impression? Conversely, what visual and non-visual dress and appearance cues do participants believe that others take into account when these others form impressions of them? The content of the information inferred includes personality characteristics, information about behaviours, biological traits, health and hygiene, and social roles. Most participants believe that both they and others are accurate at decoding information from general appearance and dress cues, although some participants believe that accuracy is dependent upon the situation or related to specific appearance or dress cues.

Appendix 3. Semi-Structured Interview Guideline

Pre-Session – Welcome; explain and ensure participants understand the interview process; answer any questions.

The First Half Hour (Maximum time) – I would like you to look through the pictures you have taken. After that, you can put them in an order or in groups or in a collage form that you feel most comfortable with, to speak from.

To be followed by a one hour interview (Maximum time) – [The interview process is primarily guided by participant responses, with the interviewer only adding questions to improve interview process and to probe and clarify responses].

Can you tell me something about this picture?

What do you think this product/brand says about you to yourself?

What do you think this product/brand says about you to your peers or people from your age group?

What kind of people would or would not opt for these products or brands?

Any other reasons you might have for using these products/brands besides those already stated? E.g., how does this product/brand help or advantage you?

Post-session – Thank participants and answer any questions.

Appendix 4. Participant Information Sheet



Date Information Sheet Produced:

28 06 2008

Project Title

The use and success of brands to bolster the self

An Invitation

My name is Renu Emile. I am a lecturer with AUT Business School, and am also currently pursuing a doctoral degree at AUT, with the Department of Marketing, AUT Business School.

I wish to invite you to participate in the research I propose to conduct.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you are free to opt out at any stage. You will not be disadvantaged in any way.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is to find out how young people use products or brands to communicate aspects of their selves to others, specifically to people of their own age group, and whether they are effective or successful in doing so.

This research may result in a PhD degree for me, and may also lead to a couple of national and international presentations, seminars and publications in journals.

How was I chosen for this invitation?

You are invited as you may be between 18 and 21 years of age, and are a resident of Auckland. I may know you or you may have been referred by a friend.

What will happen in this research?

You will be asked to take pictures of products or brands that you use and which say something about you to your peer group in a range of settings. I will provide you with a disposable camera (with a provision for 24 pictures) and you can take pictures on it over a period of two weeks. Once you have finished taking the pictures, I will collect back the camera from you. Anyone who appears in the photographs will not be able to have their confidentiality guaranteed. If you choose to include other people in the photographs taken by you, you must make sure that you protect their privacy and that they cannot be identified by others. One way of doing this is by making sure that their faces cannot be seen.

I will have the pictures developed and will also fix time for a meeting with you at a mutually convenient location on AUT University Wellesley Street Campus. The purpose of the meeting will be to talk to you about the photographs you have taken and gather your thoughts on what they say about you. The meeting will last for

a maximum of one and a half hours. The first half hour will be provided to you to arrange the pictures in any form you feel comfortable with, whether in sequence, groups, or in collage form, to talk from. Once you have arranged the pictures and are ready to talk, we will begin the interview which will not last for more than an hour.

The interview meeting will be tape recorded for purposes of my study. If you do not wish to have your talk recorded, you need to let me know. If you may have any apprehensions or fears about the recording process, you are welcome to talk to me at any stage. I will ensure the safe custody of the tape recorded material and the photographs taken by you for a period of six years from now. After six years, both the tape recorded material and the photographs taken by you will be destroyed.

What are the discomforts and risks?

Although it is unlikely that you will experience any discomfort or embarrassment, however, if there is any such possibility at any stage of the research process, you would have the full right not to answer any question or pass it, or even discontinue with the interview.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

Further, if you feel you have experienced discomfort or embarrassment that you might need help with, you would be guided to the AUT counselling service.

What are the benefits?

For you - Some fun ☺ ! It also offers you a great opportunity to reflect on the products or brands you use, your usage experiences, how you see yourself, and how you imagine others see you. Besides, you would experience participation in a real, research exercise, and will also receive a letter of appreciation for doing so.

For me - the researcher - Enhanced Understanding of and contribution to existing academic literature; personal development; familiarisation with how people of your age construct meanings and how such knowledge can be used to facilitate teaching practice; positive contribution towards career goals, and a doctoral degree.

How will my privacy be protected?

Your name or identity will not be revealed to anyone at any stage or through any publications resulting from this research. However, if you appear in the photographs taken by you, and give consent for the photographs to be published, confidentiality of your identity cannot be assured.

You also need to be aware of the following details.

Besides me (the researcher) and the Chief Supervisor (Assoc. Prof. Margaret Craig-Lees) for this project, photographs taken by you will also be shown to people of your own age and level of educational qualifications through stage 2 of data collection currently proposed from January 2009 to June 2009. This exercise will be done to gather their impressions of you, or the meanings they construct, from the photographs they see. Some of these people could be from AUT itself, while some could be from elsewhere - other tertiary institutions.

If you wish to seek any further clarifications or have any questions or conditions about this process, please feel free to check the same with me or my supervisors.

It could also be that the photographs taken by you are significant to the analyses or findings of the research in some way. In that case, the photographs might merit publication in project related conferences, presentations, articles for various journals, and also in the final thesis. If you appear in the photographs, you could be identified by anyone who may be interested in the research. However, you are within your rights to allow or disallow publication of photographs in the appropriate column on the attached consent form.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

There is a cost involved in terms of your time - A maximum of three and a half hours spread over four to six weeks.

The time can be divided as follows – Taking pictures –a total time of one to two hours over a period of two weeks – time taken depends on you.

Interview Meet – Total time – One and a half hours maximum divided as follows:

Half hour maximum to arrange pictures in a sequential form, in clusters, or in collage form, for the participant to refer to and speak about;

Interview – An hour maximum.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

If you are interested, you have a week to get back to me on the email address provided on this form (renu.emile@aut.ac.nz)

How do I agree to participate in this research?

You need to read, understand and complete the attached participant details form, the photography protocol, and also the consent form.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

If you would be interested in the findings of this research, a copy of the report from the research could be provided to you once the project is completed. Please fill in the appropriate box in the attached consent form.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Margaret Craig-Lees, mcraigle@aut.ac.nz 921-9999 ext. 5800

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTECH, Madeline Banda, madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz , 921 9999 ext 8044.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher Contact Details:

Renu Emile; Doctoral Candidate – Department of Marketing, AUT; Lecturer – Center for Business Interdisciplinary Studies, AUT, Auckland. Email: renu.emile@aut.ac.nz 921-9999 Ext. 5339

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Assoc. Prof. Margaret Craig-Lees, Department of Marketing, AUT Business School, Auckland. mcraigle@aut.ac.nz 921 – 9999 ext. 5800

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 18 August 2008

AUTECH Reference number 08/151

Appendix 5. Consent Form



Project title: ***The use and success of brands to bolster the self***

Project Supervisor: ***Assoc. Prof. Margaret Craig-Lees***

Researcher: ***Renu Emile***

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 28 06 2008.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that the interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I also understand that photographs taken by me will be shown to a set of peers from Auckland. I permit the researcher to do so, under conditions of confidentiality, if and where applicable. Yes ☐ No ☐
- ☐ I understand that I can allow/disallow the publication of photographs taken by me for (a) the purposes of this study; and (b) for purposes of presentation and publication such as at conferences, seminars, in journal articles, in the thesis to be produced from this study, and for any other lawful purposes as stated on the Information Sheet:
- I allow the publication of photographs taken by me Yes ☐ No ☐
- ☐ I understand that I may withdraw myself, the photographs taken by me, or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including photographs, tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature:

.....

Participant's name:

.....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

Date:

***Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 18 August, 2008 AUTEC
Reference number 08/151***

Appendix 6. Participant Details



Project title: ***The use and success of brands to bolster the self***

Project Supervisor: ***Assoc. Prof. Margaret Craig-Lees***

Researcher: ***Renu Emile***

Name:

Age:

Gender: Male/Female

Place/Country of Birth:

Ethnic Description:

For how long have you lived in Auckland?

Educational Qualifications:

Contact Details:

Address:

Home Phone Number:

Mobile:

Email:

Question: Do you think products or brands used in social contexts (settings) such as at University, workplace, or when in company of friends, say something about the wearer or the user?

YES ☐

NO ☐

Appendix 7. Photography Protocol



Project title: ***The use and success of brands to bolster the self***

Project Supervisor: ***Assoc. Prof. Margaret Craig-Lees***

Researcher: ***Renu Emile***

The Task:

- All you have to do is to take pictures of products or brands that you use and which say something about you to your peers. For example, who you are and how you would like others from your own age group to think about you or describe you as a person.
- I will provide you with a disposable camera (with a provision for 24 pictures) and you can take pictures on it over a period of two weeks.
- You may choose to include yourself in as few or as many pictures you would like to. You may also choose to exclude yourself completely.
- You need to be aware that if you allow publication of photographs taken by you in research related publications, the confidentiality of your identity is not possible. This means anyone seeing the photograph/s taken by you and/or reading the published material may be able to identify you.
- If you choose to include other people in the photographs taken by you, you must make sure that they cannot be identified. One way of doing this is by making sure that their faces cannot be seen. This needs to be taken care of to protect peoples' privacy.
- Once you have finished taking the pictures, I will collect back the camera from you and have the photographs developed.
- Once the photographs are developed, I will arrange a mutually suitable time to meet.

Appendix 8. Participant Information Sheet



Date Information Sheet Produced:

26 08 2009

Project Title

The use and success of brands to bolster the self

An Invitation

My name is Renu Emile. I am pursuing a doctoral degree with the Department of Marketing, AUT Business School.

I wish to invite you to participate in the research I propose to conduct. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you are free to opt out at any stage. You will not be disadvantaged in any way.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is to find out how young people use products or brands to communicate aspects of their selves to others, specifically to people of their own age group, and whether they are effective or successful in doing so.

This research may result in a PhD degree for me, and may also lead to a couple of national and international presentations, seminars and publications in journals.

How was I chosen for this invitation?

You are invited as you may be between 18 and 21 years of age, are a resident of Auckland, and are enrolled at university.

What will happen in this research?

You will be asked to click on a web link which will take you to four sets of photographs one after the other. You will not see the face or any image of the person who took the photographs. You will be asked to describe the characteristics of the person the products or brands belong to, in a short paragraph of about 100 to 150 words. Once you have written a short paragraph, you will be asked to tick off items from a master list of descriptors of the person you wrote about. The same process will be repeated for the next three sets of photographs.

What are the discomforts and risks?

Although it is unlikely that you will experience any discomfort or embarrassment, however, if there is any such possibility at any stage through the research process, you would have the full right not to answer any question or pass it, or even discontinue with the survey.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

Further, if you feel you have experienced discomfort or embarrassment that you might need help with, you need to make contact with the researcher at the email address mentioned below, and you would then be guided to the AUT counselling service.

What are the benefits?

For you - Some fun ☺ ! The research offers you a great opportunity to reflect on the products or brands you see in your daily lives and what they say about people who use them. Besides, you would experience participation in a real, research exercise.

For me - the researcher - Enhanced Understanding of and contribution to existing academic literature; personal development; familiarization with how people of your age construct meanings and how such knowledge can be used to facilitate teaching practice; positive contribution towards career goals, and hopefully, a doctoral degree.

How will my privacy be protected?

Your name or identity will not be revealed to anyone at any stage or through any publications resulting from this research.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

There is a cost involved in terms of your time - Twenty to thirty minutes.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

If you are interested in participating in this survey, please read further. If you need time to make up your mind, you can come back later, provided the survey is still up. The survey will close once we have an approximate number of 300 participants.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

You will confirm your consent to participate if you continue with the survey.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

If you would be interested in the findings of this research, a copy of the report could be provided to you once the project is completed. You would need to email me with your request on renu.emile@aut.ac.nz.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Margaret Craig-Lees, mcraigle@aut.ac.nz 921-9999 ext. 5800

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTECH, Madeline Banda, madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz , 921 9999 ext 8044.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researchers Contact Details:

Renu Emile; Doctoral Candidate - Department of Marketing, Faculty of Business, AUT University, Auckland.
Email: renu.emile@aut.ac.nz 921-9999 Ext. 5339

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Assoc. Prof. Margaret Craig-Lees, Department of Marketing, Faculty of Business, AUT University, Auckland.
mcraigle@aut.ac.nz 921-9999 ext. 5800

*Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 11 November, 2009, AUTEC
Reference number 08/151.*

**COMPLETION OF THE ATTACHED QUESTIONNAIRE WILL BE TAKEN AS INDICATING YOUR
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE**

IF YOU'D LIKE TO PARTICIPATE, PLEASE CLICK ON THE LINK BELOW

WEB LINK

Appendix 9. List of Profiles, Photographs selected and Self-related Descriptors

Participant	Photographs of Product or Brand	Initial list of Self descriptors - original, or (close to original or essence of expressed idea)
P1 (F)	Barbecue Table Fruit Car (VW Golf) Handbag Bag (Louis Vuitton) Shorts (Ksubi) Perfumes (Lancome and Christian Dior) Jeans (Ksubi) Shoes Sunglasses (Gucci)	1. Life of the party (Sociable) 2. Loves the outdoors 3. Free spirited 4. Aims high 5. Health conscious 6. Fashion conscious 7. Trend setter 8. Confident 9. Different from others 10. Cares about personal grooming 11. Courageous 12. Strong personality 13. Posh 14. Upstyle 15. Has had a good upbringing 16. University student 17. Happy 18. Needs to be original
P2 (F)	Car (Ford Laser) Diary (From Fancy Swedish store – Kee Kee Kay) Wine (Villa Maria) Lip Balm (Elizabeth Arden (Green Tea)) Perfumes (Elizabeth Arden (Green Tea) ; Marc Jacobs (Daisy); Summer from Vanc Leef and Arpels; Yves Saint Laurent (YSL) Paris) Wallet (No brand mentioned) Dress (Workshop) Shoes (Witchery) Laptop (Apple Macbook) Cellphone (Sony Ericsson) iPod	1. Not very rich, but not very poor either; middle income 2. Student 3. Buys expensive things and high spending 4. Looks out for the nicer things in life 5. Likes nice stationery 6. Knowledgeable of wine 7. Conscious of socio-economic status 8. Higher level of education 9. Perceived as bit different 10. More discerning 11. Takes care of appearance and presentation 12. Attractive 13. Very sensible, just plain and black 14. Doesn't get swayed by brands 15. Individualistic 16. Young 17. Sophisticated 18. Stylish 19. Has the money to buy a laptop 20. Knowledgeable about computers – cares about more than just typing out things 21. Cool person 22. Image conscious
P3 (M)	iPod (Apple) Drumkit Microphone Computer (Apple) Jeans (Levis) Shirt (Diesel) Running Shoes (New Balance) Shoes (Vans)	1. Loves music 2. A bit anti-social, closed off 3. Not as easy to approach or get to know at a deeper level 4. Quite seriously into music 5. Keeps in contact with friends 6. Trendy 7. Fits in well

	TV Book Glasses Australian Rugby Jersey	8. Looks good 9. Young 10. Can afford to buy 11. Serious about running and keeping fit 12. Tries and keeps in shape 13. Keeps up with fashion 14. Normal kind of person 15. Lazy and unproductive 16. Loves to read 17. Looks smart with glasses on 18. Australian
P4 (M)	Hat (Horley) Sweat Shirt (Quicksilver) Shorts (Dickies) Wallet (Adidas) School Bag (Quicksilver) Perfume Guitar Base Multi-affects guitar pedal iPod (Apple) Music CD (Smashing Pumpkins) Autobiography of favourite guitarist (Slash) Self assembled computer (Enamax) Computer game (A world of warcraft) Posters Squash Racket Cell phone (Sony Ericsson) Car (Integra Honda)	1. Just very casual 2. Likes certain colours 3. Working man 4. Clean 5. Very cool 6. Pretty good at playing the guitar, experienced and technical 7. Multi-talented 8. Very rich 9. Likes to have fun 10. Listens to music a lot and loves good music 11. Cool 12. Into computers 13. Plays games 14. Fan of quality movies 15. Sporty 16. Fit 17. Technically savvy 18. Likes to drive around
P5 (F)	Perfume (Yves Saint Laurent (YSL) Baby Doll) Earrings Sunglasses (Le Specs) Running shoes (Nike) High waisted skirt Dress Shoes Strawberries Wall planner Flyer (Get Shaky dance party) Flyer (Young Labour Party) Health Care Book Flyer (Rhythm and Vines) Alcohol (Malibu) Alcohol (Lindauer) Cell phones iPod Laptop (Sony Vaio) Photograph Frame Photograph Wall Flat <u>Photographs in bold (and associated characteristics) were excluded from final inclusion because of privacy related issues</u>	1. Sociable 2. Outgoing 3. Confident 4. Cares about personal grooming 5. Likes to distinguish herself (stand out from the crowd) 6. Trendy 7. Cares about fitness and health 8. Organized 9. Politically aware and believes in democratic socialism 10. Loves what she is studying 11. Intelligent and clever 12. Busy 13. University student 14. Hard working 15. Enjoys drinking

P6 (F)	iPod (Apple) Tablets (Board to draw on) Cellphone Shoes (work shoes and two other kinds) Memory Stick Paints Workbook Jeans Cosmetics (Moisturiser and mascara) Hand bag	1. Works best while listening to music 2. Knows what she is doing 3. Knows people 4. Can't dress properly 5. A little bit stuffy 6. Relaxed 7. Has done work 8. Creative 9. Efficient 10. Relaxed 11. Laidback 12. Doesn't try too hard 13. Young 14. Looks after herself 15. Tidy 16. Is not really into high fashion or anything
P7 (M)	Sports shoes (Nike) Shoes (Vans) Shoes (Adidas) Clothes (Adidas) iPod (Apple) Play Station Glasses (Ray-Ban) Hat (Billabong) Cereal (Nutrigrain)	1. Cool 2. Likes the Nike brand 3. Plays soccer 4. Middle class 5. An average person, has a bit of money 6. Bit of a colourful person 7. Bit of a joker 8. Happy person 9. Sports focused 10. Tries to keep fit and stuff 11. Young, Flashy sort of person 12. Goes for quality 13. Likes music 14. Doesn't put a price on fun 15. They probably think I am made of money or something (Rich) 16. Fun person 17. Health conscious, worried about body
P8 (F)	Public Transport information sign Alarm Clock Mobile Phone (Motorola) Wallet (Rip Curl) Makeup (Thin Lizzy) Clothes (Supre) Shoes for Work (no brand for shoe) Shoes (Converse) Radio and Speakers (Logitech) Guitar and guitar pick (Yamaha) CD (Ministry of Sound) Soft drinks, prepared food and fast food (Pepsi, Burger Fuel and Chicken Tonight) Hockey Stick Bag	1. Unorganized, maybe organized 2. Working full time 3. Very busy 4. Keeps in contact 5. Organised and reliable 6. Conscious of image 7. Cares about what people think she looks like 8. Young 9. Well presented 10. Well organised 11. Fits in 12. Professional 13. Likes to relax and listen to music 14. Creative 15. Artsy type 16. Social 17. Busy student 18. Poor student 19. Sporty 20. Outgoing 21. Team player

P9 (F)	iPod (Apple) Mobile phone Water bottle (Pump) Energy Drink (Lift) Book Magazine (Women's Day) Wallet Handbag	1. Likes music 2. Social person 3. Likes interaction 4. Takes care of health 5. Really busy person; on the move, on the run 6. Enjoys reading 7. Independent 8. Mature 9. Not really classy
P10 (M)	Mobile Phone (Nokia 95) GPS System (TomTom1) Laptop Printer Stereo system in car (Pioneer) Finance Calculator CD rewritable Heater Book (Oxford English Dictionary) Chess and Cards Clothing (T-Shirt) Shoes (Crocodile Leather) Jeans (True Religion) Soccer shoes Weights; Kickboxing gloves iPod Watch (Omega) Sunglasses Perfume (Chanel) Chocolate	1. Keeps in communication with friends and family 2. Not familiar with streets in New Zealand; Impressive- Impresses friends with smooth navigation 3. Ordinary young man 4. Cool 5. Prefers convenience and comfort 6. Very impulsive 7. Likes to listen to loud music 8. Young 9. Doing a finance major; Likes what he is studying 10. Up to date with technology 11. Wants to be healthy – doesn't want to get up sick or catch a cold 12. Working on improving English (English is a second language) 12. Plays cards and chess – takes risk and geeky 13. Born in the USSR - Kind of patriot; Part of the Russian community and likes the red colour 14. Likes few expensive things 15. Stylish 16. Fashionable and up to date 17. Likes sport and to look aesthetic 18. Conscious of skin care and smelling nice 19. Likes chocolate
P11 (M)	Jeans CellPhone iPod Alcohol (Barbados Rum) Soft Drink (Coke Zero) Deodorants Turntable Pizza (Hell's Pizza) Reading Glasses (Dolce and Gabbana)	1. Laid back 2. Also smart 3. Not too scruffy 4. Not over done 5. Quite likes gadgets and technology 6. Is into music 7. Likes to keep in touch with everyone 8. Normal student 9. Likes to fit in with everyone 10. Likes drinking rum 11. Has class and taste 12. Bit more mature 13. Impresses people 14. Avoids sugar and watches weight 15. Likes to keep clean and healthy 16. Enjoys DJ-ing as a hobby 17. Has taste for good pizza 18. Prefers to go for the looks and comfort sort of thing

P12 (F)	The Bible Car (Holden) Soft drink (Coke Zero) Labelled Ethnic Food Bottles Make up and cosmetics (Mascara, Lipstick, nail polish, and foundation) Shoes (Nike) Guitar Electronics (Play Station) Laptop iPod Cartoon (Mickey Mouse)	1. Born Christian 2. Quite rich and posh 3. Tries to keep healthy 4. Indian or Asian 5. Likes to be well presented 6. Young 7. Enjoys music 8. Stays connected with people 9. Hates present day cartoons
P13 (F)	Clothes (sari) Jewellery Bag Shoes Purses Sports (Cricket bat and soccer ball pictures) Chocolates (Box of Roses) Beverage (Can of Lipton Tea) Cosmetics (lip balm, a hair mousse, face wash, body butter, make-up (Mac) Stationery Hair straightener (ghd) Computer Camera iPod Cellphone	1. Indian 2. Loves her jewellery 3. Likes to wear comfortable things 4. Likes old styled fashions 5. Likes bright colours 6. Creative person 7. Bubbly, energetic sort of person 8. Likes to be original 9. Looks after her things 10. Quite messy 11. Likes to look presentable and nice 12. Is similar to girls her age 13. Enthusiastic sports player 14. Loves food and has a sweet tooth 15. Enjoys make up 16. Looks good 17. Tries hard at study 18. Serious and enthusiastic about work 19. Up to date with the latest technology 20. Thoughtful 21. Enjoys music 22. Communicates with people
P14 (F)	Dresses Cosmetics –Make Up (Thin Lizzy) Conditioner and Shampoo Bottle of Water Cream (Fantasy) Wallet (Glassons)	1. Tongan background 2. Proud of her culture 3. Uses popular brand 4. Shares style with friends 5. Is healthy 5. In the crowd
P15 (M)	Hair Product Car Logo (Honda) Cereal (Wheatbix) Shoes (Adidas) Cell Phone (Nokia) Perfume (Polo) Sunglasses (Gucci)	1. Cool 2. Cares about self 3. Likes to put in time and effort into how he looks 4. Normal person 5. Has class 6. Cares about health 7. Has breakfast everyday 8. Not a pretty boy 9. Simple 10. Cares about what he wears 11. Likes to stay in contact with people 12. Likes to smell nice

P16 (M)	<p>Drink (V8)</p> <p>Music legend Bob Marley related items – a bag</p> <p>Another bag</p> <p>A T-shirt</p> <p>A lava-lava- a sarong with Bob Marley on it)</p> <p>Shoes (Nike – Airforce)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Health freak 2. Fanatic (Bob Marley fan) 3. Freak, kind of weird 4. Rastafarian kind of person – Jamaican kind of reggae person 5. Big fan and crazy about Reggae 6. Has style
P17 (M)	<p>Cereal (Sanitarium)</p> <p>Spread (Margarine)</p> <p>Beer (Speights, Tui)</p> <p>T-Shirts (Quicksilver)</p> <p>Hoodie with University Book Shop logo</p> <p>Fly Spray</p> <p>Olive Oil (Home brand)</p> <p>Appliances (Fisher & Paykel)</p> <p>Laptop (ASUS from Malaysia)</p> <p>Speakers (Logitech)</p> <p>Juice (Just juice)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Likes to keep fit and healthy 2. Not so concerned about the price 3. Student 4. Proud of the university and the university brand 5. Reasonably gullible 6. Values functionality of products 7. Cares about the brand 8. Has personal preferences 9. Not too bothered about the music speakers brand 10. Not too bothered about taking care of teeth
P18 (M)	<p>Soft Toy (with motto “Born to Fly”)</p> <p>Painting</p> <p>Gym</p> <p>T-Shirt (Ralph Lauren)</p> <p>Perfume (Ralph Lauren)</p> <p>Guitar</p> <p>Belt (Bob Marley)</p> <p>Rugby Jersey (De La Salle School)</p> <p>De La Salle School College</p> <p>Dress (Lavalava)</p> <p>NZ Flag</p> <p>Car (Holden Commodore)</p> <p>Car (Honda)</p> <p>Alcohol (42 below)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Talented 2. Cares about how he looks 3. Friendly 4. Cares about their family 5. Relaxed 6. Easy going 7. From Tonga (Pacific Islander) 8. From New Zealand 9. Rich (Well off financially) 10. Reggae lover...(Likes music) 11. Likes to have fun 12. Soft and cuddly 13. Aims high 14. Loves Rugby 15. Catholic 16. High achiever 17. Raised around music 18. Relaxed 19. Religious 20. Represents a well known school for Rugby 21. Tough 22. Physically strong and fit (Fit and active)
P19 (F)	<p>Car (Holden Calais)</p> <p>Laptop (Toshiba)</p> <p>Shoes (Nike Airforce)</p> <p>Items of Maori cultural significance (Te Te Toria – a stick game and Tonga)</p> <p>Shopping Bags (Supre & Cotton on)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Has money and status 2. Student involved with work 3. Modern dress sense 4. Maori 5. Stylish and Cool
P20 (F)	<p>Computer</p> <p>Music system</p> <p>Car keys</p> <p>Finger rings</p> <p>Make up (cosmetics)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Loves being in touch with friends 2. Loves music 3. Loves dancing 4. Has a lot of friends 5. Very excited to be driving 6. Has a sense of growing up and becoming older and more independent 7. Cares about how she looks to other people 8. Aware that she looks made up and something

		pretty about it 9. Well-groomed 10. Tidy 11. Stylish in taste
P21 (F)	Maori carving (Taonga) Art Work Drawing tools Computer External Hard Drive Cellphone iPod Shoes (Puma) Water Fruit	1. Maori 2. Enjoys what she does 3. Very creative 4. Artist 5. Hard working 6. Focused 7. Complicated person 8. Flash person who likes nice and expensive things 9. Likes listening to music 10. Up with technology 11. Casual person 12. Sporty person 13. Looks after herself and is healthy
P22 (M)	Car (Toyota Cellica) Cell Phone (Sony Ericsson) Shorts Singlet Polo Shirt	1. Likes fashionable cars 2. Trendy and fashionable 3. Has high standards 4. Competitive person in sports 5. Doesn't really care about brands in sports 6. Casual 7. Fashionable
P23 (F)	Vitamins (Healtheries) Drinking Chocolate (Cadbury) Soft drink (Pepsi) Bottled water (Pump) Bus card Jacket Hair straightener Make Up (Mac) Perfumes (Kylie Minogue & Jo Malone) Laptop (HP) Shoes (Converse – Chucks) Car (Nissan)	1. Takes vitamins every morning 2. Likes hot drinks 3. Likes Pepsi and Coke 4. Follows trends 5. Health conscious 6. Exercises 7. Enjoys Pump water 8. Environment conscious 9. Student 10. Enjoys being different 11. Likes straightening hair and looking nice 12. Dresses up before going out 13. Tries to look nice 14. Comfortable with make-up 15. Presentable 16. Confident 17. Clean 18. Works 19. Can afford to buy perfumes 20. Uni student 21. Young Teenager 22. One in a crowd of people 23. Casual 24. Can afford a car 25. Freedom to go off
P24 (M)	Laptop (LG) Book (Java for Dummies) iPod Computer Monitor Bag (Rip Curl) Shoes (Nike) Xbox LCD TV Phone (Landline apparatus)	1. Bit of a computer nerd 2. Understands things in layman's terms 3. Enjoys music 4. One of the 'hip' crowd 5. Not too fussed about brands 6. Likes to use good quality stuff 7. Takes pride in footwear 8. Nerdy, uncool 9. Likes to watch Big TV

	Food (Wheatbix, Mengren noodles, tomato sauce) Cleaning products (Shower gel, shampoo, conditioner, and shaving cream) – Garnier Fructis	10. Wealthy 11. Connected to the outside world 12. Kiwi 13. Kind of poor 14. Too lazy to cook 15. Likes green 16. Doesn't want to spend too much money on hygiene
P25 (F)	Shoes (Adidas) Pair of jeans (Witchery) Jacket (Abercombie and Fitch) Vintage Jacket Ball dress (Laura Parker) Cosmetics – Eye and skin make up (Smashbox) Bronzer (Stiller) Tea (Fair Trade) Tomato Sauce (Watties) LCD TV (Giant Samsung) Movies (Moulin Rouge)	1. Loves her Adidas pair of shoes 2. Quite stylish 3. Functional 4. Expressive 5. Trendy 6. Frugal 7. Very cliché American girl 8. Put outfits together well 9. Not too out there with fashion trends 10. Dresses in what she feels comfortable 11. Likes to look good 12. Likes to dress up sometimes 13. Vintage – really important to her 14. Can make a classic piece work as a piece of fashion statement 15. Individualistic 16. Fashionable 17. Doesn't mind spending money on quality products 18. Loves doing make up before going out 19. Conscious person (ethical consumption) 20. Is in New Zealand and fitting in with the culture 21. Not as American as people think 22. Wealthy 23. Likes to watch certain type of films (girly-girly) 24. Connoisseur of films
P26 (M)	Arab dress Photograph of self wearing a hoodie in dad's workshop Computer Cosmetics - Hair, skin shaving, (Cetaphil – Skin cleanser) Shoes (Timberland) Mobile	1. Proud of who he is 2. Believes in his heritage, culture, religion 3. Adapted to Western lifestyle 4. Committed to work and Knows how to fix cars 5. Has never enjoyed cars 6. Messy 7. Not that responsible 8. Cares about what people think of him 9. Likes to spoil himself every now and then by buying expensive shoes 10. Typical teenager with mobile and things
P27 (F)	Cosmetics (Revlon (eye shadow), Maybelline (foundation), Napolean (lip gloss) Kleenex Tissues Perfume (Oscar de la Renta) Skin care - Mud mask, cleanser, and moisturizer (Skin Food) Technology – Cellphones iPod – Nano Digital Camera (Fuji) Laptop (Apple) Hair Straightener (ghd) Watch (Baby-G)	1. Likes to dress up and look nice 2. Student 3. Cares for skin 4. Proud of perfume 5. Likes to use natural things, soft things 6. Likes to stay in contact with everyone 7. Can afford to have nicer things 8. Cool 9. Family oriented person 10. Likes to take lot of photographs 11. Quite well off 12. Likes to take care of herself 13. Normal

	Jacket (Kathmandu) Netball shoes Shoes (Converse Chucks) Bottled water (H2Go) Wallet (Guess) Sunglasses (Wayfarers)	14. Likes to look nice in what she is wearing 15. Likes to be in with the trendy things 16. Serious about sports and netball 17. Quite fun, easy going and relaxed 18. Health conscious 19. Sophisticated 20. Wealthy 21. Kind of trendy 22. Bit different 23. Likes to have similar stuff but also likes to be a bit different
P28 (M)	(Dance sport gear) Dress (Dance sport gear) Dress (Dance sport gear) Latin shirt Dance sport gear (Trombone) Dance sport gear (Dress jacket) Necklaces (with Maori symbol) Asthma and hayfever pills Shampoo Deodorant T-Shirt (with Maori symbol) Jandals (Maori pattern) T-Shirt (Coma) Soccer T-shirt Bag (Billabong) Belt (Quicksilver) Shorts (Mossimo) Vodka (Smirnoff) and Beer (Tui) iPod, computer and mobile phone Scuba tank for diving Diving Watch Fishing Rod and map of huts in Fiordland	1. Bit different 2. Exuberant 3. Respects body and looks after himself (Cares about personal grooming) 4. Likes to fit in 5. Cool 6. Into outdoors 7. Techno-savvy 8. Fit and active 9. Maori 10. Enjoys drinking 11. Interested in the Arts 12. Has a sense of humour 13. Cares about their family 14. Likes the best 15. Respects culture and people 16. Likes to express himself

Appendix 10. Tables showing Product in Column 1, Applicable Proposition in Column 2, Representative Quotes in Column 3, and Self-related Characteristics in Column 4 for Two Sample Participants P1(F) and P28(M)

P1 (Female)

Product	Applicability of proposition	Representative Quote/s	Self-Related Characteristics
Barbecue Table	Affiliation... (C1)	<p>I'm the life of the party and I always want to organize things and always bring everyone around.. Friends...family... I want them all to get along and be happy and...</p> <p>I love the beach, I love the outdoors, barbeque and I just wanna always bring everyone together ...</p> <p>I'm free as a person, I don't like being controlled...I just want to be open all the time and I like the outside I guess .. happy and really free spirited...</p>	<p>Life of the party (sociable)</p> <p>Loves the outdoors</p> <p>Happy</p> <p>Free spirited</p>
Fruit	Affiliation... (C1)	I'm trying to be healthy now and...be happy , be jolly and just eat healthy...healthy life...	Health conscious
Car (VDub Golf)	Status (C2)	<p>ahh..I feel like a bit of an upmarket person...</p> <p>Upmarket say...say...above average...</p> <p>I always aim high...as it's my first car people were saying to me like my parents for example ..ohh...go buy a Honda or go buy a Toyota...it's cheap...blah, blah, blah...but no...I can't do that because image is really important to me...</p>	Aims high

Handbag	Uniqueness (C4)	<p>I don't like that... I want to break it up...just be different...well I've got a pink bag right now.</p> <p>I'm making a statement I am different, I don't follow trends, I don't like to be associated with everyone else, because I just don't.</p> <p>not friends...just people in general...like I ...not many people would actually have the guts to go and buy a hot pink bag and actually wear it out...I am me and I am confident I guess and...yeah...and I am not afraid to wear a pink bag or green pants]...very very confident</p> <p>not many people would actually have the guts to go and buy a hot pink bag and actually wear it out...I don't care...(says about you) courageous, strong person, strong personality..</p>	<p>Trend setter (doesn't follow trends)</p> <p>Confident</p> <p>Courageous</p> <p>Strong personality</p>
Bag (Louis Vuitton)	Uniqueness (C4) Status (C2)	<p>... it differentiates me but now everyone is like – I like your bag, I like your bag – can I borrow it?</p> <p>I care about fashion - but I'm not someone who says – aww – if you don't have that bag, I'm not gonna talk to you...not like that. But just for me personally, I like to wear the best, be the best, and always aim for the best....but I am a student...that's a lot harder right now than when I was working full time...</p>	<p>Fashion conscious</p> <p>University Student</p>
Shorts (Ksubi)	Affiliation... (C1) Status (C2) Uniqueness (C4) Age & Life Stage C6)	<p>Umm...they like it because my friends do wear that brand...most of them.</p> <p>It is quite expensive, quite upmarket...They are quite expensive...It is quite expensive, quite upmarket...– Like upmarket people? And people who live around New Market ...Remuera</p> <p>umm..I've had a really good upbringing ...so my mum had to do something about it, so she started going to Korea, and buying things from there and reselling</p>	<p>Has had a good upbringing</p>

		<p>them in Russia....and that business took off, and she did it all by herself ...and she always inspired to wear the best, for us to have the best toys, the best proper education, and that really inspired me ... and I want to stay at that level, I don't want to go down</p> <p>They design for people who want to be different from others.....they design for people who want to be different...</p> <p>People at a particular stage are not brand conscious...(younger sister)...she's still young...she doesn't really care...and she's younger...they'll wear whatever...do whatever...they don't really care about appearance that much</p>	Different from others
Perfumes (Lancome and Christian Dior)	Status (C2)	<p>But once again, I bought them because I like them and they smell amazing...just for my personal use... I really like it..i don't like it when people smell bad...and I always wanna ...you know once someone gives you a hug, and they say they've been smoking and they smell like smoke, and that's not very nice. Always like to be fresh, clean, smell good, look good....Says she takes care of herself...like I said from the start like those bananas represent how I treat myself or how I wanna take care of myself really</p> <p>That means you're not going to attract some bum from the street...or some smoker or someone you know... I don't mean like a smoker, I mean a drug addict or whatever...</p> <p>Somewhere when you're out and you're wanna make an impression I guess...</p>	Cares about personal grooming
Jeans (Ksubi)	Uniqueness (C4)	<p>a differentiated person. (laughs.) I guess you can tell by looking at me that I don't ever wear something that someone else will wear...I need to be original</p> <p>...yeah I try and buy from overseas or from different shops or even if I go say to NewMarket somewhere I'll buy things that I like not that everyone else wears from there.. something that suits me</p>	Needs to be original
Shoes	Affiliation... (C1)	<p>(saw shoes) them in a magazine - like that celebrities wear...I just want to look my best really and wear something that's different really...and it's really really cute as well</p>	

	Uniqueness (C4)	<p>...they know I'm going to wear something different and come up with something different so you know...</p> <p>that once again I like to set the trends I like to wear things that suit me.</p>	
Sunglasses (Gucci)	<p>Status (C2)</p> <p>Uniqueness (C4)</p>	<p>Once again, more posh, more upstyle</p> <p>I bought them... is because they're different and they suit me.</p> <p>I like to be very different</p> <p>I haven't seen them being sold here. This would mean no one else would have them. It is available but not those styles.</p>	<p>Posh</p> <p>Upstyle</p>

C1= Affiliation, association or belongingness with reference groups or community; C2=Status; C3=Ethnicity & Culture; C4=Uniqueness; C5= Cosmopolitanism; C6=Age & life stage; C7= Gender

P28 (Male)

Product	Applicability of proposition	Representative Quote/s	Self-Related Characteristics
Dress Latin Shirt Ballroom Latin shoes Dress Sports Jacket	Uniqueness (C4) Uniqueness (C4) Uniqueness (C4) Uniqueness (C4) Uniqueness (C4)	Well there is a picture of a trombone, my Latin Shirt, my ballroom Latin shoes, my sports jacket that I wear with the dance sport and my dress (tails). And I see that it obviously shows that I am interested in the artsI am a bit different than all the other people because not many people do ballroom dancing at my age anyway. So sets me apart a little... the impression I think they would get that I wasn't quite a mathematician or something like the equivalent to that, I think they would see a more exuberant kind of person maybe.	Interested in the Arts Bit different Exuberant
Dress Latin Shirt Ballroom Latin shoes Dress Sports Jacket	Age & Life stage (C6) Age & Life stage (C6) Age & Life stage (C6) Age & Life stage (C6) Age & Life stage (C6)	...I am a bit different than all the other people because not many people do ballroom dancing at my age anyway ...I would think I would be the exception to my age group	
Trombone	Uniqueness (C4)	...I know I can do something different to most people..	

Necklace (with Maori symbol)	Ethnicity & Culture (C3)	have part Maori in me because I am as white as you get, but I just thought I would show these photographs because it represents something I am proud of that I have got this ancestry of Maori and this is what I wear sometimes.	Maori
T-Shirt (with Maori symbols) Jandals (with Maori symbols)	Ethnicity & Culture (C3) Ethnicity & Culture (C3)	I just wear it (T-shirt and the jandals) normally, like if I go to the beach or something, just out and everyday. It's not crazy out there, that I am not wearing a flax t-shirt saying I am Maori or something, it is just a little bit kind of recognising my past Well first of all it would say they must have some connection to Maori. Then it would mean that obviously they're are proud, but then it would say perhaps they have values about certain things. I respect culture and people . Like the family values are slightly different. Just different perceptions. ... Like they are more collective, everyone is making sure they are together, whereas sometimes Pakeha families can be more individual but then they come back together,I feel my family is really close and we can talkbut obviously I have both but...I care about family	Respects culture and people Cares about their family
Asthmatic and hayfever pills	No construct clearly applies to Asthmatic and hayfever pills	To myself it is just saying I look after myself...	Looks after himself
Shampoo Deodorant	Status (C2) Status (C2)	Try and keep my hygiene up and kind of helps prevents sickness and stuff like that...I am a clean person and that I respect my body and look after myself and I am aware of people around me that I don't smell real bad or something...Yeah they (people) would be less likely to go up to someone who is smelling like they have just come out of the gutter.	Respects body and looks after himself (Cares about personal grooming)
Shampoo Deodorant	Affiliation...(C1) Affiliation...(C1)	I think it is expected in societies today that we have to use these things. Like if you are going to interact with people you must have a certain amount of hygiene...It just helps me fit in I suppose. <u>...(with)</u> Society.	Likes to fit in

Soccer (T-shirt)	Affiliation...(C1)	I will do this one here. This is me, kind of my brands, like these are the things that I think teenagers find important	
T-Shirt (Coma)	Affiliation...(C1)		
Soccer (T-shirt)	Uniqueness (C4)	These two t-shirts are intended to show humour. This one is actually a soccer t-shirt but my sister she got my last name on the back and put a 10, there is no soccer player with the name...but you know I just go around and just dance in it or whatever I do, but this one here is like the brand Puma, but is Coma and it has the little Puma....	Likes to express himself
T-Shirt (Coma)	Uniqueness (C4)	I don't take myself so seriously that I have to wear the best clothes all the time... more of express yourself rather than be scared to have some fun, instead of worrying what people think, It says that he probably has a sense of humour , he's different, he probably isn't stuck in the mud and real boring.	Has a sense of humour
Bag (Billabong)	Affiliation...(C1)	Because it shows that I am part of the teenagers and I want to fit in in places, because this is what all the teenagers enjoy.	
Belt (Quicksilver)	Affiliation...(C1)	Yeah that I want to fit in .	
Shorts (Mossimo)	Affiliation...(C1)	That I would want to fit in so I would want them to see me as part of the equal. They would describe me as brand aware. That I can try and be cool or something like that. I want to be cool obviously because everyone wants to be cool. the people who do wear these they would be because they would be looking for people who are the same as them and everyone looks for similarities in everyone.	Cool
Bag (Billabong)	Status (C2)	of an image of someone who is wearing just brands, you kind of think that oh they might be quite wealthy and then people generally get attracted to wealthy people because that breeds success you know and stuff, so that would advantage people. If	

Belt (Quicksilver) Shorts (Mossimo)	Status (C2) Status (C2)	they wear a brand because people could have that image of them that they think oh they are wealthy and successful.	
Vodka (Smirnoff) & Beer (Tui)	Affiliation...(C1)	This is like what people, teenagers drink, at parties. Again it is like complying with the teenage image...like that drinking is supposedly cool, but I don't drink because it is cool, I actually enjoy drinking and like the effect it has...	Enjoys drinking
Vodka (Smirnoff) & Beer (Tui)	Status (C2)	Well I think Tui, with the kind of going back to the branding with Billabong and stuff like that, that doesn't show wealth... I think if I had a Steinlager or Heineken that shows wealth	
iPod, computer & mobile phone	Age & Life stage (C6)	like teenagers everything is just technology based ..	
iPod, computer & mobile phone	Status (C2)	Okay well it says to myself that I want to have the best technology, because one it is good to use and two you look better to your peers	Likes the best
iPod, computer & mobile phone	Affiliation...(C1)	you can fit in if everyone has the flashest stuff.. That I am techno savvy as well, that I can use the computer well, and that I have a phone like most normal people.	Techno-savvy
Scuba tank for diving Diving watch Fishing rod and map of huts in Fiordland	Affiliation...(C1) Affiliation...(C1) Affiliation...(C1)	I am into outdoors and I do tramping, fishing and scuba diving...to me, that I am fit and active and that I am trying everything in life I suppose, I am not just sticking home watching TV....(to friends, peers) the same kind of thing...that I am fit and active and kind of full of life, if that is the expression.... if I am more active in getting out there, but also I get to meet a whole different kind of people....if I go tramping I could meet international people, I could meet naturalists, I can meet a whole different vast of people and it kind of builds up your perspective on the world, it enlarges it so you are not just stuck in your little computer world. I can talk about experiences as well after....if someone has similar experiences then	Into outdoors Fit and active

		obviously you are going to get along and it just gives you a better knowledge base about the world....	
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C1= Affiliation, association or belongingness with reference groups or community; C2=Status; C3=Ethnicity & Culture; C4=Uniqueness; C5= Cosmopolitanism; C6=Age & life stage; C7= Gender

Appendix 11. Interview Transcript 28

Legend:

Products and/or brands in Photographs - Underlined

Yellow - Discourse of self-related characteristics

Green - Discourse of affiliation or belongingness

Grey - Discourse of power

Thank you very much for your time, effort and participation in my research. I see you have arranged these pictures in an order you would like to speak from so where would you like to speak from first?

I will start in the arts section.

The arts section, so I see you have five pictures here. Can you describe these pictures and tell me what they mean, what do they say about you?

Well there is a picture of a trombone, my Latin shirt, by ballroom Latin shoes, my sports jacket that I wear with the dance sport and my dress (tails). And I see that it obviously shows that I am interested in arts.

Okay - what do you think it says about you to your peers?

Well, it probably says, I am a bit different than all the other people because not many people do ballroom dancing at my age anyway.

So sets me apart a little bit, I think.

So it sets you apart, in what ways?

Well there are stereotypes with arts and stuff - so you are labelled, airy, arty farty, out of it, you know. It is more of people who are eccentric I think, like the people who are into arts, so that is the impression I think they would get.

That I wasn't quite a mathematician or something like that - the equivalent to that, I think they would see a more exuberant kind of person maybe.

And when you say exuberant what do you mean, how do you explain that?

Well, my understanding is something like outgoing, and shows lots of personality in their day to day life, that is my understanding of it.

And what do you think is communicated to your friends or peers?

Well, just if they look at that, and they know that I am in to the arts, then I think that is what they would have an impression and my dedication as well.

So what kind of people wouldn't be doing this sort of thing, how would you describe them?

Nearly normal people! I would think I would be the exception to my age group

So when you say normal what does that mean?

People who, well if you are talking about brands, they would be wearing all the latest brands and stuff like that, that is what I have an image of. That they would be going to all the parties and, I don't know they would probably take life a bit serious, I am not sure, or not the work serious, but they would take themselves seriously and worry about everyone else. The impression on what everyone thinks about them.

Okay...?

It is just that, if you say a classic teenager, they wouldn't be in to the trombone and stuff, it wouldn't be cool. It would be more like an electric guitar or they would be listening to their radio rather than playing a trombone you know.

So does this sort of choice of things advantage you or disadvantage you?

Well advantages are in myself, that I know that I can do something different to most people and so it's like, 'hey I am good at something that others aren't'. But it disadvantages me through that people don't fully understand what I do. So if I am in a social environment they will be talking about, I don't know- another sport like soccer or something that most people know about, well I can't come in to the conversation and say 'hey I do dance sport - this is what I do blah-blah-blah' they won't understand it. So they won't be interested, so I have to comply with everyone else's conversations rather than start my own so in that kind of sense, yeah.

Thanks - That was good. What next do we have?

We can use the cultural kind of ones. I have my necklace, Pounamu actually, of Maori significance.

Very nice.

Well people seeing me wouldn't actually have any idea that I have part Maori in me because I am as white as you get, but I just thought I would show these photographs because it represents something I am proud of, that I have got this ancestry of Maori, and this is what I wear sometimes.

Okay so this is a necklace and this is a t-shirt?

Yeah a t-shirt just with a little Maori symbol.

So where do you wear this stuff?

I just wear it (the T-shirt and the jandals) normally, like if I go to the beach or something, just out and everyday. It is not crazy out there - I am not wearing a flax t-shirt saying I am Maori or something, it is just a little bit kind of recognising my past and it is not in your face, it is just subtle so I feel proud so I will just wear a little bit of it.

So you feel proud! So what do you think it says about you to your friends or peers, people in your age-group?

Well first of all it would say they must have some connection to Maori.

And what does that mean then?

Then it would mean that obviously they are proud, but then it would say perhaps they have values about certain things. I respect culture and people.

Like?

Like the family values are slightly different. Just different perceptions.

In what ways?

Like they are more collective, everyone is making sure they are together, whereas sometimes Pakeha families can be more individual but then they come back together. But you know you have to come from a base and I feel my family is really close and we can talk about anything and it is fine. But a Pakeha family I think, it is a little bit different maybe, but obviously I have both but... I care about family.

So how do you think when you wear this, does it advantage you, does it disadvantage you, or do you think others are missing out on something?

It advantages me, I am not really sure. It doesn't necessarily disadvantage me, it advantages me to show that I have this cultural importance and people can recognise it straight away, I respect culture and people. Well it could disadvantage me if they were against Maoris for some reason and then they would have this preconception, so maybe 'oh well mustn't like him' but then if people are reverse, and they relate to Maori and understand it then obviously it would advantage me because they would be more open to talking to me.

So it is both ways?

Yeah it is both ways.

Okay, that was very good. What do we have next?

We will use the kind of health, hygiene, I suppose.

Okay that is your hygiene, health you call it?

Yeah

Okay so where are we going to start from and I will just number this?

I have just got products here that I use.

So can you please explain.

So we have got this, this one here is actually the asthmatic and hayfever pills. Then I have got some shampoo and deodorant, which I use especially for dancing because you get smelly.

So tell me what do these pictures say about you to yourself?

To myself, it is just saying that I look after myself, try and keep my hygiene up and kind of helps prevent sickness and stuff like that.

And what does this stuff say about you to your friends, peers?

Hopefully it says that I am a clean person and that I respect my body and look after myself and I am aware of people around me that I don't smell real bad or something.

And do these brands or labels matter at all or could they be any brand?

Well to me it doesn't matter. To me it doesn't matter.

So what matters then, after all you picked some deodorant, you picked some shampoo or whatever, so what is more important here?

Just that I have a product. I don't actually look at 'oh it is Adidas deodorant I must have it', I think I just need deodorant so I get something, which obviously I am not going to get something that smells awful. But if it is deodorant and it is going to stop me sweating, then I will use it. I don't care about the brand and with Lynx shower gel, I am not going to say that I am never going to use it if it is not Lynx, it doesn't matter to me but to

other people it could. Like, what I see as the typical teenager could be like insisting that they have this brand, that they must have Adidas, because it must work because the brand promotes itself as the best, you know so they have to have that and that is what all their friends have so they must have that, but to me it doesn't matter.

Okay and we have talked about what these things say about you to your friends and peers - did we?

Yes we did.

What would happen if people were not to use this stuff?

I think it is expected in societies today that we have to use these things. Like if you are going to interact with people you must have a certain amount of hygiene you know, otherwise everyone is just going to turn the other way and run from you.

Which means these help...?

They help in my appearance, they look after my skin and then other ones help with my body odour and hair and society today is such a visual, everyone expects everyone to look great and so you have to somehow look after yourself, although I don't care myself as much. I could go out with my hair all messed up, but still I use these things to help me.

So you said society...

Yeah they would be less likely to go up to someone who is smelling like - they have just come out of the gutter.

Okay...

It just helps me fit in I suppose.

Fit in with whom?

Society.

Society meaning?

Everyone, it is expected that you have to do this. So it helps me do every day things, like to talk to someone else, otherwise they would get false impressions of who I am and judge me on my odour or something.

Okay and you don't want that to happen - naturally.

No.

Okay - that is very interesting. What next do we have?

I will do this one here. This is me, kind of my brands, like these are the things that I think teenagers find important.

So where are you going to start?

I will start from here. These two t-shirts are intended to show humour.

Are they? So what is this?

This one is actually just a soccer t-shirt, but my sister she got my last name on the back and put a 10, there is no soccer player with the name *****. But you know I just go around and just dance in it or whatever I do, but this one here is like the brand Puma, but it is Coma and it has the little Puma.

So it is inverted, so it is humour...

Yeah.

Which means what? Did you buy this somewhere?

Thailand. My sister bought it for me but I wear it and that is what I like to wear, and I have other t-shirts like it but I like that.

So what does it say about you to yourself and what does it say about you to your peers?

I don't take myself so seriously that I have to wear the best clothes all the time and that, I don't know I don't take life like it is, I don't know, more of express yourself rather than be scared to have some fun, instead of worrying what people think, you know like some people might think that is real stupid why would you put your name on that, but you don't care you just do it because you like it.

So what does it say about you to your peers?

It says that he probably has a sense of humour, he's different, he probably isn't stuck in the mud and real boring.

So when you wear this stuff - does it advantage you or disadvantage you in any way?

It depends on the people around you.

Where do you wear them?

I can wear them anywhere. I feel comfortable wearing them most places unless there is a standard of dress needed, but it would advantage me by showing my personality without, like I wouldn't have to talk and you would already know that I had some humour, if you found it funny obviously. But it would disadvantage me with people who judged too much on appearances who didn't like it then they wouldn't come up and talk to me.

And do you think others are missing out on something?

They are missing out, if they have something that they want to enjoy and show, then they are missing out on it. They need to express themselves.

Okaygood, thanks, what next do we have?

Shall I go through these ones?

So tell me what are these?

This is like me kind of just blending in with everyone else I suppose.

Can you explain what these pictures are about?

Okay Billabong, Quicksilver, Mossimo - they are quite big brands.

And so what is this, a Billabong bag?

Yeah it is a Billabong bag, a Quicksilver belt and Mossimo jean shorts.

So why did you take these pictures?

Because it shows that I am part of the teenagers and I want to fit in places, because this is what all the teenagers enjoy. This is what looks cool apparently; this is what media makes it out to be cool.

So when you say cool what does that mean?

That is like what the celebrities use and what...

Cool is the products celebrities use or the word?

The brands that celebrities promote and it is pretty much the celebrities that use that, and then it channels down to the people that watch the shows, and then it goes down.

Okay and so when you wear this stuff, where do you wear it?

Everywhere, just mainstream places.

So what do you think it says about you to yourself?

Yeah that I want to fit in.

And how does it describe you to your friends, peers?

That I would want to fit in, so I would want them to see me as part of the equal.

So how would they describe you when they see you wearing this kind of stuff?

They would describe me as brand aware. That I can try and be cool or something like that.

And that is what you want them to?

Yeah that is what I think they would perceive me, I don't know because I have different...I mean I don't really mind if I don't wear a brand, so when I see someone wearing a brand it doesn't jump out to me, but if I see someone wearing only brands, like Quiksilver from head to toe, I kind of think of them kind of being under confident in a way, because they don't have any expression of who they are. It is just trying to be cool and to some extent I like the brands, I want to wear them, I want to be cool obviously because everyone wants to be cool.

So if people are not wearing these things at all?

I don't really notice it.

Do you think they are advantaged, disadvantaged or missing out on something?

They are advantaged because they are normally expensive as well - the brands. So I think you have a kind of an image of someone who is wearing just brands, you kind of think that, oh, they might be quite wealthy and then people generally get attracted to wealthy people because that breeds success you know and stuff, so that would advantage people. If they wear a brand because people could have that image of them that they think - oh they are wealthy and successful.

And if they don't wear the brands...?

They wouldn't be disadvantaged from me but from the people who do wear these, they would be because they would be looking for people who are the same as them, and everyone looks for similarities in everyone.

So they would...?

Yeah they would be excluded from the groups that found this important, found that the brands were important.

So do you think they are important in life, as you said it helps fitting in and things?

Well I think you need to have some aspect of your life with those brands because you are going to have to try and get along with lots of people, lots of different people, so you need to be able to adapt to different situations and you might have to comply.

Okay - what next do we have?

This is the alcohol. This is like what people, teenagers drink, at parties.

So what is this you have taken pictures of?

Smirnoff Vodka and Tui beer.

Do you drink these?

Yeah, if I go to a party I will drink that.

So what does it say about you to yourself and how do these things describe you to your peers?

Again it is like complying with the teenage image, like that drinking is supposedly cool, but I don't drink because it is cool, I actually enjoy drinking and like the effect it has.

Okay - And so you have Tui and Smirnoff - why not some other brands?

Well that was all we had there. But normally just drink those ones because I enjoy the taste of those brands.

Do you think you are gaining some advantage or disadvantage?

Well I think Tui, with the kind of going back to the branding with Billabong and stuff like that, that doesn't show wealth. I think if I had a Steinlager or Heineken, that shows wealth, and I prefer those beers for some reason.

So what does this say about you to yourself and about you to others?

The brand or?

Both, whatever?

Tui says I don't really care too much about what I drink, and if I had a Heineken, it would say that I prefer more quality beer.

Okay so you don't care, is it because of resource constraints at this point?

Yeah.

Which says that..

Well I rely on my parents for lots of things. So if they have it in the cupboard, then I will be having that. But if I have some money then I would prefer to choose a higher quality beer and enjoy that.

So people who don't drink, what are they missing out on? Are they missing out on something?

Well drinking potentially gives a lot of fun, so if they found that not drinking wasn't fun, then they are missing out on fun. But if they are fine with not drinking and they have fun, then they are not missing out on anything.

Okay - and what next?

The technology maybe. Well this is just, like for teenagers everything is just technology based, and it is just the next thing, next model. I don't necessarily have the flashiest things, like the iPod – that is a very old iPod, but I still have it.

So what does it say about you to yourself and what does it say about you to your friends, to your peers?

Okay - well it says to myself that I want to have the best technology, because one it is good to use, and two, you look better to your peers. You can fit in if everyone has the flashiest stuff. But obviously there are resources that I can't acquire what I want, but I still have it.

So what do these things say about you to your peers, friends? That you are?

That I am techno savvy as well, that I can use the computer well, and that I have a phone like most normal people.

What do you mean normal?

Like I suppose it is the majority, it is kind of like a necessity now to have a phone, like even little children have it. So you are like kind of the exception, if you don't have a phone. So it is not necessarily me trying to make a statement, it is me trying to fit in.

So what would happen if you didn't have these things?

Well one, I wouldn't be able to communicate using the channels that are available today, like you exclude yourself from many things like Facebook and Bebo and just email. If you exclude yourselves from those, then you can exclude yourselves from many conversations. So like if they are talking about 'did you see that on Facebook so and so did that' and I wouldn't have any idea what Facebook was, so you kind of separate yourself from your peers if you don't have these things.

Okay - that was good, what next do you have?

These ones here were just me showing that I am in to outdoors and I do tramping, fishing and scuba diving.

So what are these pictures of?

This picture is of a scuba tank that you use when you dive, it is your air bottle and then the one on the right is a picture of a poster that shows all the huts in the Fiordland area and I have been to quite a few of them so I just thought that would be significant to show you where I have been for my tramping.

So what do these pictures say about you to yourself?

To me that I am fit and active, and that I am trying everything in life I suppose, I am not just sticking home watching TV.... I am getting out there experiencing, I don't know, what I suppose the planet has for me and experiencing all these bits of New Zealand and knowing my country and so... It is kind of blending in with my family as well because my dad scuba dives, and he enjoys tramping and outdoors, and it is what I love, and I feel you go to a different place and it is a different world than what every day is.

So what do these things say about you to your friends, peers?

The same kind of thing, that I love the outdoors, and that I am fit and active and kind of full of life, if that is the expression.

What kind of people wouldn't be using this sort of stuff or doing these things in your age group?

Like the people who find social events too important or something, like going to a party or something like that, or the people, the guys that are obese maybe who are not active or something.

So they might be ..?

Unhealthy, yeah.

So how are you advantaged with all this, I assume that is what you are suggesting - that you are advantaged?

Well advantaged in health I suppose, if I am more active in getting out there, but also I get to meet a whole different kind of people. So at university, I meet some type of person, if I go tramping I could meet international people, I could meet naturalists, I can meet a whole different vast of people, and it kind of builds up your perspective on the world. It enlarges it so you are not just stuck in your little computer world. I can talk about experiences as well after.

Okay you can talk about the experiences - and how does all this help then if you talk of all the experiences?

Building contacts, so if someone has similar experiences, then obviously you are going to get along, and it just gives you a better knowledge base about the world, and you can bring back memories to help you with different situations.

That was very interesting. I am very happy with all that you have explained. Thank you once again for your participation and time.

Appendix 12. Online Survey Questionnaire