TEENAGERS' BRAND RELATIONSHIPS IN DAILY LIFE
– a qualitative study of brand meanings and their motivational ground among teenagers in Helsinki and London metropolitan areas

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My dear thesis,

We have now reached the end of our mutual road, and it is time for you to continue your life as an independent individual. I have raised you as well as I possibly could, and I hope I have given you the necessary tools for building a successful future. Although I have raised you alone and independently, a number of people have helped and supported me in this mission. The least I can do is to let you know about them and their vital contributions. So, may I please have your attention for one more (last) time.

I would like to thank Dr Pekka Tuominen, who encouraged me to consider embarking upon doctoral studies. This happened one evening in the mid-1990s in a gloomy corner of Monttu, the party venue of TSE students. So, if you ever regret the day you were born don't exclude him from your list… Managing the doctoral courses while working as a marketing practitioner gave me the necessary balance regarding both my academic and practical interests. Further, I had become acquainted with the "softer side" of marketing when I joined the cross-disciplinary doctoral courses run by Dr Juha Panula, and learned to approach consumption and brands from perspectives other than the managerial. This opened my eyes and blew my mind, and also helped to make me the kind of researcher I am today. Despite being the Dean at the University of Lapland Juha showed great interest in you while I was drawing the first sketches in my mind and thinking what kind of an individual I would like you to become. I am extremely grateful to him for his interest and support at the critical primary stage of your development. I will return to him later in this note since I was privileged to share his expertise at the end of your puberty, the final and critical stage of the process.

Raising you was not easy, because you were the odd one out, "An Englishman in New York" ("turkkulaine Helssingis" in Finnish). You were not like many of your peers, a clear-cut and well-defined individual whom peers and older people understood and accepted easily. When I as a single parent asked more experienced people questions about your development and upbringing I was usually faced with ignorance and questions instead of any kind of directional or guiding answers. As a consequence I soon accepted the fact that you were a child that was destined to float quite freely and find quite independently the right course down the Hudson River. I also learned to be

active and to seek knowledge from actors outside of your obvious social environment. I am extremely grateful to have had Dr Terhi-Anna Wilska's guidance in tackling the challenges of your development. On top of her personal engagements she has shown an immense interest in you, introducing me to the exciting field of youth research, and thereby helping me largely to construct your characterizing features. She has my highest admiration both as an alert and unique personality and as a multi-faceted and accomplished researcher in the area of youth consumption.

Academic and practical worlds of research collided in a productive way when I met Mrs Pirjo Ekman, managing director of a Finnish market-research company. She showed a lot of interest in you, although she had numerous children of her own. As a market researcher of the highest standard she offered me a shortcut to communication with you. Thanks to her I learned to ask you questions in an appropriate way, which gave us a warm, close and open relationship with a lot of shared experiences and thoughts. Pirjo has shown ongoing interest in you and I'm happy to say that she has become a friend of our family. She also introduced me to Dr Jukka Törrönen, who shared his expertise and encouraged me to continue raising you without regard to the clear-cut textbook approaches that would have restrained your individuality and freedom. I am deeply grateful to Jukka for his time and his interest in you.

The "downside" of Pirjo's input was that you talked so much that I had a tough time getting a grip on all the data you generated. Fortunately I became acquainted with Dr Pekka Räsänen, who taught me to use NVivo-software in the analysis of your insightful accounts. I am also grateful to him for his useful comments regarding your personal development.

Your free floating ended in the autumn of 2007 when I fished you out of the freezing Hudson River with the help of Dr Rami Olkkonen and Dr Juha Panula. Up until that moment you had been a bright, insightful and talkative individual with a lot of future potential, but lacking in stamina, structure, clarity and approachability, particularly among new acquaintances. After having interacted with you and analyzed you for a number of hours, Rami and Juha asked to meet me in private in order to talk about you. I must admit that I was shocked at their first question: "Are you ready to work hard?" We discussed a lot and agreed on your development during your late puberty. Despite the workload that was expected of me I was very lucky and relieved to have found two people in your immediate social environment that understood you holistically and were ready to support your development on the basis of who you were at that time. I deeply appreciate Rami's expertise, valuable remarks, genuine optimism, open communication, highly developed skills of empathy, and fluent management of the process of your late development. Not only did he assist in constructing your personality and abilities, he also

understood our needs for support as a household and was ready to work for it right from the beginning.

As I mentioned earlier, our paths crossed with that of Dr Juha Panula at this critical final stage. We were privileged to have such an esteemed cross-disciplinary marketing academic and a unique personality in our lives during your late teenage years. Together with Rami he guided me in re-structuring you into a fine young individual with clarity, structure, depth and easy "access"/approachability. His insights and suggestions helped me to see and understand you the way I had wanted to without perhaps realizing it prior to this reunion. I am extremely happy to see that you have adopted some of his fine characteristics and abilities.

At the very final phase, my reviewers Dr Johanna Moisander and Dr Päivi Eriksson made very valuable suggestions that further clarified your self, making you a more rigorous and determined individual. I was excited to realize your further personal growth. I truly appreciate Johanna's and Päivi's expertise, their interest and the efforts they have invested in you. Furthermore, it is an honor to have Dr Moisander responsible for your final check-up at the forthcoming official defense. Your linguistic abilities were revised by Mrs Joan Nordlund, who managed to make your communication more succinct. I highly appreciated her intense dedication to you.

Although I enjoyed every moment with you I sometimes needed a break and visited academic single-parent bars. On one occasion I met Dr Anne Rindell, who was also at the time a doctoral student struggling with parenting her divergent branded offspring. We shared our worries and experiences, and had many good laughs. I am deeply grateful to Anne for her insights into our mutual postmodern approach to brands, and I am also happy to have her as a friend of the family today.

Last but not least, I wish to express my deep gratitude to Dr Leila Hurmerinta, who guided me through your whole developmental process despite having many descendents of her own. Her door, telephone line, ears and mind were always open to us. Her support and interest in you were limitless, and her cheerful and positive presence was always a pleasure to face.

In addition, the following people shared their expertise and knowledge or gave their support during your development:

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Our warm thanks to you all!

My thesis, you would not exist without the exciting insights of the brilliant pupils who took part in the process of your development, particularly the interviewees. I owe an immense debt of gratitude to the students of Helsingin normaalilyseo and Haukilahden koulu in the Helsinki metropolitan area, and the City of London School for Girls and the Latymer Upper School in London. I would also like to thank the parents who allowed their children to take part in the study. Moreover, without the interest and vital co-ordination of the personnel in the respective schools you would not be what you are today. Thus, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my former Finnish lecturer Mrs Kaisa Lange, Ms Anne-Mari Karvonen and Dr Markku Pyysiäinen, the principle of Helsingin normaalilyseo, Mrs Marjatta Häkkinen at Haukilahden koulu and its principal Ari Suistola, Mrs Roisin Babuta at Latymer Upper School and deputy principal Andrew Douglas at the City of London School for Girls. It was as pleasant to interact with Kaisa in this context as it was to be her pupil in the 1980s at "Norssi". In addition, I highly appreciated Mrs Babuta's and Mr Douglas' courage, and their interest in the doctoral study of an unknown youth researcher from Finland. The international data made you richer, wider and more comprehensive. I learned to know you mostly in my workroom in downtown Helsinki and in venues provided by the respective schools. In addition, some of our interaction took place in a conference room at the Esport Center, for which I would like to address my warm thanks to Mr Ferid Ainetdin and Ms Faize Ainetdin.

You remind me a lot of myself. I am pleased.

I will now conclude our discussion and address some words directly to the people who have had an influence on my personal development.

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I was happy to become familiar with the music of "Staind" during these years. It provided me with a vital sensory pleasure during the ups and downs of this process. After long hours in my workroom I used to turn on my mp3-player

and walk by the beautifully illuminated and usually very windy and dark coast of Helsinki, and listen to and relate to songs such as "So far away", "Suffer", "Rainy day parade", "Break away", "For you", "Believe" and "Epiphany". My head was emptied when I arrived at home, and the occasional research worries did not affect my sleep.

Long before my interest in Staind arose I was privileged to grow up and spend my days with my grandmother Benet while my mother was working. She took great care of me, picked me up from kindergarten, waited for me to come home from elementary school, always standing in the same place in front of the window, and came at the age of 77 to see my first official soccer game in which I scored one own goal and another goal for my team. I was very fortunate to grow up surrounded by her wisdom, charisma and love. Unfortunately, she passed away a month before my TSE admission test: she has left an empty space. She loved to see well- and traditionally dressed men, so I guess she would not have minded seeing me in a tailcoat defending my thesis.

I learned to know my other grandmother, Zeytüne, better when I moved to Turku for my studies at TSE. After her weekly home-cooked dinners in her apartment on Puutarhakatu ("Garden street") we used to discuss a lot while watching her favorite TV show "The Bold and the Beautiful". Although my childhood friends in Helsinki thought I was de-ranged to move to Turku, I was really pleased to have done so. I came to know my grandmother better, and realized that I had inherited her interest in well-grounded discussion. She was present at my Master's graduation ceremony, but passed away at the beginning of this millennium. I would at this point like to express my gratitude to her son and my father Urhan, who has steadily supported me in my diverse doings.

Before moving on to the three women in my life, I would like to mention some of my friends and my "second family". First there are my two cousins. Haris, I am deeply grateful to you for your friendship, insightful discussions and support of various kinds before and during this long and occasionally difficult stage of my life. Fide, in addition to being a friend you have been involved in both of my theses. Back in 1993 you saved the schedule of my master's thesis by typing it from the messy pages of my booklets. With my one-and-a half-finger-touch-type system it would have taken ages. With regard to this thesis you transcribed the Finnish interviews and looked through the whole thing a couple of times. I am grateful to you for your role. Kajus, I am fortunate to have you as a friend – you define the word "friend". Petri Taneli, I have been more than happy to stay in touch with you, and to know that we still share the special sense of humour we developed in "Onnela" kindergarten. Eeva, I am also very happy to be connected to you and to see our children playing together after our twelve years in the same school class and a couple

of years at the same company. Quite a common history, some might say! Finally, special thanks are due to my soccer team Kiffen, including the chairman Timo Huotinen. I have experienced great moments with Kiffen I would not otherwise have, and it still is my second family in the form of senior soccer of the highest national standard.

Of the three women in my life my wife Suzan is the first in line. A lot of things have happened, others might have and some did not during these years. I am grateful to you for your love and support, particularly during the final stages of this process. In addition, you are a great mother to our daughter.

Aida, my lively and joyful daughter, you have been my main supporter during this process without knowing it, with your exhilarating perceptions, loud laughter and world-record runs into my arms, smiling, when I have come to pick you up from kindergarten day after day. I have been a privileged father in that I have been able to be with you more than many fathers would wish to be with their offspring. I hope it has resulted in more than just well-founded sentences to support your diverse wants and needs in your current daily life – "Daddy, I want this, because… Yeah but I need that, because…".

My mother Gölten, I would never have reached this final step in the life of a student without your active and self-sacrificial role in bringing me up. Your constant, limitless and unconditional love and support, as well as your dedicated acknowledgement of the importance of education turned this unruly and wild, ball-kicking child into a responsible pupil at school. I cannot express how much I appreciate today your exams at home the evening before the actual exams at school. The latter were usually easier. I am deeply grateful to you for your love and altruistic support in my doings in and outside of the academic world.

Dedicated to my mother

Helsinki, 18.3.2009
Samil A. Aledin

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1   Research area

In April 1993, the most impatient Wall Street analysts were ready to iron their dark suits for a brand funeral. Philip Morris Ltd., the owner of the widely known and highly appreciated brand icon Marlboro, announced that it would cut the price of its cigarettes by 20% in order to compete more effectively for market shares with manufacturers of low-priced cigarettes. The analysts made a lot of hasty conclusions about the future of brands: "If great almighty Marlboro was not able to deal with a severe price competition, which brand would?" (Klein 2001, 30). Thus, the final countdown was believed to have started.

Now, more than fifteen years after the famous "Marlboro Friday", it seems that Marlboro and the whole branding industry are doing very well. Brands have become important elements of youth and popular culture in our society, which educates and fosters more brand-dependent consumers than any other constructing cultures and societies that are heavily influenced by brands and the importance of symbolic consumption. The aim of this study is to enhance understanding of what brands mean at the peak of their influence, and the focus is on their relationships with teenagers aged between 13 and 15. Brand consumption is known to have an important role especially in the early teenage years when children start to form their identities.

Given the results of various brand-relationship studies suggesting that a substantial number of consumers stay loyal to their childhood brands, marketers are understandably keen to influence their future consumers as early as possible. Nostalgia and childhood associations may strongly influence adult brand allegiance. Brands that create bonds with young teenagers, and then hold true over time, are likely to maintain a powerful advantage over competitors as their "loyalists" enter later life (Lindstrom & Seybold 2003, 47-48). Teenagers have become more and more difficult to comprehend and to influence as a group of consumers due to the decrease in heterogeneity, and the rise of individualism and anti-brand movements in today's socio-cultural environment.

The American Marketing Association defines a *brand* as a "name, sign or symbol used to identify items or services of the seller(s) and to differentiate them from the goods of competitors". According to Kapferer (1997) in

addition to this differentiation, one of the main functions of the brand is to present the unique and invisible qualities that cannot be perceived unambiguously with the senses (Kapferer 1997, 29). David Aaker (1991) suggests that a brand is a "mental box", and defines brand equity as the assets and liabilities linked to the name and symbol that adds to (or subtracts from) the value provided by a product or a service (Aaker 1991, 15). This mental box definition is relevant to this study, because I aim to enhance understanding of the diverse aspects of teenagers' brand relationships in their daily lives through meanings they carry and diverse motives behind them.

According to Fornäs (1998), culture is the aspect of human interaction in which meanings are created through the use of symbols, and which incorporates diverse forms of style generation and communicative activities. Its preconditions include certain common codes and experiences, but there is also room for differences. Thus, culture includes both what people have in common and what differentiates them. In this thesis, brands are studied as symbols that generate meanings in the minds of consumers, differentiate people, and join them together (see Fornäs 1998, 167–169).

The study is designed to benefit both marketing practitioners and academics and youth research. For marketing practitioners, it offers an overview of how young teenagers experience and utilise brands and their meanings in their daily lives during the vulnerable stage of their personal development. Marketing academics will increase their brand-user knowledge of this special and sensitive consumer group, and witness the science of marketing being combined with other behavioural disciplines such as psychology and social psychology. Finally, youth research will gain insights into the lives of teenagers in terms of brand relationships.

1.2 Guiding concepts and bodies of theoretical knowledge related to consumer-brand relationships

1.2.1 Environments of brand-meaning development

Relationships between brands and consumers are conceived under the influence of stimuli and actors in physical, social and marketing environments. The physical environment consists of the nonhuman physical elements that comprise the field in which consumer behaviour occurs. In addition to non-spatial elements such as temperature and time, they include spatial factors such as cities, buildings, stores, malls and other physical objects. The social environment covers culture, subcultures and social class on the macro level,

and typical face-to-face social interactions among smaller groups of people such as families, reference groups and teachers on the micro level (Peter & Olson 1993, 382–387).

The marketing environment includes all the social and physical stimuli associated with marketing strategies, including promotional action, advertising (including stars as endorsers of a brand) and brand distribution (Peter & Olson, 1993, 389). Thus, the marketing environment basically consists of the aspects of the physical and social environment that are directly controlled by brand marketers. These three environments interact, and influence each other as well as consumers (see Figure 1).

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┌──────────────────┐          ┌──────────────────┐
│    Physical      │  ◄──►    │     Social       │
│   environment    │          │   environment    │
└──────────────────┘          └──────────────────┘
        ▲        ┌──────────────────┐        ▲
        │        │    Marketing     │        │
        └───►    │   environment    │   ◄────┘
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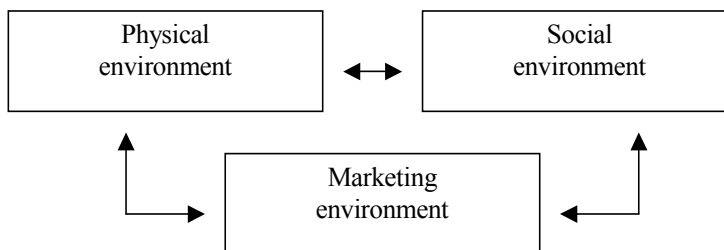
Figure 1. Environments influencing the relationship between consumers and brands. (Adapted from Peter & Olson 1993)

A meaning turns a product into a brand, and manifests the link (e.g., self-brand connection, consumer-brand relationship) between the brand and the consumer. A certain brand may carry numerous and diverse meanings in the eyes of various consumers in different contexts and periods of time. These meanings are not fixed stigmas in the minds of consumers, but dynamic phenomena that develop in the social environment. Morris and Martin (2000) define a *brand meaning* as the consumer's perception or interpretation of the brand, and his or her affective reaction to it (Morris & Martin 2000, 80). This combines Kleine and Kernan's (1993) meaning- or interpretation-based definition, which acknowledges an interaction between individuals, brands and contexts as the source of brand meanings, with Friedman's (1986) so-called psychological meaning of products: the psychological meaning of a product (or a brand) is its meaning to the consumer and his or her affective reaction to it (Friedman 1986, 5; Szalay & Deese 1978, 2). Fournier (1991) also elucidates the affective element in her division of brand meaning into attribute-based, emotional and commonality dimensions (Fournier 1991, 738).

According to Harrell (1986), perception is the process of recognising, selecting, organising and interpreting stimuli (Harrell 1986, 66). The central element in the interpreting process of social actors is the creation of meaning in order to make sense of something. It is to understand what an individual has come to know within the context of some particular moral universe (Jaffe &

Miller 1994, 53). The perception of goods and services is affected by the stimuli to which an individual is exposed and the way these stimuli are given meaning (Foxall, Goldsmith & Brown 1998, 52). When an individual matches an external stimulus he or she has received via his or her internal patterns of thought and concepts, he or she has given a perception meaning (Fiske 1990, 25). These internal patterns of thoughts and concepts are socio-psychological in nature, and the "process of matching" is influenced by the motives that direct individual behaviour (Foxall, Goldsmith & Brown 1998, 52). In sum, *brand meanings* could be understood to derive from the consumer's matching of the external stimuli and the internal organisation of patterns, thoughts or affections that are driven by diverse socio-psychological motives.

Ligas and Cotte (1999) identify three environments in which the development and transfer of brand meaning takes place as a result of an interchange involving the marketing, the individual and the social environments (see Figure 2). Each of these has an effect on the uniform way in which consumers identify and interact with a brand. The *marketing environment* consists of the meanings that develop as a consequence of brand management. The meanings developed in the *individual environment* refer to the ways in which consumers wish to be perceived by other people, and additionally how a person wishes to present him or herself through the use of specific products. Thus, the role of the self is emphasised in the creation of brand meanings (Ligas & Cotte 1999, 610–611).
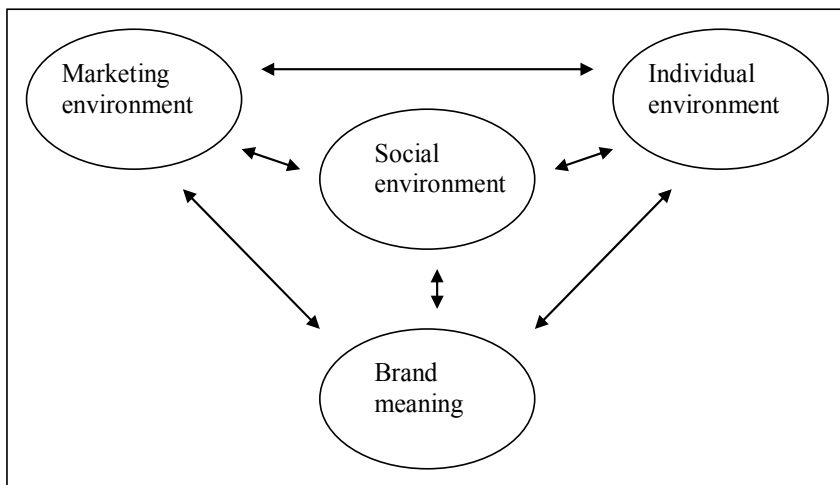
Figure 2. Environments of brand-meaning development. (Adapted from Ligas & Cotte 1999)

Brand meanings are formed as a result of negotiation in the *social environment* in which the consensus is reached, and this in turn facilitates

communication and interaction. Thus, these three environments interact with one another: consumers refer to the meanings created in both the marketing environment and social environments to support their individual meaning construction, for example (Ligas & Cotte 1999, 610–611).

Finally, McCracken's approach (1986) to the "stage" of brand and product meanings is grounded in notions of structural anthropology: the cultural meanings of consumer goods are constantly in transit, and they move continually between their several locations in the social world. Meanings are found in three different locations: the culturally constituted world, the consumer good and the individual consumer. The culturally constituted world is the everyday experience when the phenomenal world presents itself to the individual's senses fully shaped and constituted by the beliefs and assumptions of his or her culture. Culture is both the lens through which the individual views the phenomena, and the blueprint of human activity determining the elements of social interaction and productive activity, and specifying the behaviours and objects that issue from both (McCracken 1986, 71–72). Advertising, the fashion system and consumer rituals (e.g., gift giving, showing off, going out) are the means by which the meaning is drawn out of, and transferred between, these locations. Advertising and the fashion system transfer meaning from culturally constituted world to consumer goods, whereas consumer rituals transfer meaning from the consumer goods to the consumer. This is the way cultural meaning moves in modern developed societies (McCracken 1986, 81; see also Holt 2002).

1.2.2 Self, identity and social identity

The concepts of self and identity are used and defined in a versatile manner in both the social sciences and consumer research. There are numerous variations, and more or less related terms including self-concept, self-image, self-identity, sense of self, personal identity, social identity, possible selves and actual self. The definitions and the relation between these concepts are often blurred and overlapping. In the following, therefore I will define and clarify these focal concepts as far as this study is concerned.

The self could be defined as the sense of who and what we are. It is an organising concept through which we can understand people's everyday activities (Kleine, Kleine & Kernan 1993, 209). The self-concept refers to the set of an individual's beliefs and knowledge about his or her personal qualities, and constitutes one of the two elements of self-knowledge. The other element is self-esteem, which stands for how we feel about ourselves (Smith

& Mackie 2000, 104). I use the terms self and self-concept in a synonymous manner in this study, since they are usually defined in a similar way.

Malhotra (1988) summarised the various definitions of self-concept and found twelve that are based on diverse theoretical approaches and their seminal thinkers. These approaches include symbolic interactionism (Cooley 1902, Mead 1934), the neo-Freudian (Sullivan 1953), the organismic (Lecky 1961), the phenomenological (Snygg and Combs 1949; Rogers 1951) and the cognitive (Sarbin 1952). I see no point in discussing all of them in this context, but I will cover the definitions put forward by Mead, Sullivan and Corbin in order to elucidate their profound relative differences. Mead, a seminal scholar of symbolic interactionism, defines the self-concept as a social structure that arises out of social experience, whereas the neo-Freudian Sullivan understands the self as an organisation of educative experience, and for Sarbin the self is a cognitive structure that includes various substructures (Malhotra 1988, 8–9).

Self-concepts are located along a continuum ranging from the internal psychological view to the external socially situated view. The researcher needs to recognise explicitly the underlying assumptions in his or her preferred approach if he or she is to meaningfully apply it to the problem domain in question. The three critical aspects of the approaches include the way the self-concept is defined, the extent to which internal or external aspects are stressed, and its primary function (Reed 2002, 238). Before moving on to the self-concept as conceived of in this study I will discuss some common approaches to the self in consumer research, and the concept of identity.

The multiple nature of the self has been recognised by scholars (e.g., Cooley 1902, Mead 1934, Rosenberg 1979, Markus & Wurf 1987; Higgins 1987). Mead characterised the self as the relationship between "I" and "Me" rejecting it as the bare organisation of social attitudes (Jenkins 1996, 41). The "I" is the active observer, the knower and the information processor of the self, whereas "me" is the known, observed and constructed self-image (Arnould, Price & Zinkham 2002, 233–234). A compelling formulation of "me" is the "looking-glass self" (Cooley 1902), which indicates the importance of other people's reactions to us as one source of our self knowledge. These reactions work as a mirror reflecting our image so that we, too, are able to see it (Smith & Mackie 2000, 106; Arnould, Price & Zinkham 2002, 233–234; Reed 2002, 245). Moreover, a common view is that the self-concept consists of actual, ideal and social selves. The actual self tells us how a person perceives himself or herself, whereas the ideal self refers to how people would like to perceive themselves and what they would like to become. These two extensively employed selves were later complemented with the individual's social self, which refers to how people present themselves to others and the image they would like others to have of them (Sirgy 1982, 287;

Malhotra 1988, 8–9; Foxall & Goldsmith 1994, 53; Solomon 1996, 227). Indeed, we see ourselves in a wide range of situations and roles, thus our self-knowledge is organised around multiple roles, activities and relationships. As information related to the self accumulates from these diverse sources, we become aware that we have many different "multiple selves" (Smith & Mackie 2000, 111). Not only is the multiple nature of the self widely accepted, the dynamics of the self-concept is also generally acknowledged, especially in postmodern societies in which the self is conceptualised not as a given product of a social system or a fixed entity the individual can simply adopt, but as something he or she actively creates, partly through consumption and the usage of brands (Elliot & Wattanasuwan 1998, 132).

Weigert, Teitge and Teitge (1986) make a distinction between the self and identity suggesting that an individual has one self that becomes situationally defined through a variety of identities (Weigert, Teitge & Teitge 1986, 57–58). The self-concept I use in this study is grounded in this idea of the self as the sum of diverse situational identities (see Kleine, Kleine & Kernan 1993, 211–212). Thus, in the line with Kaiser (1998), I consider the self to be a global sense of who one is, composed of a subset of identities. Kaiser further defines the identity as a self-in-context, constructed and negotiated through social processes in which the person interacts in a context. In a similar manner, identities are composed of subsets of roles that are typified responses to a typified expectation. Roles are the most tangible of these three concepts, and refer to some performance or enactment (Kaiser 1998, 193). Depending on the characteristics of a situation and the other people involved in the interaction, different roles are assumed. Thus, the self could be thought of as having components or role identities, and only some of these identities are active or in use at any given time. Further, some (e.g., daughter, student) are more central to the self than others, and others that are not so central and are possibly temporary (e.g. cheerleader, band member) may be dominant in some specific situations (Solomon 1996, 228).

As mentioned, the self-concept has both private and public or social qualities (see Helenius 1996, 4). Additionally, contemporary scholars have usually agreed on the influence of social interaction on the creation and development of the self. According to social-comparison theory (Festinger 1954), people learn about and evaluate their personal qualities by making comparisons between themselves and others (Smith & Mackie 2000, 107; see also Festinger 1954). Identity is about being similar and different. It refers to how subjects see themselves in representation, and to how they construct differences within that representation and between it and the representation of others. Thus, it is about both correspondence and dissimilarity, and it is articulated through the relationship between belonging or identification and

difference (Hetherington 1998, 15). Identity is not a fixed "thing", but a process of constant negotiation with those around us, and in line with this thinking, it is the product of agreement and disagreement, and is open to change (Craib 1998, 4; Gabriel & Lang 1995, 83).

Social-identity theory, rooted in Henry Tajfel's work on categorisation and social perception, is about the dynamic and generative interdependence of the self-concept and intergroup relations (Hogg & Abrams 1999, 6–9). The central concept of the theory, social identity, refers to the particular aspects of the self-concept that derive from an individual's knowledge of and feelings about the group memberships he or she shares with others (Smith & Mackie 2000, 205). The social nature of identity is expressed well by Jenkins (1996), who considers all human identities to be in some sense social identities. Identities are always about meanings, and meanings are essential properties of words or things. Meanings are always the consequence of agreement or disagreement, always a matter of convention and innovation, always to some extent shared and negotiable. Social identity is "the systematic establishment and signification, between individuals, between collectivities, and between individuals and collectivities, of relationships of similarity and difference" (Jenkins 1996, 4).

Adolescents in particular are eager to identify themselves with groups, which may be based on some subcultures, post-subcultures or hobbies (Helenius 1996, 5). It has become evident that the line between the "private" and "social" elements of the self-concept is blurred and quite far from being clearly defined and unambiguous. I have tried to show this, and to illustrate the social location of the "originally private" self-concept in this brief discussion of social identity also in the context of personal sources of brand meanings, not only within the social sphere of brand meanings in which I find the concept of social identity more appropriate (see Figure 3).
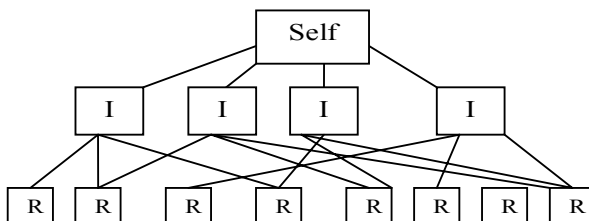
Figure 3. A schematic illustration of the self-concept as applied in this study, I= Identity; R=Role. (Adapted from Kaiser 1994)

In sum, the self-concept discussed in this study consists of a subset of context-specific identities that are multifaceted and dynamic, and not fixed entities. Further, identities have both private and social elements. They are

seldom creations inside a person's head, but are constructed and formulated in social interaction. The social aspect is emphasised due to the research focus on adolescents.

1.2.3   Groups

People belong to different kinds of groups during their lives. Not only do these groups provide a basis for social interaction and meet basic human needs, they also help people to comprehend and make sense of the surrounding world. They fulfill important socialising functions for individuals, providing information about the social order and mediating between the individual and society at large. During adolescence people place a lot of emphasis on appearance, and use it as a criterion for self-evaluation. Ideas about what is appropriate are linked to group values as individuals compare and assess themselves in relation to others (Kaiser 1998, 353–354). This section focuses on diverse types of groups.

A *social group* forms when there are two or more people who share a common characteristic that is socially meaningful to them or to others (e.g., upper-secondary school students, environmentalists). Thus, individuals who believe they share socially meaningful characteristics comprise a group even if others do not think of them in that way. In a similar manner, some particular individuals could be seen as a group by others, even if the individuals themselves do not hold that view (Smith & Mackie 2000, 158–159). Members of a social group may or may not interact with one another. However, members of *face-to-face groups* are exposed to direct interaction that facilitates influence on one another's thoughts, feelings and behaviours (Smith & Mackie 2000, 330).

Social identity moulds "I" into "we" by extending the person's self to include other members of the groups to which he or she belongs. The perception of seeing him or herself as a typical member of a group directs the thoughts and behaviour of that person. Additionally, group memberships may affect people's moods and self-esteem as they feel good or bad about the successes and failures of their groups. This flexible process of seeing oneself as a member of a social group is called *self-categorisation*. Depending on the social context an individual can see him or herself as a wife, a figure skater, a soccer-team fan or a teacher, for example (see Smith & Mackie 2000, 205–211).

Self-categorisation is one of the three forms of *social categorisation.* Social categorisation means identifying individual people as members of a social group instead of unique beings since they share certain features that are typical

of the group (Smith & Mackie 2000, 160). When "others" turn into "we" social categorisation results in an *in-group*. Thus, an in-group is a group to which an individual belongs. The focus of the group membership is understandably on similarities but there is also room for learning about the other members' uniqueness as individuals. People are likely to treat other members of the in-group in a polite, fair and altruistic way, seeing them as sharing similar goals and interests (Smith & Mackie 2000, 214). Belonging to the same group usually implies that the members have the right to get involved in the affairs of fellow members (Triandis 1995, 9). The third and final form of social categorisation occurs when others are seen not 'as one of us', but as 'one of them'. An *out-group* is a group of which the "observing" individual is not a member; it is simply different, and to some extent unattractive and unappealing. Moreover, its members are not considered to share similar goals and interests. The "out-group homogeneity effect" refers to the tendency of individuals to see the out-group as relatively more homogeneous and less diverse than the in-group (Smith & Mackie 2000, 216–217). In the context of brand consumption, consumers tend to accept the meanings of brands associated and consistent with an in-group and to reject those associated and consistent with an out-group (Escalas & Bettman 2005, 379).

A *reference group* is a real or imaginary individual or a group of individuals to which a person refers when making judgements about his or her own circumstances, evaluations, aspirations, attitudes and behaviour. Such a group shares the attributes needed for the individual to make a judgement (Park & Lessig 1977, 102; Antonides & van Raaij 1998, 333; Smith & Mackie 2000, 342; Foxall & Goldsmith 1994, 194). It may be a group to which the person belongs or does not belong. The essence of a reference group is that it is used by an individual as a point of comparison. A person or a group of people with particular social perspectives provides the individual with a frame of reference for his or her own actions (Foxall & Goldsmith 1994, 194). Reference groups include the following types: comparison and normative groups, formal and informal groups, primary and secondary groups, and aspiration and dissociation groups.

Comparison groups are groups to which the individual concerned does not belong, and they serve as a standard for self-evaluation. The comparison is driven by criteria such as income level, and the person making it aspires for a higher level or feels content with his or her current level as a result. *Normative groups* stand for certain norms and values regardless of whether the individual does or does not belong to the group. They include congregations, political parties and associations of environmentalists, for example (Antonides & van Raaij 1998, 334). Groups may have formal memberships, such that one is either a member or not. *Formal groups* (e.g., the scout movement and the

Salvation Army) tend to have a clear structure and a well-ordered organisation with membership directories and so forth (Arnould, Price & Zinkham 2002, 553; Antonides & van Raaij 1998, 335). *Informal groups* are usually smaller in size, they form around a group of friends or acquaintances. These have less structure or none at all (Arnould, Price & Zinkham 2002, 553). These groups are elusive from the marketer's perspective, but they exert a great influence on individual consumers since they impinge daily life on "face-to-face" basis (Solomon 1996, 342).

Members of a *primary group* (e.g., the family, a junior soccer team) have a lot of personal contact and strong coherence. They are motivated to belong to the group and have an influence on each other's behaviour. Those involved in secondary groups (e.g., professional organisations) also have personal contact but to a lesser extent and on a less regular basis, so the influence is much less than in primary groups (Antonides & van Raaij 1998, 335). An *aspiration group* has a need to imitate the norms, values and behaviour of others (an aspirational reference group). Aspirational reference groups usually comprise idealised figures such as successful business people, athletes, actors and other performers (Antonides & van Raaij 1998, 335; Solomon 1996, 343). Additionally, older teenagers may function as targets for aspiration groups of younger teenagers in that they offer living images of the next stage in the developmental process. Members of *dissociation groups* are motivated not to belong to a particular group: they may study in detail the dress and mannerisms of the disliked group (e.g., nerds, punks) and avoid buying anything that might identify them with it (Solomon 1996, 344).

Peer groups have an important role in consumer socialisation at various stages of a person's life. People need social interaction with diverse groups of people, including friends, classmates, co-workers and members of more and less formal organisations. The need for interaction stems from many sources, such as biological needs (e.g., growing up, uncertainty or reinforcement with the regard to values), sociological needs (e.g., conformity, status), and specific needs arising from changes in the individual's social structure (e.g., the family life cycle, employment) (Moschis 1987, 101). Adolescents clearly acquire expressive aspects of consumer behaviour from peers by developing consciousness of the social value of products. Teenagers who interact more with their peers about consumer matters develop a decision-making style that is brand-oriented (Lachance, Beaudoin & Robitaille 2003, 48). Children also learn and copy from their peers but peer influence seems to decline as they get older. Peers do not, as a rule, require their friends to consume certain kinds of products in a certain manner: the child rather accepts the influence of other children in order to satisfy a variety of needs (McNeal 1987, 17).

1.2.4 The construction of reality and the pervasiveness of social influence

Society and the social world develop in a dialectic process in which externalisation, objectivation and internalisation constantly interact. An individual simultaneously externalises his or her own being into the social world, and internalizes it as an objective reality. Thus, being a part of the social world means participating in this dialectic process. Through internalisation an individual is likely to take over a social world in which others already live, which may then be reshaped and changed. Internalisation is not limited to an understanding of the other's momentary subjective processes, but refers to an understanding of the social world in which the person lives, and to the social world that becomes his or her own (Berger & Luckmann 1966, 150–151). Thus, individuals construct their personal social worlds, which are parts of the "real world that is out there". One person's social world is not likely to be identical to another's because individuals select from a range of possibilities that are limited by what is available in the cultures to which they have access and by their own characteristics (Davis & Roberts 1985, 146).

According to Smith and Mackie (2007), social psychology concerns the effects of social and cognitive processes on the way individuals perceive, influence and relate to others (Smith & Mackie 2007, 5). I will define these two fundamental processes of social psychology separately, although in reality they are deeply intertwined. Human cognition is partially constructed through social interaction, and on the other hand it partially creates it. Individuals are likely to act according to the way they understand their environment or social world. However, how they understand the totality of their environments including the physical, the social and the marketing environment is largely determined by the effects of their actions upon it as well as the demands and requirements for action that it presents. All this results in continuous shifts and changes, so that the main cognitive processes are likely to be described as adaptation to and the initiation of change (Tajfel 1978, 303).

Cognitive processes are procedures in which our memories, thoughts, meanings, emotions and motives guide our understanding of the surrounding world and our actions in it. In turn, *social processes* reflect the manner in which input from the people and groups around us influence our thoughts, feelings and reactions (Smith & Mackie 2000, 3–5). My research subject, teenagers' brand relationships, is evidently the result of a complicated symbiosis of these two processes. I will concentrate more on social processes and factors, and less on the cognitive mechanisms and processes when I discuss the diverse aspects of brand relationships. In the following sections I

will describe the eight interrelated basic principles of social psychology that set the stage for interaction between teenagers, brands, and the respective brand meanings.

Smith and Mackie (2007) propose that two fundamental axioms of social psychology, the construction of reality and the pervasiveness of social influence, connect the individual person to the social world (see Figure 4). An individual's personal view of social reality guides all of his/her thoughts, feelings and actions, and at the same time, the pervasiveness of social influence has an effect on virtually all aspects of the individual (Smith & Mackie 2007, 15). For example, personality (the kind of person you are) is likely to be socially constructed. Burr (1995) suggests that it exist between rather within people. Words referring to entities within the person they describe (e.g., friendly, shy, charming) become meaningless when the person is removed from his/her relation with others (see Burr 1995, 27; Berger & Luckmann 1966, 68-69).

Motivational principles
Striving for mastery
Seeking connectedness
Valuing 'me' and 'mine'

Processing principles
Conservatism
Accessibility
Superficiality vs. depth

The person

The construction of reality

The pervasiveness of social influence
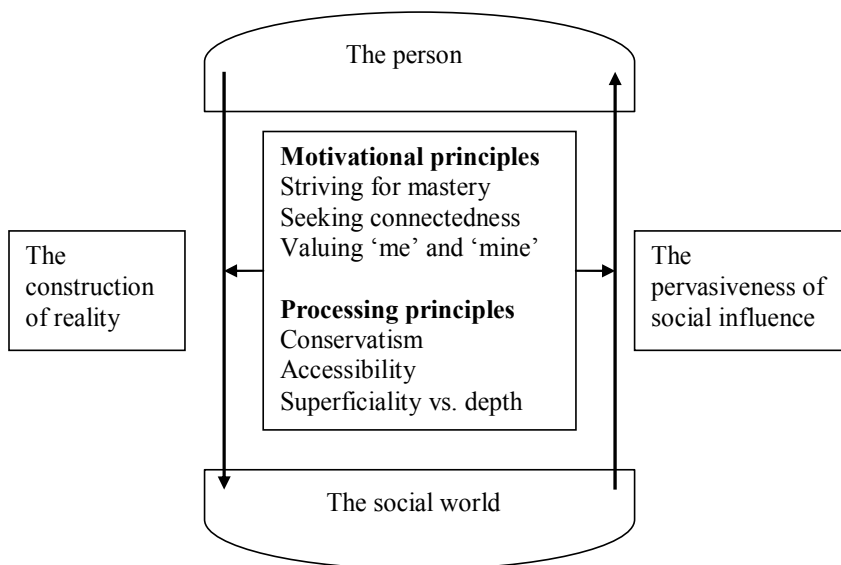
The social world

Figure 4. The eight interrelated basic principles of social psychology. (Adapted from Smith & Mackie 2000; 2007)

A teenager lives with brands in a social world comprising social and marketing environments, in which there is continuous interaction between individuals and the environments as well as between the two environments. Although brand marketers may influence teenagers directly through campaigns aimed at creating a relationship between their brands and consumers, teenagers are more likely to construct their relationships with brands mediated by significant social actors. This is backed by the weight of interpersonal implications in early adolescence (e.g., Damon & Hart 1988,

64). I will now briefly discuss social influence in the light of diverse reference-group influences.

Reference-group influence comprises informational, utilitarian and value-expressive influences. *Informational influence* is based on the consumer's desire to make an informed decision and to minimise the uncertainty involved by seeking appropriate information. Presumed experts and significant others are usually linked with high credibility (Bearden & Etzel 1982, 184). Individuals use informational reference groups in two diverse ways: they may actively seek information from opinion leaders or a group with the appropriate expertise, or they may make an inference by observing the behaviour of significant others (Park & Lessig 1977, 103). *Utilitarian influence* reflects attempts to follow the wishes of others in obtaining rewards or avoiding punishments. People find it useful to meet the expectations of significant others if they consider the outcomes of a certain type of behaviour important. Finally, *value-expressive influence* relates to the need for psychological associations with a person or a group, and is reflected in the acceptance of positions implied by others (Bearden & Etzel 1982, 184). This kind of influence involves two different processes. First, individuals may utilise reference groups for the purpose of self-expression and ego-bolstering: this requires consistency between the desire to express oneself and the image attached to the reference group. The second type of influence is simply based on individual affect for the group in question (Park & Lessig 1977, 103): the individual is responsive to the reference group not because of a desire to be associated with it, but out of a feeling (liking) for it (Bearden & Etzel 1982, 184).

1.2.5   Motivational principles

There are three motivational and processing principles that determine the nature of the constructed reality and of social influence. The motivational principles include striving for mastery, seeking connectedness, and valuing me and mine.

According to Smith and Mackie (2007), *striving for mastery* involves understanding ourselves and our surrounding social world, as well as applying that understanding with a view to controlling the outcomes in our lives. Individuals are likely to strive for mastery. They seek to understand and predict events in the social world in order to obtain various kinds of rewards (Smith & Mackie 2007, 17). Rotter's (1966) concept "locus of control" illustrates where an individual addresses and attributes the reason of reinforcement. The "external locus of control" operates when external factors

that are at least partially independent of the acts of an individual (e.g., destiny, the influence of powerful people) direct his or her life. On the other hand, "the internal locus of control" refers to contexts in which the individual attributes things that happen to his or her own behaviour or relatively fixed characteristics (Rotter 1966, 1–2). Individuals tend to have desired states towards which they aspire and continue to strive toward until the experienced state sufficiently resembles the desired state (or the altered state). Reaching this state gives a sense of coherence in that it enables them to experience the social world in a way that conforms to their beliefs, wishes, desires, values and needs (Gollwitzer & Moskowitz 1996, 362). Jaari (2004) refers to Antonovsky's definition of "sense of coherence" as a general resource for survival that has an effect on a number of factors related to the well-being of an individual. It refers to ways of perceiving and interpreting the environment, as well as to the activities in it in terms of whether they are experienced as pleasant, understandable and controllable (Jaari 2004, 78; see also Antonovsky 1979). Self-understanding has an obvious link to our self-knowledge, which is comprised of the self-concept and self-esteem. Accordingly, the better teenagers understand who and what they are, the more likely they are to succeed in getting rewards and reaching their goals in their daily interaction with the social world. Brands as meaningful, everyday life partners are likely to help them in terms of developing their self-understanding and getting rewards in the surrounding social world, not least rewards related to self-esteem and connecting with others.

Seeking connectedness is the second motivational principle. It refers to individuals' attempts to create and maintain feelings of mutual support, liking and acceptance from people or groups they value and care about (Smith & Mackie 2007, 17). Individuals are likely to be attracted to people who are similar to themselves. As Newcomb (1956) suggested, the probability of a rewarding interaction is likely to be higher when the interactors are similar, since one of the expected rewards is social support for one's attitudes, beliefs and opinions (Shaw 1981, 86; see also Newcomb 1956).

Balance theory, which was developed by Heider (1958), reflects the dynamics of attitudes, beliefs and opinions in interpersonal relations. It posits that a person perceives his or her environment in the form of attitude structures, triads. Each triad consists of a person and his or her perceptions, an object of an attitude, and some other person or object. In other words, people see themselves as being involved in triangular relationships in which the three elements present (people, ideas and things) are either positively or negatively related (Loudon & Della Bitta 1993, 430; Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard & Hogg 2006, 150; Heider 1958, 202–209). Individuals are likely to alter their perceptions in order to make relations among them consistent. According to

the theory, they strive for harmonious and balanced relations among elements in the triad. If this does not happen, a state of tension will exist until perceptions are changed and balance is restored (Solomon et al 2006, 150).

Being a member of more or less formal groups provides a valued sense of belonging and social security. Communal brands are not merely symbolic resources for the construction of the self-concept, they also serve as the foundation of group identification and experiences of social solidarity (Thompson 2004, 98). According to Auty and Elliot (2001), adolescent brand behaviour is primarily about the human need for social approval, and only secondly about adopting the features of group identity. Thus, teenagers' main reason for fitting in is to be liked by others, not to be like others (Auty & Elliot 2001, 240).

According to the third motivational principle, *valuing me and mine*, individuals wish to see themselves and other people or groups linked to them in a positive light (Smith & Mackie 2007, 17). This is closely related to the concepts of self-esteem and self-enhancement: people are likely to feel better about themselves if they value and appreciate themselves, their belongings and those with whom they interact.

Leary, Tambor, Terdal and Downs (1995) refer to events that are likely to lower self-esteem as those that the person thinks may put his or her social bond at risk. Ego-threatening events are aversive since they signal a potential deterioration in one's social relationships. Thus, individuals do not need to maintain self-esteem per se: it is likely to function as an indicator of the quality of social relations vis-à-vis inclusion and exclusion (Leary, Tambor, Terdal & Downs 1995, 520). People with high self-esteem probably assign themselves more positive attributes than those with low self-esteem. Furthermore, they tend to cognitively accept only positive information in feedback conditions, whereas those with low self-esteem accept both positive and negative information (Campbell, Chew & Scratchley 1991, 475–477).

Self-enhancement refers to an individual's tendency to maintain positive self-regard (Kurman 2006, 339). Most people prefer to see themselves in a self-enhancing manner, and it follows that they consider themselves more skilled, intelligent, original and attractive than their peers or the average person, for example (Pfeffer, Cialdini, Hanna & Knopoff 1998, 314). Self-enhancing bias refers to an individual's tendency to gather or interpret information in a way that results in overly positive self-evaluations (Smith & Mackie 2007, 109). These kinds of exaggerated self-conceptions derive from the tendency of most people to process and interpret incoming information in manner that promotes the self (Pfeffer, Cialdini, Hanna & Knopoff 1998, 314). Finally, since parts of their self-concepts are constructed in terms of their group affiliations, they are likely to view in-groups and their members

positively rather than negatively. Further, they tend to assess the worth of an in-group in comparison with other groups. These intergroup comparisons are essential in that they have an indirect effect on self-esteem. If the in-group is superior in some respect, any individual member can bask in that reflected glory (Brown 2000, 312).

1.2.6   Processing principles

Processing principles comprise conservatism, accessibility, and "superficiality versus depth". According to the principle of *conservatism,* individuals' and groups' views of the world are slow to change and are prone to self-perpetuation (Smith & Mackie 2007, 118–19). Wilson (1973) discusses the following distinguishable but overlapping conceptualisations of the nature of conservatism: "resistance to change", "playing safe", and "the internalisation of parental prohibitions". Preference for existing and traditional institutions, as well as a disposition towards moderation, is at the heart of the word "conservatism". The combination of these elements results in the conservative position that tends to resist change except when it is perceived to be in a traditional direction or such that it strengthens the security of the individual or his or her society (Wilson 1973, 12–13).) According to Schwartz's (1992) typology of values, conservation and openness to change are at opposite ends of the bipolar value dimension (Puohiniemi 1995, 16–19; see also Schwartz 1992). Openness to change is characteristic of adolescents, while older individuals tend to stick with the familiar elements in their lives.

Resistance to change and a preference for traditional institutions and behaviour could be seen as two aspects of individual preference for "playing safe" and avoiding risks. This kind of conservative individual is therefore prone to feeling threatened and to experiencing insecurity in a complex and unfamiliar social environment. Resistance to change is fuelled by the potential increased complexity in the experienced social world. Finally, "the internalisation of parental prohibitions" refers to the extent which people incorporate such prohibitions into the framework they use to evaluate social phenomena and behaviour. The structure of the individual conscience is likely to be affected by parents, peer groups and other actors and institutions in the social environment. Moreover, there is likely to be a certain amount of consensus regarding the "right kind of" and "socially desirable" behaviour in a given context, and conservatism could be regarded as the quantification of the extent to which the normative value pattern is absorbed. Thus, conservatism is related to measures of conformity and social desirability (Wilson 1973, 13–14).

Diverse pieces of knowledge cannot be activated or brought to mind unless they exist in the memory. The concept of availability in this context refers to whether or not some particular knowledge is actually stored in the memory. Accordingly, accessibility could be defined as the activation potential of available knowledge (Higgins 1996, 134). According to the processing principle of *accessibility,* whatever information is most readily available to individuals is likely to have the most impact on their thoughts, feelings and behaviour (Smith & Mackie 2007, 18). In the case of perceiving others, for instance, cues have no meaning in themselves, but are likely to be interpreted based on existing knowledge or cognitive representations of people, behaviours, traits and social situations. A representation that is associated with the cue itself or is accessible and easily remembered is most likely to be used in its interpretation. Accessibility may thus be grounded in individual expectations, and moods or the situational context, as well as in the frequent activation of the representation (Smith & Mackie 2007, 93).

The hierarchy of information-processing stages is usually discussed in terms of depth, greater depth implying a higher degree of semantic or cognitive analysis. Once an individual has recognised the stimulus (e.g., a brand), it may be further processed by means of enrichment or elaboration (Craik & Lockhart 1972, 675). The last of the eight interrelated principles, *superficiality vs. depth*, refers to the individual's context-specific effort when processing the information. People usually seem to put little effort into forming a superficial view of reality, relying solidly on whatever information is accessible, but at times they are motivated to process the information in more depth (Smith & Mackie 2007, 19). Petty and Cacioppo (1986) discuss attitude-change processes in the context of their elaboration-likelihood model of persuasion, referring to the two opposite ends of the continuum as the "central route" and the "peripheral route". Individuals taking the central route carefully and with high motivation consider the true merits of the information presented, whereas those on the peripheral route are subject to persuasion as a result of a simple cue that induces change without necessitating scrutiny of the true merits (Petty & Cacioppo 1986, 125).

Superficial information processing occurs in groups when a member merely adopts the group position when deciding on his or her own position. This kind of consensus gives people a shortcut to the position they believe to be correct and appropriate without having to engage in finding the right answer themselves (Smith & Mackie 2007, 325). Turner and Oakes (1989) point out that the superficiality vs. depth aspect may be relative to time: people sometimes go along with the view of the in-group until they have time to work out the "why and how" for themselves (Turner and Oakes 1989, 254). Finally, links with important goals or objectives are likely to motivate individuals to

process information in more depth and to consider their own beliefs and actions (Smith & Mackie 2007, 19).

Processing principles have an effect on human perception. Individuals are likely to prefer information that is in line with their former conceptions and understanding, for example, an easy access does not necessarily result in the acceptance. Perceptions and their interpretations are influenced by goals such as seeking a harmonious world, discussed in balance theory.

Processing principles are beyond the empirical interests of this study. The focus is not on how (e.g., processes) brand relations are constructed, but on aspects of the relationships as the end result of brand information processing. Thus, I do not discuss processing principles per se, but rather address them when they contribute to my research interests.

1.3   Literature review and theoretical approach

The following of the existing literature on consumers' connections with brands focuses on self-brand connections, brand relationship, the personal and social roles of brands in everyday life, and brand and product meanings. I discuss the literature in terms of two upper-level paradigms in consumer research: the *positivist* and the *interpretivist*. Although this division is common, it is not clear-cut and self-evident since there are shared elements and research interests: a theoretical concept created in the context one paradigm can be studied further in the other (e.g., see Fournier 1998: Monga 2002; Aggarwal 2004). Furthermore, in some cases drawing the line is troublesome since characteristics of "competing" paradigms may be found in the chosen approach. Holt's (2002) attempt to create a dialectical theory of consumer culture and branding falls between positivism and interpretivism, specifically within hermeneutics. His method extended case method (ECM) relies on interpretive research data (e.g., field observation, interviews, archived texts), and is grounded in Burawoy's (1998) notion of hermeneutic science, but the aim is to develop a heuristic conceptual framework with explanatory power, which relates it to the positivist tradition (Holt 2007, 73). Having thus reviewed the thematically relevant literature through these discussed two paradigms, I will discuss my theoretical approach (section 1.3.3), which is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm within consumer research.

Hudson and Ozanne's (1988) division of knowledge seeking in consumer research into the positivist (e.g., logical positivism, logical empirism and modern empirism) and interpretivist (e.g., subjectivism and symbolic interactionism) approaches provide a basis for discussing the nature and the contribution of studies on consumer behaviour (Hudson & Ozanne 1988, 508–

509). Murray and Ozanne (1991) further discuss these two approaches in their presentation of critical theory in consumer research. In line with Burrell and Morgan (1979), they divide the interpretivist approaches into phenomenology, ethnography, hermeneutics, semiotics and literary criticism, while cognitive psychology, role theory, structuralism, exchange theory and behaviourism are linked with positivism. As opposed to "order approaches" (positivism and interpretivism), critical theory as a "conflict approach" concerns how human beings can be emancipated from the structures that limit and repress their development. Since such labelling features of critical theory are not found in research associated with consumers and their brands, the positivist and interpretivist approaches are likely to address the aspects of the reviewed literature in an appropriate manner (Murray& Ozanne 1991, 129–130; see also Burrel and Morgan 1979).

Approaches included in the *positivist* paradigm focus on identifying an existing gap in the literature, developing an a priori conceptual framework, deriving empirically testable hypotheses from it, and producing research results from statistical analyses. At each stage there is strict adherence to scientific protocol. The data is usually obtained from laboratory experiments or large-scale surveys (Murray and Ozanne 1991, 136). *Interpretivist* approaches are characterised by the identification of a general phenomenon of interest that is usually less strictly defined and limited. The design, the research questions and the sampling strategies are likely to evolve as the phenomenon is studied, and the "human instrument" (participant observation, in-depth interviews) is expected to generate a "thick description" to be interpreted in the form of content or textual analysis (Arnould and Fischer 1994, 62).

1.3.1   The positivist paradigm in consumers' connections with brands

One established way to consider the link between brands and consumers is in the terms of *meaningful self-brand connections*. Such connections are created by linking the brand to the self, and to be more specific by taking brands as meaningful and important components of a person's self narrative. People tend to construct stories or narratives in order to give their lives coherence and to create their identities (Escalas 1997, 67). They use brands to create and represent their self-image and to communicate to others who and what they are or wish to be. As a result of this process, a link joins the brand and the self. Self-brand connections are preferred to specific brand associations because the brand meaning is most often dependent on the entire constellation or the set of associations (Escalas & Bettman 2003, 340). Escalas (2004) explored

narrative processing as one way of connecting brands to consumers' self-concepts, and thus creating self-brand connections. The meaning of a brand is usually a result of its being part of a narrative. Therefore, through the narrative meaning-making process some brands become more important to consumers than others, and are connected with their sense of self (Escalas 2004, 176). Brands are used to construct and cultivate the self, to express and reflect the self publicly or privately. They may also work as a means for social integration, or as something that connects one to the past. Moreover, they may act symbols of personal accomplishment, enhance self-esteem, allow one to differentiate oneself and to express one's individuality, and help one through life transitions (Escalas 2004, 170).

The connection between children or adolescents and brands has not been discussed extensively in the literature. However, Chaplin and John (2005) have studied the development of self-brand connections in youngsters. They conducted in order to find out how age affected the number and quality of these connections three different studies among young people aged between eight and 18 (Chaplin & John 2005, 119). Various methods (e.g., Who am I? collages) were used to measure the self-concepts, and it was found that connections developed between middle childhood (ages 7-8) and early adolescence (ages 12-13). The limited number of connections children make during middle childhood is based on concrete associations with the brand, such as owning or buying branded products. The number increases during adolescence as brands become connected to the self-concept in terms of personality, user characteristics or reference-group affiliation (Chaplin & John 2005, 127). Belk, Mayer and Driscoll (1984) had previously studied consumption symbolism in children's products with regard to the effects of age, gender, social class and sibling influence. They found, for example, that older children held stronger consumption-based stereotypes than younger children, and that children in higher social classes held stronger stereotypes than those in the lower classes (see Belk, Mayer & Driscoll 1984).

Although Escalas' concept of self-brand connections is based on the notion of consumers' narrative processing (see e.g., hermeneutics), she studied them in line with the notions of positivism. She focused on whether consumers actively constructed their diverse identities from brand associations formed by means of narrative processing (Escalas 2004). In an earlier study, Escalas and Bettman (2003) investigated the influence of reference groups on consumers' connections with brands, showing that the degree to which member or aspirational group usage affected individual self-brand connections was in the line with the "strength" of individuals' membership of or their wish to belong to the aspirational group in question (Escalas and Bettman 2003, 343–344). Further, Chaplin and John (2005), using age/grade as an independent variable

discussed how children's self-brand connections changed in number and quality (see Chaplin & John 2005).

Phau and Lau (2001) and Wee (2005) studied diverse aspects of *brand personality*. Phau and Lau (2001) concluded that the development of self-congruity was indeed a dynamic two-way process, and that individualists were more likely than collectivists to build up strong self-congruity with a preferred brand (Phau & Lau 2001, 440). Wee (2005), on the other hand used quantitative means in his study and concluded that the brand personality of a well-known fast-food chain was stable over time and in relation to other brands (Wee 2005, 326).

When there is a connection between brands and consumers, brands take on diverse *personal and social roles* through their meanings. Solomon (1988) developed the idea of symbolic consumption with respect to social categorisation approach. He defined category as product constellations (collections of symbolically-related products), and posited that they were instrumental in the definition and maintenance of social identity. He carried out a quantitative study on the role of symbolic product constellations in the social identities of consumers, investigating consensus of such constellations across consumers and their links to diverse social roles such as banker, brand manager and insurance salesperson. His analysis of the structural aspects of constellations showed a higher level of consensus among subjects with a relatively weak desire to occupy a social role concerning products associated with that role. In qualitative terms, despite the fact that some constellations appeared to be richer than others, all of them contained at least one item from each of the five product categories (Liqueur, Records, Magazines, Personal care products, Automobiles) (Solomon 1988, 247–250). Solomon took an experimental approach in order to quantify elements of product symbolism and to evaluate the consensus regarding these product/role (e.g., "yuppie") associations across consumers (Solomon 1988, 233–235; see also Solomon & Buchanan 1991). Solomon and Buchanan (1991) attempted to identify and measure consumption constellations. Their interpretations resulted in joint consumption ratios of diverse up-market product categories (e.g., foreign cars, imported wines), and an assessment of the strength of pairwise comparisons of these categories. Their basic finding was that none of the examined pairwise constellations was very strong in absolute terms (Solomon & Buchanan 1991, 101–103).

Consumption is studied as much for its functional benefits and symbolic aspects relative to the individual as for its emotional and aesthetic elements relative to the communal link between individuals (Cova 1997, 314). Communal brands are not merely symbolic resources for the construction of personal identities, they also form the basis of group identification and

experiences of social solidarity (Wattanasuwan 2005, 182). Miles, Cliff and Burr (1998) concluded that brands with their embedded meanings were used as tools for managing the constant balancing act between fitting into a group and standing out from the masses in teenage years. A teenager wants to be a special and interesting individual, and to fit in with his peers and gain acceptance (Miles, Cliff & Burr 1998, 88–93; see also Bourdieu 1984). Escalas and Bettman (2003) showed that consumers actively constructed themselves by means of brand association that arose through reference-group usage and the resulting self-brand connections. They tested two hypotheses (their informants were college students) and demonstrated that a brand used by a reference group was a source of brand association that was linked to consumers´ mental self-representation as they actively constructed their current selves (Escalas & Bettman 2003, 341). Auty and Elliot (2001) focused on teenagers and discovered that this movement of meaningful brand properties from the group to the self did not explain adolescent brand behaviour as much as the human need for social approval did: it was more important for teenagers to be liked by others than to be like others. They concluded that the human need for social approval explained adolescent brand behaviour more effectively than McCracken's (1986) notions of the systematic appropriation of the meaningful properties of brands from the group to the self (Auty & Elliot 2001, 236; 240).

Consumers buy brands for the value and benefits they provide. According to Richins (1994), the value of possessions is rooted into their *meanings*. In order to understand this, she classified meanings into public and private (Richins 1994, 504). Public meanings are the subjective meanings that outside observers (non-owners) assign to an object. In this case, members of the general population or of some social subgroup agree upon some aspects of a brand's meaning. These agreed-upon meanings construct the brand's shared public meaning. Private meanings are the sum of the subjective meanings the brand has for a particular individual. They may include elements of its public meanings, but in that case the owner's personal history with the brand also plays an important role (Richins 1994, 505–506). Richins goes on to classify the sources of meanings into four categories: utilitarian value (e.g., to ride a bike), enjoyment (e.g., the mp3-player provides sensory pleasure), representations of interpersonal ties (e.g., the same brand of sneakers symbolising social relationships), and finally identity and self-expression (e.g., a certain jeans brand is used to express or reinforce the sense of self) (see Richins 1994, 507).

Dittmar (1992) classifies meanings as instrumental and symbolic in her categorisation of the meanings of material possessions for identity. Instrumental meanings refer to brands that in terms of their functional uses

help consumers to gain control over their environment (e.g., kitchen appliances). She goes on to create the sub-category of use-related meanings (instrumental meanings), which combines the functional and symbolic elements. Here, for example, the functional element of driving a car from home to work is combined with the owner's freedom to do that. Symbolic meanings are linked to expressions of what somebody is, and are further classified as self-expressive and categorical. Self-expressive meanings relate to individuals' uniqueness and their values, attitudes and personal qualities. What a person accumulates during his or her lifetime becomes a symbolic collage of his or her personal history, and personal and social relationships. On the other hand, categorical meanings symbolise group memberships, social positions and status – in other words they locate individuals in social-material terms (Dittmar 1992, 88–89).

Richins' (1994) paper comprises three studies on the private and public meanings of consumers' valued possessions. Firstly, influenced to some extent by the possession categories used in earlier studies (Dittmar 1989, 1991) she ended up with nine categories and discussed their importance and weight in quantitative terms. Secondly, she compared the private and public meanings of possessions, and concluded that some elements are present in both, and others in one or the other (e.g., financial- and appearance-related meanings belong only to the private realm). Finally, in the third study her comparison of private and public meanings confirmed the expectation that the private meanings of possessions are, to some extent, based on both their public meanings and the owner's personal experiences with them (compared through content analysis) (Richins 1994, 508–516).

Finally, Achenreiner and John (2003) studied the meaning of brand names to children from the perspective of their age and the nature of the meanings (perceptual and conceptual). They claimed that brand names could either function as a simple perceptual cue that identifies a product or they could be associated with certain perceptual features. On the other hand, they could also have conceptual or symbolic meanings, expressing the status, prestige or "coolness" of the user (Achenreiner & John 2003, 205–206). This study concerned the meaning of brand names to children aged from eight to 16. Two hypotheses were tested, regarding the influence of age on the meanings and the ways in which children relate to brands (e.g., understanding the symbolic). The independent variables of age, product category and brands were shown to have diverse impacts on product evaluations, owner impressions and brand-extension evaluations. By the age twelve, for example children used brand names as important conceptual cues in their consumer judgements (Acrenheiner & John 2003, 216–217; see also McNeal 1992).

1.3.2 The interpretivist paradigm in consumers' connections with brands

Fournier (1998) offered a comprehensive relationship view of consumer-brand interactions – starting with the basic relationship principles and building on an integrative framework to explain and explore the dynamics of those interactions in everyday life (Fournier 1998, 344). Within this theoretical framework the brand is treated as an active contributing member of a relationship dyad that connects it with the consumer (Aaker & Fournier 1995, 392). A critical insight of her analysis concerns the holistic character of the *consumer-brand-relationship* phenomenon: it is possible to gain a deep understanding only through consideration of the larger whole in which the relationship is embedded. The results of the study indicate that consumer relationships are more a matter of perceived goal compatibility than congruence between discreet product attributes and personality trait images. Thus, meaningful relationships are qualified not along symbolic versus functional product -category lines or in terms of high versus low involvement, but according to the perceived ego significance of the chosen brands (Fournier 1998, 366) Fournier also used her typology of brand relationship qualities (BRQ) to categorise the relationship forms of her interviewees, including "arranged marriages", "casual friends", "childhood friendships" and "enslavements" (Fournier 1998, 362; see also Fournier 1995, 661; Olsen 1999).

The literature on children's or teenagers' relationship with brands is limited. Ji (2002) looked at whether relationships developed between children and brands in a family setting. She interviewed three siblings aged seven, nine and thirteen, and discovered that their relationships with brands served certain functions and played important roles in their everyday lives. These relationships served as tools in the process of growing up, gaining competence, pursuing pleasure, living their dreams and becoming connected with others. Ji also found that the formation of the relationship was also a process of developing diverse identities such as becoming a girl, an athlete or an adult. Fournier's (1998) brand-relationship forms were comprised with child-specific alternatives such as "first love" (suggesting the lack of consumption skills in the marketplace), "fun buddy" (highlighting the need to play) and "secret admirer" (financial limitations in forming the relationship), which are less common with adults (Ji 2002, 379–384).

Rather than focusing on the elements and their strength regarding consumers' connections with brands, interpretivist approaches pursue an in-depth understanding of meanings that is strongly related to the respective socio-cultural and historical contexts. Fournier (1998) used both idiographic

and across-person analyses in her phenomenological study of consumer-brand relationships. The relationships of her informants were reflected in the descriptions of their life worlds. Idiographic analysis revealed how the projects, concerns and themes that people use to define themselves can be played out in the cultivation of brand relationships, and how these brand relationships can influence the cultivation of one's self-concept. Additionally, across-person analysis resulted in a typology of consumer-brand relationships grounded in emergent categories of text-based analysis (Fournier 1998, 359–361). Earlier, as a conclusion of their exploratory study on consumers' relationships with coffee brands, Fournier and Yao (1997) discussed the equivocality of a share-based brand-loyalty concept and presented a meaning-based relationship perspective that offered richness, sensitivity and consumer-relevance (Fournier & Yao 1997, 468). Ji (2005) also studied children's brand relationships through idiographic and across-person analysis, ending up with nine categories of brand relationships that richly described the relationships and their "qualitative" strength. According to her findings, children's relationships with certain brands play a central role in their lives, and together they orchestrate a developmental theme for the child in question. She also identified brand-relationship types that are specific to children and less common among adults (Ji 2005, 377–384).

A brand community is a special kind of consumer-brand relationship and a special case of reference-group membership. It is defined as a specialized, non-geographically-bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand. A branded good or service is at the centre of the community. Like other communities it is marked by a shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility. Brand communities are participants in the larger social sphere and play a vital role in establishing the brand's ultimate legacy (Muniz & O'Guinn 2000, 412; see also Mc Alexander, Shouten &Koenig 2002). Jørgensen and Østergaard (2003) argued that today's society provided context in which brand consumption could create a feeling of "belonging to" and consistency that was lacking in this ever changing world. The communicative characteristics of brands made them appropriate tools in the constitution and manifestation of social ties (Jørgensen & Østergaard 2003, 4). They claimed that it was impossible to understand the meaning of brands and brand communities without giving up Muniz and O'Guinn's idea of a brand as an isolated unit. A brand should be investigated in connection with other brands in a configuration, a brand mosaic. This brand mosaic could also be regarded as a certain style that unifies the members of the community (Jørgensen & Østergaard 2003, 17).

Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) based their notion of brand communities on their ethnographic research. Having analysed in-depth interviews and computer-mediated environmental data they managed to find rituals, attitudes and traditions that constructed and maintained the brand communities under study. They also concluded that brands were fundamentally social entities created by both consumers and marketers in "a complex and fascinating dance of social construction". Finally, they promoted the consumer-brand-consumer triad over the more common consumer-brand dyad (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001, 428). In accordance with their interpretation of their in-depth interviews, Jørgensen and Østergaard (2003) broadened the concept to cover aesthetic and stimulated brand communities, in which ritual meetings and diverse moral obligations were not a necessity. They suggested instead that common consciousness was essential, since it enabled the community members to agree that certain brands expressed the characteristics they wanted to express (Jørgensen & Østergaard 2003, 15–16).

Consumers' relationships with brands have an effect on how people express and understand themselves as well as on how they act and behave in diverse contexts of social interaction. With regard to the *personal and social roles of brands*, Belk (1988) argued that people tend to extend the core self and to reflect their various identities through their possessions. For him, the construct of the extended self offered a more insightful alternative in self-related consumer research than formulations of the relationship between the self-concept and brand-image-driven consumer choice. He examined the relationship between possessions and the extended self and suggested that "we are what we have" could be the most basic and powerful fact of consumer behaviour. People's accumulation of possessions provides a sense of the past and indicates who they are, where have they come from and possibly where they are going to. As a result of his theoretical analysis, Belk concluded that self-extension occurred in the form of control and mastery over an object as well as through knowledge and creation. He also stressed that the realm of the extended self was not limited to the individual level, and included collective aspects in the form of family, group, subcultural and national identities (Belk 1988 139; 160).

According to the basic tenets of social interactionism, product symbolism is generated on the societal level, but may be consumed on the individual level. Brands are consumed on account of both their social and private meanings (Solomon 1983, 324). Solomon (1983) studied how products were used in everyday social life, and saw brands as integral threads in its very fabric of social life. He discussed how consumers used intangible brand and product attributes in their daily lives. He melded the ideas of symbolic interactionism with the empirical findings of consumer research in his approach to the

relationship between material cues and the behaviour of consumers. The product symbolism was usually consumed by the social actor for the purpose of defining and clarifying behavioural patterns associated with certain roles. Thus, the consumer often relied upon the social information inherent in products to formulate a self-image and to maximise the quality of role performance (Solomon 1983, 319–320).

Brand relationships provide meanings in varying psycho-socio-cultural contexts, while *brand meanings* shed light on diverse aspects of the brand relationship (Fournier 1998, 345). The hermeneutically oriented theory of meaning was derived from the narrative structuring of identity and the role of stories in constructing self-identities (see e.g., Gergen & Gergen 1986; Polkinghorne 1988). Thompson (1997) based his understanding and interpretation of consumers' consumption stories on this model (see also Thompson, Pollio & Locander 1994), which is based on the metaphor of the person's life history as a text. Thus, the meanings of particular life events are contextualised within the broader narrative of self-identity. The key term in the model is the personalised cultural frame of reference. The relationship between this cultural background and the personal meanings constructed by a consumer assumes many forms. Further, personalised consumption meanings express a co-constituting (dialectical) relationship between the social conditions and identity issues that are prominent for a given consumer and a broader legacy of historically available frames of reference: they are not merely subjective or idiosyncratic constructions. This hermeneutic model not only conceptualises consumption meaning as a type of narrative, it also conceives of consumers as "self-narrators". The reciprocity occurs when a specific consumer narrative is derived from a consumption experience and then is incorporated into an interpretation of the consumer's broader life narrative. Thus, rich descriptions of consumer stories are linked to a broad narrative of self-identity contextualised within a complex background of historically established cultural meanings and belief systems (Thompson 1997, 440–441).

1.3.3 The theoretical approach of the study: brand meanings reflecting aspects of brand relationships

The conceptual foundation of this study follows the lines of Fournier's (1998) study on consumer-brand relationships. According to this approach brands are taken as active and contributing members of the relationship dyad rather than passive objects of marketing transactions. They have no objective existence since they are simply a collection of perceptions in the minds of consumers.

Acceptance of the behavioural significance of marketing actions leads to acceptance of the legitimacy of brands as contributing partners in relationships (Fournier 1998, 344–345).

The instrumental notion as far as this thesis I concerned is that relationships provide meanings in psycho-socio-cultural contexts. Understanding a certain relationship requires comprehension of the meanings it provides to the person who engages in it. The three essential sources of meaning are the psychological, the socio-cultural and the relational context. Relationships both influence and are influenced by the contexts in which they are embedded. The psychological context refers to the identity activity (e.g., life themes, life projects, aspects of the self) on which the relationship is based, socio-cultural contexts comprise relationship attitudes and behaviours related to age, life-cycles and culture, for example, and relational context reflects the networked nature of the relationship phenomenon (e.g., the complementarity of consumption constellations) (Fournier 1998, 345–346). Brand meanings are considered along the lines of Thompson's hermeneutic framework (1997), discussed above in section 1.3.2. They are understood to derive from the interplay between "stories" (/experiences) of brand consumption and narrative self-construction within personalised cultural frames of reference.

The aim of this study is to give an account of teenagers' brand relationships in daily life. Since meanings facilitate understanding of relationships, I will explore the psychological and socio-cultural aspects of brand relationships through the respective brand meanings and motives. In doing so, I will consider teenagers from the thematic perspectives of self-construction and self-expression including self-extension and symbolic self-completion, self-esteem, and the aspect of fitting in and sticking out in daily social interaction. Teenagers' brand relationships are molded by brand marketers, peer groups, family members, and celebrities, as well as by youth and popular culture with their diverse subcultures and post-subcultures. I will also address these aspects.

The nature of the study is explorative and descriptive with the aim of in-depth and rich contextual understanding of teenagers' brand relationships in daily life. My focus is not on the nature or qualitative strength of the relationships, but on their diverse aspects as teenagers interact with the actors in their socio-cultural environments. The theoretical lens presented above is likely to facilitate the collection and analysis of rich, descriptive and insightful data. Current theoretical knowledge lacks insight into the "branded life" of teenagers, particularly generated by interpretivist approaches. Thus, the aim is to generate knowledge in the interpretivist tradition of consumer research. The tenets of phenomenology and hermeneutics inspired the data collection and

analysis, but there is no clear-cut relation to either of these interpretivist approaches.

Of the paradigms in qualitative research (positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, constructivism) presented by Guba and Lincoln (e.g., 1994), this study follows the constructivist tradition. The epistemological and ontological foundations and the chosen approach are discussed in sections 2.1 and 2.2.

I will conclude this presentation of the theoretical lens with a brief discussion of Reckwitz's (2002) categorisation of social and cultural theory into culturalist mentalism, culturalist textualism and culturalist intersubjectivism, and the practice theory that he developed as an alternative for the first three more traditional forms of cultural theory (Reckwitz 2002, 243). The basic idea in *culturalist mentalism* is that "social" is situated in the mind, since the mind is the seat of knowledge and social structures. The "smallest unit" of social analysis is understandably mental structures. *Culturalist textualism* implies that symbolic structures exist "outside" rather than "inside" the mind – in chains of signs, in symbols, in discourses, communication or "texts". Furthermore, *cultural intersubjectivism* implies that "social" exists in interactions, and accordingly has elements of intersubjectivity. Agents (e.g., teenagers) refer in their speech acts to a non-subjective realm of semantic propositions and pragmatic rules regarding the use of signs (e.g., brands). Thus, sociality is located in a constellation of symbolic interactions between agents. The agents internalise and use the contents and patterns of the oversubjective, "objective" realm of meanings in their speech acts. Finally, *practice theory* locates "social" in practices that are understood as a routinised type of behaviour (e.g., consuming brands) consisting of a number of interconnected elements: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' (e.g., brands) and their use, background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion, and finally motivational knowledge (Reckwitz 2002, 247–249).

This study is linked first and foremost with the realms of cultural intersubjectivism and practice theory. According to cultural intersubjectivism, brands could be understood as signs that have common and internalised meanings as a result of intersubjective processes. Their symbolic aspect materialises as language in daily interaction between consumers. In this as in cultural textualism, discourses or propositions produce objects as meaningful entities, or make statements about them. Thus, objects (e.g., brands) are only known and interpreted, not used. This "shortcoming" is not addressed in practice theory.

A practice stands for a pattern comprising the numerous single and usually unique actions that reproduce it (in this study, for example a certain brand

consumption pattern comprises a number of acts of consumption, such as discussing the popularity of the brand, using a certain brand at school and youth parties for the purposes of fitting in). As a bodily and mental agent, a single individual acts as a carrier of a practice, or in fact of many practices that are not necessarily connected. Thus, the individual is a carrier not only of patterns of bodily behaviour, but also of certain routinised ways of understanding, knowing how and desiring. These three last-mentioned conventional "mental" activities are necessary elements and qualities of a practice in which a single individual participates, and not qualities of the individual. Carrying out a practice usually means using things in a particular way (Reckwitz 2002, 249–252). According to practice theory, the social world is first and foremost the place in which varying social practices are carried out by agents. Individuals as agents understand the world and themselves, and use know-how and motivational knowledge according to the particular practice (Reckwitz 2002, 256).

The notion of using objects (here: brands) is relevant to this study, since consumers are likely to utilise brands that are meaningful to them for the purposes of "surviving" their daily interactive lives. Shared consciousness of brands and their meanings is a necessary but insufficient element. Consumers who have an understanding of diverse aspects of the surrounding social world are likely to use their brand and motivational knowledge according to particular practices in daily life.

1.4   Research setting

1.4.1   Implanting the teenager in Consumer Culture Theory (CCT)

Teenagers are an especially interesting group of people given the influences of brands in people's lives. They understand that they are on their way towards maturity and adulthood, but since they are at the beginning of the process they look for the appropriate bricks with which to construct their various identities and in this manner create their selves. Brands as products (or services) with various meanings, offer a welcome helping hand in this process. Their influence does not end when we reach mature adulthood, because no matter how mature we feel as adults our identities continue to develop and change: some will be replaced by new ones and others will just play different roles. Accordingly, the ways in which brands influence our daily lives is likely to change. The aim in study is to extend the body of knowledge called consumer culture theory (CCT) by implanting the teenager in it. Consumer culture

theory is a family of theoretical aspects addressing the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace and cultural meanings (Arnould & Thompson 2005, 868). It comprises four different research programmes.

First of these, *Consumer identity projects* (CCT1) covers the co-constitutive, co-productive ways in which consumers working with marketer-generated materials forge a coherent if diversified and often fragmented sense of self (e.g., Levy 1981; Belk 1988; Mick & Buhl 1992; Thompson 1996; Fournier 1998; Mick & Fournier 1998; Thompson & Tambyah 1999; Holt 2002; Arnould & Thompson 2005, 871–873). The study of *marketplace cultures* (CCT2) focuses on the ways in which consumers forge feelings of social solidarity and create distinctive, fragmentary, self-selected, and sometimes transient cultural worlds through the pursuit of common consumption interests (e.g. Schouten & McAlexander 1995; Cova 1997; Belk & Costa 1998; Muniz & O'Guinn 2000; Kates 2002; Coulter, Price & Feick 2003; Arnould & Thompson 2005, 873–874) . Subcultures (e.g. skateboarders) and brand communities (e.g. Harley Davidson bikers) belong to this category. Institutional and social structures that systematically influence consumption (class, community, ethnicity and gender, for example) are the key interest in the third domain of CCT, the *socio-historic patterning of consumption* (CCT3). The theoretical interest here is in the processes through which consumption choices and behaviours are shaped by social groups, gender, ethnicity, the family, the household and other formal groups (e.g., Thompson, Locander & Pollio 1990; Wallendorf & Arnould 1991; Belk 1992; Peñalosa 1994; Holt 1997; Holt 1998; Oswald 1999; Dobscha & Ozanne 2001; Arnould & Thompson 2005, 874). Finally, the programme investigating *mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies* (CCT4) takes consumers as interpretive agents, whose meaning-creating activities range from those that tacitly embrace the dominant representations of consumer identity and lifestyle ideals portrayed in advertising and the mass media to those that consciously deviate from these ideological instructions (e.g., McCracken 1986; McCracken 1988a; Hirschman 1988; Murray & Ozanne 1991; Hirschman & Thompson 1997; Sherry 1998; Peñaloza 2000; Holt 2002; Belk, Ger & Askegaard 2003, Escalas & Stern 2003; Arnould and Thompson 2005, 874–875).

1.4.2   The purpose of the study

The aim of the study is to extend the body of knowledge about "consumer identity projects" (CCT1) and the "socio-historic patterning of consumption" (CCT3) by offering insights into teenagers' brand relationships. Although

various personal and social aspects of brands have been a quite well covered in the literature, there is a lack of scientific knowledge concerning teenagers' lived experiences with brands. *The purpose is therefore to enhance understanding of these aspects of teenagers' brand relationships in their lives through studying the brand meanings and the motives behind them.* In order to achieve this purpose I formulated the following two objectives.

1. <u>The first objective of this study is to identify the self- and group-driven aspects of teenagers' brand relationships.</u> In order to reach this objective I will devise a categorisation of brand meanings from the empirical research data. What kinds of meanings do teenagers link with brands? The results are discussed in sections 3.1 and 4.1.
2. <u>The second objective is to shed light on the motivational basis of teenagers' brand relationships.</u> In achieving it I will relate the empirical findings on brand meanings to the body of theoretical knowledge of personal and social motives and to the motivational principles applied in social psychology. How do diverse motives direct the meanings teenagers attach to brands and their utilisation? The results regarding personal and social motives are presented in sections 3.2 and 4.2. The relation between brand meanings and the respective motives is discussed on a more abstract level in Chapter 5 in the light of the three motivational principles of human social interaction.

1.5   The structure of the study

The function of this *introductory* chapter was to enable the reader to follow and comprehend this study. In presenting the relevant concepts and paradigmatic bodies of theoretical knowledge, as well as giving a brief coverage of CCT, I aimed to reveal the lack of theoretical knowledge concerning teenagers and CCT. In describing its purpose and the two research objectives I have indicated how I expect the study to fill the identified gap in the body of theoretical knowledge. In addition to reviewing current insights in consumer research, I also discussed Smith & Mackie's (2000; 2007) view of basic principles of social psychology. Of these, motivational principles (Striving for mastery, Seeking connectedness, Valuing me and mine) are the most relevant here.

Chapter *two* covers the research approach and the ontological and epistemological basis of the study. I have adopted the ideas of constructivism and have applied abductive logic, according to which the motivational basis is

understood to direct the meanings teenagers attach to brands, and how they utilise these meanings in their lives. I interviewed twenty-four brand-oriented teenagers from Finland and the United Kingdom selected on the basis of essays they had written. The interviews were based on collages of "The world of my favourite brands" the teenagers constructed.

Chapters *three* and *four* present the results of the study in the light of the stated objectives. These chapters are identical in structure in the sense that the empirical findings on brand meanings are presented as categorisations arising from emic-focused interpretation prior moving to the findings of etic-focused interpretation. In emic-focused interpretation, the categorisation was guided by the sensitising concepts of self, identities, social identity and groups. I started with a more than 1,000 brand meanings implied by the teenagers, and ended up with four categories of *self-driven brand meanings* (Personality traits and style, Making an impression, Self-esteem, mood and feelings, and Contexts) and four categories of *group-driven brand meanings* (Immediate circle, Subcultural and post-subcultural groups, Specific groups, and Demographic groups). In my etic-focused interpretation I relate the emic-interpreted brand meanings to motivational ground as described in the existing body of literature. Chapter three focuses on personal motives in the form of self-construction and self-expression, self-extension, and pleasure and protection. Chapter four, in turn, covers social motives including self-expression and self-construction in the group context, self-completion and self-extension, assimilation and connectedness. This etic-focused interpretation sheds light on the personal motives behind self-driven brand meanings and social motives behind group-driven brand meanings, discussed at the end of the two chapters, respectively.

Chapter *five* is devoted to a discussion of the findings. I reflect on aspects of teenagers' brand relationships in the light of the motivational principles presented by Smith & Mackie (2000; 2007). My aim is to enhance understanding of such relationships in their daily lives. I relate the empirical findings on self- and group-driven brand meanings and the associated personal and social motives to the more abstract motivational principles behind a person's interaction with the surrounding social world. Other basic principles of social psychology mentioned in the introduction are also discussed, but they are of secondary relevance to the research objectives.

Finally in Chapter *six*, I discuss the trustworthiness of the study in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Suggestions for future research conclude the chapter and the study.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Ontology and epistemology

Prior moving on to the research approach I will discuss the ontological, epistemological and methodological foundations of the study. The researcher's epistemological, ontological and methodological premises could be termed a paradigm or an interpretive framework incorporating a certain basic set of beliefs that guide the implementation of the study (Guba 1990, 17; Guba & Lincoln 1994, 107). Inquiry paradigms represent a "worldview" that defines what falls within and outside the limits of legitimate inquiry. The basic beliefs behind these paradigms could be summarised as responses to the three fundamental and interconnected questions of conducting scientific research (Guba & Lincoln 1994, 107–108).

Guba and Lincoln (1994, 109) distinguish between the following four paradigms of inquiry: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructivism (see also Lincoln & Guba 2003, 256). This division is limited to the social sciences, and is open to discussions on definitions, meanings and implications. Furthermore, Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) discuss the existence of diverse forms of interpretivism and constructionism (equal to "constructivism" in Guba & Lincoln's typology), claiming that the common feature is a concern with subjective and shared meanings. Constructionism (as well as interpretivism) focuses on how people, as individuals or as a group, interpret and understand the social events and settings they are faced with (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 19). Since brand meanings are often subject- and context-specific, and constructed in the minds of consumers partially through social interaction, I find the constructivist paradigm to be the appropriate option for this study. I will now elaborate on the ontological, epistemological and methodological questions of inquiry in the context of this research in order to justify my choice.

Ontological question has to do with the form and nature of the reality. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), the constructivist paradigm denies an objective reality, and posits that realities are to be comprehended in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions that are socially and empirically based, and are local and specific in nature. We cannot consider some constructions to be more or less true, they are simply more or less informed.

Since they are associated with "realities" they are open to alteration (Guba & Lincoln 1994, 109–110).

Given my aim to understand the role of brands in teenagers' lives by studying the often context-specific and subjectivist meanings they attach to them, the idea of a single and "real" reality is very problematic. However, socially and experientially generated context-specific meanings of brand relationships are likely to result in "more truthful" understanding of the phenomenon. A certain brand may mean different things to different people in different contexts, and it may mean different things to different people in the same context. Thus, accepting the idea of a reality originating from multiple mental, socially and experientially grounded constructions is fundamental.

Epistemological question concerns knowledge and how people come to acquire it (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis 2005, 13). Here the concrete questions include "How do I know the world?", "What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known? "What can be known?. Positivism assumes the inquirer and the inquired about to be independent entities, and that an objective truth can be inferred from replicable findings. Constructivism, on the other hand, denies this possibility on the assumption that the two are interactively linked in the process of investigation. The findings of an inquiry emerge as the investigation proceeds. Consequently, constructivism excludes the possibility of the objective truth of replicable findings (Guba & Lincoln 1994, 108–111).

Finally, *methodological question* involves how the inquirer can find out whatever he or she believes can be known. The chosen ontological and epistemological premises guide the choice of methodological alternative. The objective of constructivist inquiry is the understanding and reconstruction of constructions that both the inquirer and the interviewees hold. Given the variable and personal nature of social constructions, individual constructions are believed to be elicited and illuminated through interaction between and among inquirer and interviewee(s) (Guba & Lincoln 112–113, 1994). I gave my interviewees absolute freedom to discuss the brands that were meaningful and important to them. They based their discussion on their collages of "The world of my favourite brands", and were also influenced by my spontaneous and accommodating questions. These questions, in turn, originated from my research interest and the associated sensitising concepts (self, identity, social identity, groups). Given my interest in the personal meanings of brands, face-to-face interviews were more likely to yield deeply personal and intimate accounts than focus-groups discussions, for example.

2.2   Research approach

The terms research methodology and research approach are both used in the literature to refer to the general perspective adopted. Silverman (2005) defines methodology as the choices the researcher makes about cases to study, methods of data collection and forms of data analysis in planning and executing the study (Silverman 2005, 379). According to Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005), "Approaches are systematic and dynamic social scientific formations that provide loosely defined structures for conceiving, designing, and carrying out research projects". Within a given approach the researcher uses and adapts various techniques and strategies, combines and reworks them. As theories, the function of approaches is to move the researcher along the way to understanding his or her research topic (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis 2005, 17–18).

This study can be characterised as qualitative, constructivist and theory-bound with emic- and etic-focused interpretations. The function of *qualitative* research is to mine rather than survey the terrain. Thus, the objectives of qualitative inquiry are more intensive than extensive (McCracken 1988b, 17). I intend to forge an understanding of teenagers' brand relationships in their daily lives on the basis of the diverse phenomena in my interviewees' accounts, and not by solely focusing on the frequency, which would have been an alternative way of dealing with the empirical data. According to Luborsky (1994), the researcher needs to explain how an infrequent statement is highly significant to the speaker or writer as well as giving order and meaning to a wide range of phenomena (Luborsky 1994, 196). Inevitably, research findings are shaped by the assumptions and experiences and prior theoretical knowledge of the researcher carrying out the data analysis. In order to make the findings usable, the researcher must make decisions about what is more important and less important in the data (Thomas 2003, 4). Not only did I emphasise saturated themes in the data, I also pointed out the themes that were relevant based on the body of theoretical knowledge (e.g., brand meanings related to self-esteem). I also share Alasuutari's (1995) view that qualitative research always deals with culture and with explaining meaningful action. According to such notions, teenagers' relationship with brands, a kind of resource in consumer culture, could be considered anything but meaningless (see Alasuutari 1995, 2).

Social constructionism could be understood as a theoretical approach embedded in the *constructivist* paradigm that stresses the role and importance of social interaction over cognitive processes in an individual's construction of reality (Schwandt 1994, 125–127; Burr 2003, 19–20). It is a widely used approach in psychology, social psychology and the other social sciences. Burr

(2000; 2003, 2–5) claims that it is impossible to give social constructionism a clear and an all-inclusive definition, and includes any approach that has its foundation in one or more of Gergen's (1985) key assumptions: a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge, historical and cultural specificity, knowledge sustained by social processes, and the interconnectedness of knowledge and social action (see Gergen 1985). According to Alasuutari (1994) the foundational concepts of social constructionism are meanings and systems of meanings such as language, and the research focuses on meaningful acts, cultural categorisations and social constructions. He suggests that this leads the researcher to employ an emic approach in which the focus is on the contextual concepts and categorisations of the interviewees rather than the researcher (Alasuutari 1994, 86–88). I gave my informants no a priori concepts or categories of brand meanings. In the role of a researcher with a prior theoretical understanding of the research area, I constructed brand-meaning categorisations based on the accounts of my interviewees, from the less abstract to the more abstract (e.g., "for teenagers" -> "age groups" -> "demographic groups").

Although social constructionism was my preferred theoretical approach, I was inspired by Blumer's three premises of symbolic interactionism (Blumer 1969, 2):

a. Human beings act toward the physical objects and other beings in their environment on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them.

b. Meanings derive from the social interaction (communication, broadly understood) between and among individuals. Communication is symbolic by its nature, because individuals communicate via languages and other symbols. Additionally, during the communication individuals create or produce significant symbols.

c. Meanings are established and modified through an interpretive process.

In terms of analysis, this study is *theory-bound* and offers *emic-focused* and *etic-focused* interpretations. It is through the former I aim to meet my first research objective of presenting empirical categorisations of self- and group-driven brand meanings of teenagers. In order to fulfill the second objective I conducted a deductive analysis of these meanings in order to arrive at an etic-focused interpretation.

In the line with Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2002) I find the inductive-deductive division in qualitative research inadequate, since the possibility of pure

inductive research is non-existent and the division into two does not take into account the third logic of scientific reasoning, abduction. Eskola (2001) used the terms "empirically grounded", "theory-bound" and "theory-grounded", since these three forms are likely to focus attention more effectively on factors affecting the analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 95–97; see also Eskola 2001).

Since I used the sensitising concepts "self", "identity" and "social identity" in my data collection I cannot claim that my study is "empirically-grounded" in Eskola's terms, the defining notion being that the entities to be analysed are not decided or thought out beforehand (see Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 98; Eskola 2001, 136–138). Therefore theory-bound analysis is likely to best describe the emic-focused interpretation of the study (see sections 3.1 and 4.1). Existing knowledge of related concepts and subject matter steer theory-bound analysis, although as in empirically-grounded analysis the entities to be analysed are chosen from the empirical data. The role of prior knowledge of the subject matter is not to test the current body of knowledge but to find new lines of thought. Theory-bound analysis is usually characterised by abductive reasoning, since the researcher's thinking process moves between the empirical findings and prior concepts and theories (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 98–99).

In the construction of each of the four brand-meaning categorisations from the four bodies of empirical data (Finnish/British/Girls/Boys), the emic-focused interpretation of this study is inspired by grounded theory. According to Martikanen and Haverinen (2004), grounded theory primarily supports research concerning individual experiences, meaning structures, social activities, and interaction between people (Martikanen and Haverinen 2004, 134–136). The seminal scholar of constructivist grounded theory Kathy Charmaz (2006) suggests that grounded theory methods should be taken as a set of principles and practices, not as constraining prescriptions or packages signifying Strauss and Corbin's (1990) approach, for example (Charmaz 2006, 9). In line with these notions expressed by Charmaz, Moisander and Valtonen (2006) stress the importance of letting the nature of the research phenomenon and the theoretical approach to guide the choice of research procedures and techniques. Factory-like practical and systematic procedures and techniques are prone to trivial and expectable outcomes that take the joy of surprise from the researcher (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 106). Charmaz also points out that grounded theory methods may complement other approaches to qualitative data analysis (Charmaz 2006, 9).

The essence of theory-bound analysis is also reflected in my etic-focused interpretation (see sections 3.2 and 4.2, as well as Chapter 5), which represents a deductive approach to identifying the motives behind the meanings teenagers attribute to brands, in line with the respective body of theoretical knowledge.

This body of knowledge developed and evolved as a result of interplay between the empirical findings and the theoretical knowledge during the stages of data collection and analysis. My etic-focused interpretation facilitated discussion of the motivational basis of diverse brand meanings among teenagers.

2.3   Informants

The value and meaning of an object are "cultivated" over time and emanate from the psychic energy invested in it and experiences related to it. Thus, private meanings are likely to be the most developed when the individual possesses the object (Richins 1994, 506). The teenager participants of the study were recruited from the wealthier areas of the Helsinki metropolitan area (Helsinki and the neighbouring city of Espoo) in order to ensure the power of consumption and the potential for a higher than average level of private possessions. The students at both secondary schools involved in the study (Helsingin normaalilyseo and Haukilahden koulu) fulfilled this criterion. Helsingin normaalilyseo is located in the wealthy southern part of Helsinki and the body of students in Haukilahden koulu live in areas such as Westend, Haukilahti and Soukka, known to be inhabited by people with higher incomes. The information on residential area was obtained from the forms the students filled in.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the research topic I also included British teenagers from London in my empirical data. London, as one of Europe's leading commercial metropolises, is a rich commercial environment with developed consumer culture. Focusing solely on Finnish teenagers and the commercial environment in Helsinki would have given a narrow and localised perspective.

The British school system differs from the Finnish system in that it incorporates a large number of private schools. Moreover, the cost and the level of education offered in the private schools are known to be higher than in state schools. Thus, my reasons for choosing private schools in England and school children from wealthy areas of Helsinki and Espoo followed a similar logic. British teenagers were represented by pupils at two private schools in London: Latymer Upper School for boys and the City of London School for Girls.

The requirement to wear a school uniform deprived the British teenagers of the main vehicle for self-expression through brands, unlike their Finnish "counterparts". Thus, the availability of commercial stimuli, and the exploitation potential in terms of time and space, were very different for the

two groups of teenagers. These diverse premises contributed to the richness of the data and enhanced understanding of the subject.

Teenagers are usually defined as children between the ages of thirteen and nineteen. I chose to study adolescents between thirteen and fifteen years of age because they are likely to be more open to diverse social and commercial influences in their everyday environment at the beginning of this exciting period of life. Unlike in late adolescence, when individual systematic beliefs and plans (e.g., moral belief systems, personal goals) are likely to guide self-understanding, in early adolescence it carries interpersonal implications. Self-understanding focuses on the characteristics that define the nature of interaction with others. Categorical identifications with interpersonal implications are often emphasised. They concern personality traits, action propensities, physical attractiveness, material appeal (e.g., brands) or states of mind that determine the type and manner of a person's interpersonal life (Damon & Hart 1988, 56; 64; 67). In addition, children over the age of 12 are capable of "thinking about their own thinking", and they are occupied with the question of who they are in their social matrix (Acuff 1997, 95; 117). A heightened awareness of other people's perspectives, along with a need to shape one's own identity and to conform to group expectations, results in a stronger focus on the social aspects of being a consumer, making choices, and consuming brands (John 1999, 187).

2.4   Research process

Sensitising concepts give the researcher initial ideas to pursue, and stimulate him or her to ask particular kinds of questions about the topic. According to Charmaz (2006), grounded theorists often begin their studies with certain guiding empirical interests and general concepts that provide a loose framework (Charmaz 2006, 16). Figure 5 summarises my research process, which started with sensitising concepts based on my pre-understanding and personal research interests.
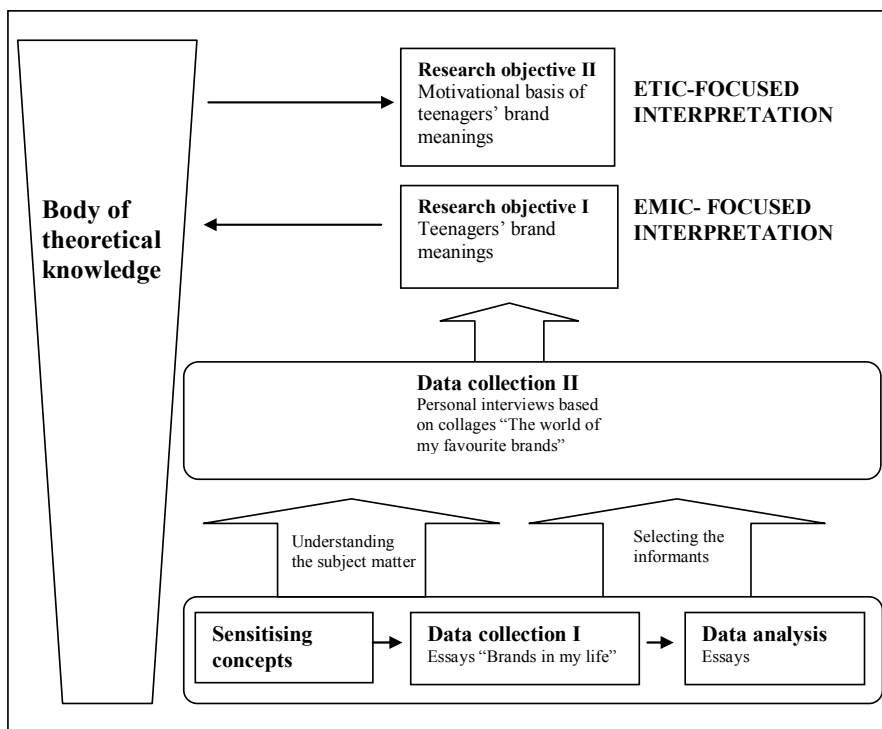
Figure 5. The research process.

For the first and exploratory phase of the data collection I asked 88 Finnish and 82 British teenagers (male and female) to write an essay entitled "Brands in my life". The Finnish subjects wrote their essays between February and May of 2005, the British girl's school pupils wrote theirs in November and December of 2005, and the boys between February and April of 2006. The essays served as selection criteria for the interviews in the respective schools.

After having conducted four pilot interviews based on collages of "The world of my favourite brands" produced by informants in Finland outside of my informant schools, I conducted twelve similar collage-based interviews with twelve of my Finnish informants (five male, seven female) in May 2005. I then carried out six interviews at the British girl's school in mid-January 2006, and a further six at the boy's school in July 2006. I will now discuss the diverse data-collection stages and the analysis in more detail.

2.4.1 Data collection - Essays

I asked my informants to produce essays of 250-400 words on the role of brands in the daily lives of teenagers in order to give me an understanding of

the matter and to "test" the appropriateness of my sensitising concepts the self, identity, social identity and groups for my primary source of research data, personal interviews. At the initial stage of the research process I had planned a bigger role for essays, but data-access problems as well as the brevity of some them led me to concentrate my primary acts of analysis and interpretation solely on data generated during the interviews. Thus, I was obliged to abandon the comparative analysis they would have facilitated. As a consequence, their role was limited to determining interviewee the selection, in addition to testing the appropriateness of the sensitising concepts, as mentioned above. I will discuss the selection of the interviewees in more detail at the end of this section.

Both Finnish secondary schools were interested in taking part in the study from the very beginning, and there was no need to motivate the teachers involved. The recruitment of informant schools in Britain for research to be executed by a foreign scholar was understandably more demanding and required more intense interaction.

I asked the teachers in both countries not to help or guide the students over and above what was stated in the essay instructions in order to avoid potential bias, given the fact that a number of different teachers were involved. Since the main function of the essays was to identify consumption- and brand-oriented informants for the interviews, the students were advised to approach brands from diverse standpoints. In order to avoid a question and answer-format in the essays and to encourage an enthusiastic approach I asked the students to cover as many standpoints as possible, but not necessarily all of them. I also gave them the freedom to approach brands from their own standpoints. The major standpoints included in the essay instructions are listed below:

- What do you consume? Where do you usually shop?
- What is the role of brands in your consumption?
- How have you become acquainted with brands? / Where have you got the information about them?
- Which brands are important (you feel that they are "your brands") to you? Why are these particular brands important while some others are not?
- Do you feel that some of the brands are some sort of mates or friends? Which ones? Why?
- If brands were human beings, which would be most like you? What would make them like you?
- Are there brands you would refuse to use? Which ones, and why would you not use them? What kinds of people use these brands?

- What does the usage of certain brands say about you, your friends, and other people you know?
- Do the opinions of other people influence the brands you prefer? Which people?
- Which brands are important to them? Why? What kind of people are they compared to you?

The interviewees were selected based on their essays. The main selection criterion was the importance of brand consumption, and therefore the chosen interview informants included brand-oriented teenagers to whom brands had personal relevance in a positive way, and excluded anti-brand youngsters who were critical of them, as well as those who seemed to imply that they could not care less. The writers indicated the importance of and their interest in brand consumption in their coverage of the diverse roles and functions of brands in their lives, as well as their personal interest in various brands and their related knowledge. They shed further light on the importance of brands in their essays discussing them in the contexts of the self, identities and their expression, and with reference to diverse types of in- and out-groups.

Thus, at the first stage of the informant-selection process I excluded essay writers who explicitly implied that they had little or no interest in brands. I then screened out the twelve informants in each country by excluding the weaker accounts in terms of brand consumption and my areas of interest discussed above. The next stage was to rank my preferred interviewees. There were far more than twelve suitable candidates in each country who fulfilled the criterion, so I was easily able to replace the two Finnish females and the two Finnish males who refused to take part. The British informants were even more positive: there was only one refusal, and that was due to a trip abroad.

2.4.2 Data collection - Personal interviews

The aim of the qualitative research interview is to elicit a description of the meanings of central themes in the life world of the subject. The main task of the interviewer is to understand what an interviewee says and means (Kvale 1996, 31).

A week before conducting the research interviews in Finland I gave my chosen informants a single-use camera and asked them to take photographs "wherever brands are present in your everyday lives". This would give me an opportunity to dive into their life worlds (everyday lived world) and locate brands in different contexts. At the beginning of the interview we looked at the photographs and I asked questions about the subjects matter (What is in the

picture? Why did you take it?) Thus, research interviews in Finland started with photograph-related warm-up questions. This stage of the data collection was not executed in London given the practical difficulties (e.g., the management of single-use cameras from Finland and the limited temporal resources of the British teachers) so the "warm-up" section of these interviews was different. Instead, I asked the informants general consumption-related questions concerning their favourite shopping venues and sources of brand information, for example. The essential brand-meaning focus and the collage-driven part of the interviews were similar in both countries, and therefore the unavailability of photographs in the warm-up part in the ones conducted in London was not likely to be a major drawback to the study in terms of the contents and quality of the British accounts.

After the warm up I asked the respondents make a collage of their favourite brands, as follows (summarised): "Create a world of your favourite brands by cutting out pictures and pieces of text from these magazines and gluing them into this paper". The magazines used for the collages included fashion and lifestyle magazines (e.g., Elle, Vogue, Cosmopolitan, Gloria, Trendi, CQ, Esquire), youth magazines (e.g., Teen Vogue, Sugar, Demi, Mix, Suosikki), sports magazines (e.g., Tennis, Match, Futari, Skimbaaja, The Skateboarding Magazine, Skateboarders) and other hobby-related publications (e.g., Rolling Stone, Personal Computer World, Mobile Choice, Hifi-lehti, Mikrobitti).

The task of the informants was to build up a collage of their favourite brands on a piece of A2 paper to use it as an aid and stimulus in the main and final stage of the interviews, when they were asked to discuss the meanings linked with these selected brands. If they did not find pictorial material related to some of their favourite brands, I asked them to draw pictures or write about them using crayons. I expected the collages to include in addition to the real and possessed brands, desired brands, which the informants wished they had. Before going through the collages and continuing the interviewing I made sure that the informant had included all of his or her favourite brands. Unfortunately, I was unable to attach an example of a collage (A2-format) due to the loss of image details in the format (B5) of this report.

I collected my personal interview data in line with the notions of intensive interviewing, a method that is familiar in constructivist grounded theory. The structure of the intensive interview ranges from a loosely guided exploration of topics to semi-structured, focused questions. The interviewees are likely to expect the interviewer to take a very active role and to express great interest. Task of the interviewer is to help the interviewee to articulate his or her intentions and meanings by making comments and asking questions (Charmaz 2006, 25–26). First I encouraged the informants to talk unprompted and freely in response to general questions such as: "Tell me about these brands.", "Why

are these brands in your world of favourite brands?","Why is this brand important to you?" and "What does this brand bring into your world of favourite brands?". The informant was likely to imply brand meanings related to my sensitising concepts and research interests (e.g., the self, identities and groups) in his or her responses. If they did not I asked them direct or projective questions in order to elicit accounts of a wide variety of brand meanings. Below are some of the questions I posed, if the respondent did not discuss these points without a prompt. I give them as examples of my reactive and specifying input during the discussions in the research interviews.

- Why does this brand suit you?
- What kinds of people use these brands? Why do they use them?
- What do you think other people think about you, because you use this brand? Why do they think that?
- Do you want to say something by using this brand?
- Are there brands you would not use? Why not?
- What does this brand communicate (in general/about its users)?
- Which celebrity would you choose to promote the brand? Why?
- If the brand was a human being, what would he or she be like, what would he or she do, where would he or she live?

The social and group-related aspects of the brands were probed through questions such as the following:

- Which brands are important to your friends? Why? Which friends and which brands?
- Do your friends have important brands, which you could not care less about, and vice versa? Why?
- Are there brands your friends would not use? Why?
- Which brands are important to your family and relatives? Why these brands?

Following the principles of the constructivist paradigm I acknowledge my active role in bringing forward the brand meanings of my interviewees in the context of the interviews, but I cannot claim that new meanings arose from the interaction, which Charmaz claims to occur in constructivist grounded theory (see Charmaz 2003, 273). The data was collected during a single session lasting from one-hour-and-a-half to two-hours at a venue provided by the researcher in Finland, and at the premises of the respective schools in the

United Kingdom. The interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder, and transcribed word for word for the analysis.

2.4.3   Data analysis - Essays

Since the *essays* had a secondary role in my data analysis and in my understanding of the research subject, I settled for thematic analysis, meaning that I organised the data in themes in order to see what aspects of brands the teenagers considered relevant. According to Luborsky (1994), there are two basic approaches to identifying themes and creating categories. The first is to seek the statements that occur most frequently or are repeated, and the second is to look for the statements that are marked in some way as being meaningful to the person(s). In the latter case the analytic task is more interpretive. The researcher needs to explain how an infrequent statement is highly significant to the speaker or writer, as well as to give order and meaning to a wide range of phenomena (Luborsky 1994, 196). Inevitably, research findings are shaped by the assumptions and experiences of the researcher carrying out the data analysis. In order to make the findings usable, he or she must make decisions about what is more and less important in the data (Thomas 2003, 4).

   I created my categories in line with these more interpretive principles and guidelines rather than on the basis of frequencies and saturation. My research interest, in the form of sensitising concepts, guided my thematic categorisation of essays. The sensitising concepts were illuminated in the diverse standpoints listed in the instructions. The empirical knowledge gained from the thematic analysis of the essays guided me in selecting appropriate interviewees, in being an active inquirer, and in implementing the collection of the primary data (personal interviews) in an appropriate manner. The following section describes the process of categorising the personal interviews.

2.4.4   Data analysis - Personal interviews

I analysed the data from the transcribed *personal interviews* in the form of emic-focused and etic-focused interpretation. The aim of the emic-focused interpretation was to categorise the empirical brand meanings and thereby meeting the first research objective. The deductive etic-focused interpretation, involving identification of the motives behind the meanings, addressed the second objective of the study.

   Thompson (1996) used a similar combination of emic- and etic-focused interpretations in his study of gendered consumption meanings and the

juggling lifestyle. His emic-focused interpretation offered a holistic conceptualisation that elucidated the levels of embedded meanings implicit in the key psychosocial dynamics of this lifestyle, and demonstrated essential symbolic linkages between consumption and the salient facets of the participants' life worlds, such as family concerns, career pursuits and their own self-perceptions. In his etic-focused interpretation, consumption experiences provided a context for creating theoretical linkages between the emic themes and a broader array of socio-cultural meanings that included structured cultural conceptions of femininity and ideals of motherhood (Thompson 1996, 390).

I will now discuss the analysis that resulted in the categorisation of brand meanings. According to Charmaz (2006), coding in grounded theory begins as soon as some part of the data is available. The findings of this temporary analysis shape the further data collection. The emerged ideas are then tested on the next body of empirical data in a process of constant comparison (Charmaz 2006, 20); see also Clarke 2005, xxxi). Line-by-line coding is a typical first step for the grounded theorist. In the case of interview data this may give the researcher new ideas and alert him or her to themes that would otherwise have been missed. Since I was interested in brand meanings that usually comprised one or a couple of words I used *in vivo coding* instead. According to Charmaz (2006), in vivo codes usually refer to special terms used by interviewees. Further, they enable the researcher to preserve the meanings participants give to their views and actions in the coding itself. Like other codes they need to be subjected to comparative and analytic treatment, and to be integrated into the theory (Charmaz 2006, 50; 55).

The first categorisation of brand meanings (Finnish boys) gave me a thematic guideline for the in vivo coding of the remaining three sets of empirical data. Thus, my learning from the first categorisation did not affect my other in vivo codings (e.g., in the form of focused coding), but it had an influence on the next stage in which I organised the identified in vivo codes in more abstract subcategories.

The in vivo codes included brand meanings such as "fashionable", "for being cool", "maturing", "for not being weird" and "used by skater people". After this initial stage of coding these impressions I started to bundle the meanings into more and more focused categories in NVivo-software during the process of my emic-focused interpretation. This categorisation resulted in more abstract codes such as "personal style" (e.g., fashionable,), "impression" (e.g., maturing) and "post-subcultural groups" (e.g., used by skater people). During the process of analysis I condensed the initial 205-434 (the number varied in the four sets of interview data) codes into more abstract categories. I ended up with two main categories of brand meanings as well as respective

sub-categories, in line with my research interests. In arriving at these final two most abstract categories self-driven (section 3.1) and group-driven (section 4.1) brand meanings I applied Thompson's (1997) hermeneutic framework for interpreting consumer stories.

Thompson's (1997) framework consists of two stages of part-to-whole iterations. The iterative process starts with an intratext stage in which the researcher tries to make sense of the whole by reading the text (an interview transcript) in its entirety. He or she reads it again in order to gain an integrated understanding of the consumption meanings indicated in it. An intertextual stage follows in which the researcher looks for similarities and differences across different interviews. Furthermore, interactive movements between the intratextual and intertextual cycles are not rare, since a relevant insight interpreted in the context of a later interview may result in reconsideration of previous interpretations based on the interview texts. Within the hermeneutic framework, it is impossible to arrive at a holistic understanding of consumer stories without going through an iterative process, in which each reading of the text encompasses a broader range of considerations. Furthermore, the hermeneutic research stresses that an understanding of the text reflects a fusion of horizons between the researchers' frame of reference and the texts in question. Thus, the interpretive orientation of the researcher (e.g., background knowledge and areas of interest) enables him or her to become attuned to the specific characteristics and patterns included in the data. Thus, the quality of the research findings is affected by the scope of the background knowledge of the researcher and his or her ability to forge insightful linkages between the respective knowledge and the texts (Thompson 1997, 441–442)

In this study, the stage of "intratextual analysis" consisted of analysing the four separate sets of empirical data (Finnish/British/Girls/Boys). I took one set of empirical knowledge (e.g., the meanings of brands to Finnish girls), rather than the individual interviews, as one text to be analysed. Since the interviews concentrated on revealing brand meanings expressed in one or a couple of words rather than on obtaining the consumption and "life stories" of each interviewee in a narrative form (unlike Fournier 1998, for example), the analysis of sets seemed to fit the aim of understanding aspects of teenagers' brand relationships in daily life. After having analysed these four texts separately I moved to the stage of intertextual analysis, in which I compared the findings in these four bodies of empirical knowledge and began to construct a holistic and synthesized categorisation of brand meanings. In this concluding categorisation, which comprised self and group-driven brand meanings as the most abstract categories, I identified aspects of teenagers' brand relationships in their daily lives, including common characteristics, and special gender-driven and cultural features, for example. During the whole

process of analysis I was guided by my background knowledge, my areas of interest, and the emerging empirical results. What I found in earlier texts influenced my approach later on, and some of my later findings made me rethink some of the earlier ones.

In the etic-focused interpretation I reflected on the categorised meanings that carried personal and social motives. These motives comprised structured conceptions such as the self, identity, social identity and diverse types of groups, as well as related psycho-social phenomena (e.g., self-expression, assimilation). Thus, my aim was to identify motivational elements behind the relevance of teenagers' brand meanings. My interpretation took the form of a scientific dialogue between the empirical findings and the body of respective theoretical knowledge.

However, this etic-focused interpretation based on the chosen sensitising concepts and the related themes in line with the theoretical lens of the study (e.g., self-expression, assimilation) seemed to be limited in explaining teenagers' brand relationships in daily life. I therefore conducted a second etic-focused interpretation focusing on brand meanings and the respective motives in relation to the motivational principles of individual interaction with the surrounding world. This is reported in Chapter 5.

3 SELF-DRIVEN ASPECTS OF TEENAGERS' BRAND RELATIONSHIPS

3.1 Self-driven brand meanings

Adolescents actively start to construct their identities in their early teenage years. The process of identity creation involves not only thinking about who one is or would like to be, but also establishing who or what one is not (or would not want to be). A teenager compares her/himself with others in the social environment and defines for her/himself in what ways s/he is similar to and different from them (Gabriel & Lang 1995, 84; Miles & Cliff & Burr 1998, 89). Dittmar (1992) suggests that "who we are" is defined more and more through what we have, referring to the weight of material possessions in the construction of our identities (Dittmar 1992, 13).

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          │   Self-driven brand meanings    │
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│Personality││Making an ││Self-    ││Contexts │
│traits and ││impression││esteem,  ││         │
│style      ││          ││mood and ││         │
│           ││          ││feelings ││         │
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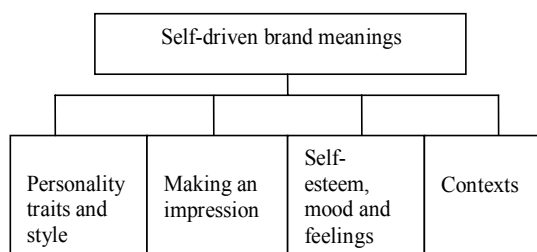
Figure 6. Categories of self-driven brand meanings.

My aim in this chapter is to discuss the self-driven aspects of teenagers' brand relationships based on the above categorisation of brand meanings (see Figure 6). The self-driven aspects emerged from the empirical data in the form of personality traits and stylistic orientations, the desire to make an impression on others in the social environment, issues involving self-esteem, mood and feelings, and attempts to meet the expectations, nature and "social demands" of diverse contexts in daily life.

3.1.1 Personality traits and style

The subjects used brand meanings to communicate "self-explanatory personality traits" (e.g., funny, colourful, rebellious) and "looking-glass

personality traits" (e.g., cool, stylish, unique). Self-explanatory personality traits were directly transferred from brands that the person using it thought had the respective attributes. On the other hand, the teenagers also discussed brand meanings that made them look and feel in a certain way in front of others. These looking-glass personality traits reflected comments and feedback from peers, since peers defined what was cool and in style.

The interviewees aspired to personal qualities such as "funny" and "colourful" wore valued and authentic clothing brands such as Quiksilver and Energie, both of which were said to have "something of their own". The use of striking colours and the special humorous details in these clothes made the wearer stand out from the mass and become associated with the attributes he or she believed symbolised him or her to the others. In addition expressing real or desired personality traits, brands also served the function of conveying a certain attitude to others – indicating a rebellious nature or an interest in sports, for example. Clothing brands such as Volcom, Diesel and Puma carried these kinds of meanings.

Boy C 14 (age) Lon (London), (C): The t-shirts (Quiksilver), they're really silly, so they kind of have funny, silly slogans on them.
Interviewer (I): Like what, can you name me some?
C: Like there's one with on the back of the t-shirt there's like a rooster getting out of bed and it says cock-up. And there are loads of stupid slogans like that, so it probably gives the appearance that I have a sense of humour. I don't know.

I: What would you say, why does Quiksilver suit you?
Boy D 14 (age) Hel (Helsinki), (D): I think they have like nice colours, the colours suit in a nice manner…
I: Hmm…
D: …suit me. You can't really say why, I don't know…, maybe it's the character, I don't know, I can't really say that.
I: Well, what do you think they say about your character?
D: I'm a colourful character… you know.

I: What does a Volcom belt say about you? You don't do skateboarding…
Girl A 14 Hel, (A): Well, there's also Volcom for chicks, and it is somehow a very stylish label, because of the diamond…
I: Yes…
A: And there's always this certain world of colours, quite dark and in a sense quite horrible, it's a kind of a rebel thing…

Teenagers used the brands not only to communicate self-explanatory personality traits, but also to construct themselves as cool, stylish and unique individuals among their peers. This was probably motivated by the need to be interesting and not boring in the eyes and minds of other teenagers. Thus, someone who is considered to use cool and stylish brands is also likely to be taken as such a person. Coolness was conveyed by using modern, trendy, authentic brands such as Samsung, Vans, and Quiksilver, and designer brands including Hugo Boss and Roberto Cavalli.

> Boy E 14 Lon, (E): It's always cool to have a brand (Dickies) that you yourself think is cool, but nobody else have. And if they say it's cool, it makes it even cooler to you, not that it is not that already…

> I: Why is Quiksilver important to you?
> Boy C 14 Lon (C): I just love their clothing and I've got lots of pairs of their jeans, boarding shorts and t-shirts. .. They just do everything and they are all really crazy and clever designs that I really like, especially their boarding shorts, some absolutely wacky boarding shorts, which I really like.
> I: Why do they appeal to you?
> C: They are just really appealing, because they stand out so much, so appealing.

> Boy D 14 Lon, (D): So, if you are wearing a Billabong t-shirt or jeans, you're, it makes you feel like a laid-back surfer.
> I: Is it desirable to be a laid-back surfer?
> D: Yeah, definitely.
> I: Why's that?
> D: Well, for me it is. Because surfing is always considered quite cool thing to do and if people think that you surf, then people think that you are cool. So, if you wear Billabong or things like that, you'd probably look quite cool.

> I: What features are common to the brands you mentioned (Gucci, Roberto Cavalli, Dolce & Gabbana) other than that they are expensive?
> Girl B 14 Lon, (B): They are all exclusive because if you buy something from them you won't go out and see loads of people wearing it. If you'd go to Topshop and bought something you'd be standing next to these people and you'd all be wearing the same outfit.

Thus, mentioned in the above citation by a British girl, one aspect of being cool and unique was to use exclusive designer brands that were not financially

available to all teenagers, as opposed to common, down-market youth-fashion brands.

The three functions of brands as expressions of personality traits, creative bricks of *personal style* and tools for sticking out or fitting in, are highly intertwined. Brand meanings that communicate personality traits also play a central role in the creation of personal style and thus in the aim to stick out or fit in. According to Barnard (1996), most people accept the idea that their clothes, alone or in combination, have or can be given some kind of a meaning. They are also happy to base their decisions on what to buy or wear on the meanings they ascribe to those items of clothing. Moreover, many people allow the meanings linked to other people's clothes to influence the way in which they behave towards these people (Barnard 1996, 69).

Although brand meanings often related to the expression of individuality and uniqueness, some sports (e.g., Adidas, Nike) and skateboarding (e.g., Osiris, Vans) brands seemed to stand for a style that enabled the boys concerned to fit in with their peers. They were safe options, since most of their peers wore them, and there was no risk of being laughed at. Attributed meanings such as sportive, casual and fashionable conveyed this "normal" and socially safe everyday style among the adolescent boys.

I: What kinds of people use Adidas?
Boy A 14 Lon, (A): Well, still athletic, but it is more a fashionable brand than a sporty brand, the same with Puma. Like Nike, some of it is fashionable, but some of it is just to do with sports.

I: Who uses these brands?
Boy E 14 Hel, (E): Circa is usually for skateboarders. I know people who wear Circa and they do skateboarding. Then Osiris is like for everyone.
I: What makes Osiris for everyone?
E: I don't really know. It's like the gang just tends to use it.
I: Well, what would you say if you compared Osiris and Circa as brands?
E: Since I don't skateboard myself I would probably choose Osiris, but if I did, then Circa. Something like that…

Sticking out from the crowd was, as expected related to having an individual style and not aping others. Brands expressing authenticity, coolness, modernity, fashionableness, a new-generation and retro-spirit were used for this purpose. They indicated that the person closely followed the changing trends of youth fashion, and showed it in his or her own style. In addition, the teenagers seemed to counter the threat of social pressure and peer criticism in their attempts to stand out with an authentic brand. The notion of an authentic

brand was twofold: a modern brand that few people knew about and a widely-known brand not everyone could afford. In either case the user stood out from the mass whether that was the intention or not.

> I: What kind of brand is Diesel in your opinion?
> Boy D 14 Hel, (D): I think it's like… They make more like fashion-clothes, clothes for the new generation…
> I: How would you describe these clothes for the new generation?
> D: Well, they change constantly. Like first there were ordinary jeans, then rubbed and now they have holes and stuff like that.
> I: Hmm…
> D: So, jeans like that. Always when fashion… It's like fashion and Diesel go hand in hand…

> I: What do you think in general, do people want to tell something about themselves by using certain brands?
> Girl A 14, Lon (A): Yeah, I think people want like… when they had Pinko bags at school I think a lot of people wanted to show they own Pinko bags… but what did they want to communicate with… I think they showed that they are in style and they (owners of Pinko bags) were like with it.

> Girl A 14 Hel, (A): …then I say "from IVANAhelsinki". "Oh really", and then I have to explain what IVANAhelsinki is, and how I can afford to buy stuff from there… And then they like think that I'm trying to find something a bit distinctive. But that always happens when you have like anything special, everybody like thinks "she is trying to be special somehow…"

> I: Well, why does Converse suit you?
> Girl B 13 Hel, (B): Actually, I don't know. I've just been wondering why I like Converse, because I didn't use to. I've just started to like it… I don't know, in a way it's like Converse All Stars is part of "retro life".

Since the term "fashionable" refers to something that is popular and approved of at a particular time, the association with coolness did not come as a surprise. A fashionable teenager is likely to be considered a cool teenager. The meanings of fashionable and cool attributed to designer brands such as Lacoste and Polo (by Ralph Lauren) were occasionally enhanced by the endorsement of celebrities. Wearing fashionable and stylish brands made the girls feel up-to-date and trendy.
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I: What does Lacoste have for you?

Boy B 14 Lon, (B): … I have a lot of friends that wear Lacoste and Polo and when I see them they do look a lot, sort of a lot cooler. They want to look great and want people to come up to them. It does make you look fashionable and a lot older. You see famous people wear it, but it's also, it's quite a simple design.

I: Okay. So why have you chosen Converse into your world of brands?

Girl C 14 Lon, (C): I suppose I have a pair of them and I wear them a lot. And I like Kaiser Chiefs kind of music and Green Day as well. They are the sort of people that I think would wear them and I like that music. So I don't know, I like to wear them.

Thus, in the case of Converse shoes, stylishness and vintage aspect were combined with an expression of musical taste and the respective style, when this informant mentioned her interest in indie music bands (e.g., Kaiser Chiefs, Green Day). These idols had motivated her to use the same shoe brand and thus to adopt the style of indie music fans.

3.1.2 Making an impression

3.1.2.1 Wealth and fashion sense

Barnard (1996) claims that clothing and fashion are often used to express social worth or status, and people tend to make judgements concerning other people's social worth and status on the basis of what such people are wearing (Barnard 1996, 58). Both teenage girls and boys seemed to aim at making an impression by expressing their economic status (or, in fact, the status of the family) as well as their sense of fashion. Some of them explicitly expressed snobbism, while others stressed the use of fashionable and peer-appreciated brands in order to make an impression. Luxurious and expensive designer brands that were not financially available to everyone served both purposes, not least with regard to the opposite sex.

I: Well, what do you think, why do they want to stand out or...?

Boy D 14 Hel, (D): Maybe some people want to show that they are rich and… I don't know. Something like that.

I: Yeah...

D: Then some people might want to show that they also can dress up or

something like that. These are the main points that came to my mind.

I: Hmm. Well, what would you say, which brands do these people use in order to stand out?

D: All of these Hilfigers and Polos, and brands like that.

I: What does Longchamp say about them?

Girl E 14 Hel, (E): Well, Longchamp… I don't like it that much. I don't know what it might communicate. It's one of these new and expensive brands that are "nice to show off in front of others"… I think all these Longchamps and Burberrys are a big problem. I mean we've seen how many of these "Burberry-Lacoste-Longchamp people" consider themselves to be superior to others, and look down on others.

I: Why does the Burberry brand suit you?

Girls C 13 Hel, (C): Well I think it's funny in the sense that everybody looks at me and thinks "what a weirdo", to have clothes like that, and she might be a bit of a snob… It's kind of flattering sometimes…

C: …I mean if someone happens to buy a Burberry dress, she buys it because… Obviously also because it's a nice dress and that, but because "wow, that's a fine brand and costs that much…"

Thus, the subjects did not necessarily think they should reject exciting brands that were available to them just for the sake of avoiding envious and sarcastic remarks from others. However, one of the girls also recalled a context in which her classmate was showing off and trying to make her envious with her Pepe Jeans shirt. These attention-generator brands included clothing labels such as Burberry, Lacoste, Miss Sixty, Gsus, Tommy Hilfiger, Roxy and Levis, and Longchamp (school) bags.

Girl G 13, Hel (G): …and once a friend of mine came to school wearing a Pepe Jeans t-shirt, and sort of saying at me, "look, I've got this shirt, this Pepe Jeans shirt". I don't know, I guess she was trying to make me envious. I also have a Pepe Jeans t-shirt…

As suggested, the teenagers also aimed to make an impression by showing their good design and fashion sense, rather than by just signalling their status explicitly. Whereas sports brands such as Adidas and Nike offered the boys peer-approved options for ordinary daily use, Quiksilver and designer brands (such as Lacoste and Polo Ralph Lauren) were used to impress others. The British boys mainly talked about impressing the opposite sex by wearing "crazy and funny" Quiksilver products, and sophisticated and stylish Lacoste

and Polo. They believed such meanings and personal qualities to be useful in an interactive context with girls. The meaning linked to impressing girls was aptly illustrated in one account in which the former Arsenal football star Freddie Ljungberg was mentioned as a suitable promoter of Lacoste since he was considered appealing and attractive in the eyes of women. In this case, the womanizer-image would first be attributed to Lacoste, and then to this teenage boy.

I: What about you and your friends, do you want to communicate something to others by using these brands?
Boy C 14, Lon (C): Not really. I don't think we really… I think Polo shirts and crazy Quiksilver jeans and things, I think… Well, we don't really try and communicate that to other boys, it's more towards to sort of, to impress the girls like that…
I: Is that the recipe for you and your friends to take some crazy Quiksilver and…
C: Well, probably yeah…

I: Why does he suit for the job?
Boy B 14, Lon (B): He's quite good-looking and already doing adverts for FCUK and I think women quite like them, like think he's attractive. So if men think that the top will make you look attractive, then they'll look on to him and think, well Freddie Ljungberg's getting women and he's wearing this top, maybe I get the women as well. So, I choose him and… it's gotta be someone quite young as well, `cos I think Lacoste is for younger people, sort of twenties, thirties…

Brand meanings related to a good sense of fashion and up-to-datedness were also suggested in the account of a British teenage girl, in which she expressed her hope of getting "wows" from peers by wearing a Polo Ralph Lauren-shirt.

Girl A 14, Lon (A): …my sister was like 'oh you're so obsessed to this Polo Ralph Lauren shirt, you should not just think people would think of you if you wear a different brand' and I don't really because some people in my class do think that, but I don't really think that I'm like that, but then when I think about it I'm like 'oh maybe I am a bit'. So Ralph Lauren is kind of my one thing I would like people to see me wearing. I don't really mind if people see me wearing something that does not have a label on it and they'd just say 'oh she looks nice and she looks pretty wearing that outfit', but if I

saw someone with Ralph Lauren, it would be like 'oh she's quite up-to-date'.

The next section focuses on brand meanings linked with maturity, which could be considered one way in which teenagers impress other people.

3.1.2.2 Maturity

The teenagers talked about how they used respected brands and their related meanings to make an impression on others in terms of appearing older and more mature. They tended to associate Lacoste with older people. One of the boys described how wearing Lacoste products made people look cooler and more mature in front of others. Thus, for him Lacoste carried the meaning of being more mature and older than he really was. In another account, a male informant implied that he felt he was treated as an adult by his parents when he wore a pair of Levi jeans as opposed to when he wore his favourite brand Quiksilver with its crazy and striking details (e.g., holes and paint splashes).

> I: You said that it's for younger, you said that it's for people from 20 to 30, but if we think about you, what does Lacoste have for you?
> Boy B 14 Lon, (B): Well if I bought it… It may be for older as well… If something that, I mean, probably is for sort of 18-year-olds, I'm 14, so it is for older people, but if you wear it, it does sort of make you look older or more mature, so it's like a maturing product. I think also I have a lot of friends who wear Lacoste and Polo and when I see them they do look a lot, sort of a lot cooler. They want to look great and want people to come up to them, it does make you look fashionable and a lot older.

> I: How do they feel when you wear Quiksilver, a pair of Quiksilver jeans?
> Boy C 14 Lon, (C): Well, I don't know… I think they (parents) act slightly…, they treat more sort of more like a teenager when I'm wearing Quiksilver, and Levis, then they treat probably treat me more adult-like when I'm wearing Levis, because, I don't know, they seem more grown up.

Finally, although Gucci sunglasses did what they were supposed to do, protect the eyes from the sun, their primary meaning for one of the female informants was to express maturity and an adult-like look, and to generate a sense of being unique and special among her peers. In this sense, brands implying maturity also satisfied the desire to stand out from others.

Girl B 13 Hel, (B): Yes it is, since the sunglasses are really good for me.

I: What makes them good?

B: I don't know… They're somehow adult-like, but on the other hand not too adult-like, so they're not really adult-like, what adults tend to wear. They are like something in between… And then they protect you from that sun…

Brands conveying maturity seemed to cover visible and symbolic categories of products. Their use was linked to self-expression and to the need for gaining that extra edge that implied being "cool" and appreciated among one's peers. There was no indication that the respective brands were used to make the wearer feel more mature per se.

3.1.3   Self-esteem, mood and feelings

The teenagers' accounts suggested brand meanings related to self-esteem, mood and feelings, which were discussed for the most part by girls. Exclusive and high-end designer brands cheered them up and increased their self-esteem due to their high price and uniqueness, which attracted admiration from peers, and because they made the wearer feel special. The teenage girls explicitly related brand meanings to self-esteem, which was also embedded in meanings linked to popularity among peers, such as cool and fashionable.

I: Why is this brand important to you? You said in a way that it's extravagant? Do you want to be extravagant?

Girl E 13 Hel, (E): No. It would just be something special and that. Maybe something primarily for me, it could like raise my self-esteem. If I wasn't doing so well I could think "Well, at least I have a Louis Vuitton leather bag".

I: Why does Miss Sixty suit you?

E: It doesn't necessarily suit me, but I just buy them.

I: Why?

E: Well, I don't know… I just want to own them. Sometimes it feels like clothes are like ornaments that you collect and just have to have. And sometimes you just wear them. When you wear Miss Sixty you get more self-confidence, or something like that…

I: Why have you included DKNY in your collage?

Girl F 14 Lon, (F): It's quite expensive, like if you got something from DKNY everyone would be like, cool, that's DKNY. But it's still nearly

affordable. You can't have too many things from there, but if you've got a couple, then you're like wow. I've got it.

Girl 14 B Lon, (B): Most of these brands (Gucci, Chanel, Dolce & Gabbana) are well-known ones that everybody knows. Most of these are expensive brands that people can't buy. It's nice to know you have a make that everybody would like to have.

In addition, brand meanings seemed to regulate the mood of the female informants. The brands involved were clothing makes (e.g., Benetton, Esprit) with numerous colours in their ranges. Thus, the wearer was able to express her mood in the various colours she wore.

I: Tell me what kind of person would Benetton be?
Girl D 14 Hel, (D): It has a frame of mind that… It might be sad some day, glad some other day, sometimes depressed and again sometimes hyperactive. So, its nature and opinions would change quite often…
I: Which of these brands do you think are like you?
D: Maybe Benetton and Puma. Puma, because I like to do sports. And then Benetton is nice, because my mood like changes quite often…

The subjects expressed their top brands as their "favourite and the dearest labels". In these contexts they tended to express strong feelings such as "I hate it" and "I love it". One of the girls dreamed of a Lacoste shirt because her mother used to wear one when she was young back in the 80s. Thus, the shirt represented a nostalgic trip to her mother's youth, the life stage she was in at the time. Nostalgic feelings were also implied in the account given by a British girl, in which she discussed her close relation as a child to Diesel jeans, and this still affected the way she felt about the Diesel brand.

Girl F 13 Hel, (F): Then this is one of my dreams: a Lacoste shirt. I was actually close to getting one, but in the end I didn't. Because like, my mom used to have one back in the 80s…

I: Why is Diesel in your world of favourite brands?
Girl A 14 Lon, (A): Because I think I just have connection, because when I was young I always had them. So, I kind of feel like, you know when you have a teddy bear or something. I had it when I was smaller so it's kind of like always, or maybe just they've always been my favourite pair of jeans I ever had these Diesel ones, so I am always going to like them.

In addition to the nostalgic features in the teenagers' emotional stands towards brands, shared experiences in general and the comprehensive presence of these particular brands in their lives, an appealing design, style and functional characteristics provoked affective reactions. The long-term love for the Nokia mobile phone was based on the company's superiority, excellence, coolness and comprehensiveness (both top- and bottom-end phones) as a mobile-phone manufacturer. The Topshop clothing store was considered a "magic shop", a trustworthy companion that did not let people down.

I: What kind of brand is Nokia to you?
Boy A 14 Lon, (A): Well, I think it's just the main brand, I've always loved that. That's just the best phone company. It's just, they're very cool phones and are really expensive, and there are also really basic phones that are really cheap. …with Nokia there's always something that's just for calling people and something with videos and cameras and stuff. They just have everything.

Girl A 14 Lon, (A): …there (Topshop) will always be something I would like, I don't know why. It's just like my magic shop which I never really think about and then when I go there I always find something I like. I don't think it's really the brand or anything, it just always has something nice …

Converse shoes and Quiksilver clothing were loved for their versatility, in that the informants said they could use them in diverse contexts in everyday life. Naturally these brands also needed to be cool in the eyes of these teenagers in order to qualify for such extensive use.

I: What does Converse mean to you?
Boy A 14 Lon, (A): I just think they're cool, and I'd always wear them, they are just easy, cool, and relatively cheap as well.

I: When do you use Quiksilver products?
Boy C 14 Lon, (C): Well, all occasions really, 'cos I've got jeans, well, I'm wearing a pair of their jeans now. I wear the boarding shorts when I go surfing or swimming and I have, well I wear, I've got like twenty of their t-shirts, so I wear them practically anywhere. I just really like Quiksilver.

A personal history with a brand did not always lead to favourable brand meanings. One female informant discussed her less sympathetic feelings towards the Finnish rainwear brand Rukka, which she linked with "traumatic experiences" in her childhood.

I: Why wouldn't you use the Rukka brand?

Girl B 13 Hel, (B): I mean I don't have anything against it as such, but I wouldn't want to wear rainwear and stuff like that. Then Rukka just came to my mind. It reminds me of all those horrible rubber overalls that were put on me to protect me from the dirt at kindergarten…

I: Hmm…

B: So, I was left with my traumas and I don't want to wear anything from Rukka.

Thus, the Rukka brand seemed like an innocent victim, since the girl's dislike and negative associations (e.g., brand meaning "horrible") were based on her dislike of the product category in general, not Rukka rainwear in particular.

3.1.4   Contexts

It seems that one group of brand meanings was linked with the purposes and contexts of use. On the basis of the empirical data I divided these brand meanings into meeting personal needs, festive contexts, and everyday contexts. When the informants discussed the meanings related to meeting personal needs, the respective brands were likely to make them feel better about themselves either mentally or physically. The functional features and benefits originating from the product were stressed in the case of meeting personal needs.

Girl A 14 Hel, (A): And there's Body Shop. I would like to support it more, but the prices are so much higher. So, it doesn't pay to buy make-up there.

I: Okay…

A: Well, if you're in the mood to pamper yourself you could buy a face pack or hand lotion…

Boy A 14 Lon, (A): Then here's this Playstation. That's just like the coolest play console, like almost all of my friends have them, it's just so big and amazing graphics and really addictive and fun.

I: Why is it so popular?

A: It's if you want to relax, sort of just have a break, it's the perfect thing to do, it's just fun and you can… yeah, it's just really fun.

The subjects discussed more and less formal festive occasions. The chosen co-ordinated outfit was therefore likely to reflect the nature of the occasion and the brand meanings related to what they decided to wear. Expensive and prestigious designer brands such as Calvin Klein, Giorgio Armani and Polo Ralph Lauren were connected with more festive occasions given both their meanings of status and finesse and the demands (e.g., dress-code) of the occasion. In addition, according to the girls Burberry was also suitable for festive occasions. Furthermore, one of British female informants discussed the distinction between Mac and L'Oreal make-up: Mac meant special occasions and parties, while L'Oreal was more suitable for everyday purposes.

I: What kind of brand is Calvin Klein to you?
Boy D 14 Hel, (D): I'd say, it is like more for celebrations. Suits
 and stuff…
I: Okay…
D: Then there's Giorgio Armani's eagle, which I think is very similar to
 Calvin Klein. It's also for ceremonial occasions, for really wealthy people.
They wear Polo and stuff…
I: Hmm…
D: That's what they're like. But I think they have really exclusive clothes.

I: And what about Lacoste shoes compared to those three?
Boy E 14 Lon, (E): They're probably smarter than those others (Puma, Adidas, Nike), you'd probably wear them for more special occasions…
I: What occasions?
E: I don't know, like… weddings or something like that, parties or something like that.

I: Do you like to vary depending on the occasion, and do you like to use the whole scale or what…?
Girl D 14 Lon, (D): Yeah, well… It (Mac) is kind of more special occasion make-up.
I: Can you give me examples which occasions and which make-up?
D: Mac make-up is mostly like strong colours, so I'll use that when I'm going to a party. But like other make-ups, like L'Oreal is more like everyday kind of make-up.

If the occasion involved adults but its nature was informal in nature (e.g., eating out with friends of the family, Sunday coffee with relatives), the brands were "downgraded" to everyday brands that left room for expressing being young and laid-back (e.g., Tommy Hilfiger, Energie, Gsus, Pepe Jeans). These

brands were also used on a daily basis, but they were still somewhat superior to the everyday range in that they offered a glimpse of finesse and speciality. This was also true with youth parties. It is worth noting that no skateboarding brands or sports brands were considered, not even for more informal youth parties. This simply implies how the nature of the contexts interacted with the meanings of the brands, and allocated appropriate brands to each occasion.

I: So when would you use these crazy pants like Quiksilver?
Boy C 14 Lon, (C): I'd wear the crazy ones for going out with my friends and things but I'd probably use the Levis for a more sort of formal, formal meeting probably as they're more plain and simple jeans.
I: What would that, can you give me an example of a formal meeting?
C: I don't know, going out to dinner with my parents or something.

I: Can you say what Tommy Hilfiger brings into your world of favourite brands?
Boy B 14 Hel, (B): Well, in practice I wear it anytime and anywhere. I mean it's very everyday but also festive. It brings a certain…, what should I say, informality but anyway it's cool, not exactly arrogant, but there's a bit of snobbery…

As well as brands linked with certain occasions and contexts, there were also those that were suitable "for any occasion". These were likely to be the ones the informants used most of the time they were awake, and included common and widely-used clothing and footwear brands. Popular brands among the British teenage girls, such as Converse and Topshop, were considered suitable anytime, anywhere and for anyone (meaning peers). Thus, they were obvious choices for the purposes of meeting and socialising with peers in informal and casual contexts.

I: What are those clothes (Topshop) like?
Girl F 14 Lon, (F): I don't know… They've just like, they've got a really big variety, I think. It's not like, sporty stuff, but it's just like, casual, everyday things, which most of my friends wear, stuff from there.

I: What about the people who use Converse in general, what can you say about them?
Girl D 14 Lon, (D): It's basically the kind of laid-back kind of shoe, it's probably the most laid-back kind of shoe you can wear, so I think that people just like to have a shoe that they can just wear whenever and they're very versatile. Like you can wear them with anything, really.

This concludes the coverage of teenagers' self-driven brand meanings. In the following section I will consider the respective meanings in the light of the theoretical knowledge of diverse personal motives behind brand consumption.

3.2   The personal motives behind brand meanings

Brands offer a way to a world of meanings in which an individual consumer can adopt ready-made solutions from the socio-cultural environment or engage in their development in order to achieve self-related goals. On the other hand, selves and identities of individuals steer participation and activeness in the creation process in which consumers give new meanings to brands through their consumption.

The self-concept and self-esteem constitute a person's self-knowledge in terms of how he or she understands and feels about himself or herself (Smith and Mackie 2000, 104). The existing body of theoretical knowledge about brands and the self has concentrated on the self-concept (e.g., Fournier 1998, Escalas 2004; Chaplin & Roedder John 2005), which is also true of research on the personal meanings teenagers attach to their brands. However, the accounts of my female informants in particular also suggested an influence on self-esteem at this unsteady stage of life. They mentioned how some particular brands gave them comfort when they were feeling down, for example, gave them self-confidence and indicated their mood to others.

These teenagers referred to other people when it came to their favourite brands. Their accounts implied that brand meanings were socially constructed and developed in that they seemed to constantly compare themselves with their classmates, school mates and other peers walking around town or sitting in a subway. Especially at this early stage (aged 13-15), the role of these actors in the social environment was likely to be influential in terms of understanding, expressing and constructing the self based on the consumer cultural echoes of others. Cooley's (1902) concept of the looking-glass self aptly conveys teenagers' daily interaction with brands. Other teenagers' reactions and comments about one's brands reflect the brand image back to him or her, and increase his or her self-knowledge.

In line with the self-conceptual approach taken in this study, self-driven brand meanings were also multiple, dynamic and context-specific in nature. Among the male informants certain sports brands stood for fitting in with their classmates and formed part of their identity as teenage boys. They also enabled them to feel like and to see themselves as excellent football players in front of others, for example.

3.2.1 Brands constructing and expressing the self

The concept of the looking-glass self conveys the interactive nature of self-construction and self-expression. From this perspective there is no difference in the case of brands constructing and expressing the self. Thus, I will make no clear distinction between these concepts in this context, and will concentrate on the thematic foundation of personal self-related brand meanings.

It was implied in the interviews that the teenagers exploited brand meanings in their self-construction and self-expression. They used brands to express diverse aspects of their personalities (section 3.1.1) and style (section 3.1.1), to make an impression on others (section 3.1.2), and symbolise diverse group memberships, which I will discuss later in section 4.1. In line with Schenk and Holman's (1980) concept of "situational self-image", Solomon (1996) claims that brands may be used to communicate the features the individual thinks should be communicated in a given context (Solomon 1996, 327; see also Sirgy 1982, 289). The personality traits that the teenagers wanted the brands to express (e.g., humorous, laid-back, crazy, colourful, rebellious) reflected this line of thinking: they were either socially desirable and appreciated, or traits that helped the person to stand out from the masses. In terms of the interactive dimension of self-construction and self-expression, those who wanted to be considered as humorous, wore humorous brands and constructed themselves as humorous after receiving positive feedback from others in the social environment. For example, one of the Finnish girls who wore Burberry clothes was well aware of how other pupils at school considered her to be snobbish based on her brand preference. Thus, part of her self-image as being snobbish was based on other peoples' reactions, and not only on the up-market brand image of Burberry that was familiar from the media. When her schoolmates made comments about her wearing a snobbish brand, her self-image of being snobbish was enhanced and her understanding of her self was further developed (see section 3.1.2.1, p. 69). Similarly, a British boy wearing a Quiksilver t-shirt with a humorous "rooster/cock-up" text would be seen as a humorous person in the eyes of his peers, at least he thought so. Thus, a meaning related to a Quiksilver item was likely to contribute the construction and expression of his self as humorous (see section 3.1.1, p. 64).

The teenagers' accounts also suggested personality traits such as special, unique and fashionable, which were likely to stress the notion of and desire for individuality even more, and thus enable them to stand out from the crowd in a positive way. One of the British female informants explained how she wanted to avoid wearing Topshop clothes because she did not want to look like the "people standing next to her". The exclusiveness of designer brands such as

Roberto Cavalli and Dolce & Gabbana enabled her to feel and express herself as a special person (see section 3.1.1, p. 65).

According to Barnard (1996), people usually accept the fact that clothes or a combination of them can be given some kind of meaning (Barnard 1996, 69). This notion was reflected in the teenagers' accounts: it seemed to be important for them to be fashionable, up-to-date and stylish, and also to be considered as such by their peers. They achieved this by using brands singly or in combinations that were considered fashionable and cool. The expressive and meaning-creating functions of brands were not limited to clothing brands, and also included other visible product categories such as school bags and mobile phones (see section 4.1.1, p. 91). These brands either alone or in combination, were likely convey something about their user, whether it was a personality trait or a certain kind of style (e.g., laid-back, "retro") he or she wanted to bring forward (see section 3.1.1, p. 65 and 3.1.1, p. 67).

Eastman, Goldsmith & Flynn (1999) define status as the position in a society or group assigned to an individual by others, and suggest that brands could be used to symbolise it (Eastman, Goldsmith & Flynn 1999, 41–42; 209). For example, some of the Finnish female informants used Longchamp bags as their school bags. This was based not only on their appealing design, but also on the financial status and prestige embedded in them. One of these girls thought that her peers considered her and her friends "nice and wealthy people". The niceness in this case did not seem to be connected with the brand meanings of Longchamp, but the aspect of financial status was likely to be based on them (see section 4.1.1, p. 91).

The use of brands to express status seemed to be motivated by the need to feel special and to stand out, to attract admiration from the peers, sometimes to make others envious, and occasionally just to show off in an explicitly unsnobbish way. The informants enjoyed hearing the "wows" and other admiring comments from their peers when they were able to show off an expensive and original designer-brand item (see section 3.1.2.1, pp. 70–71). However, the expression of status was not based solely on social class and economic status (of the family): the brands were also used in order to convey the impression of having a stylish, cool and unique personality. Thus, showing off was related to making a positive impression on peers, and particularly among the opposite sex in the case the male informants. One of the British boys confessed the combination of Polo Ralph Lauren shirts and "crazy" Quiksilver jeans to be suitable for impressing the girls (see section 3.1.2.1, p. 70).

3.2.2   Brands extending the self

It could be said that the concept of an extended self lies at the core of both self-construction and self-expression, since according to Solomon (1996, 236), the extended self comprises the external objects that people consider a part of their selves. External objects (e.g., brands as material objects) are not the only means of extending the self, but I have chosen to rule out places and things (e.g., a person's home and furnishings in it, and ties to local communities) in my analysis and to keep the focus on the link between brands and the self, and its outcomes (Solomon 1996, 237; Belk 1988, 141).

   Belk (1988) suggests that only certain kinds of material possessions can act as extensions of the self during adolescence, and he refers to clothing and automobiles (for high-school students) as an important source of prestige (Belk 1988, 148). The findings of my study indicate the relevance of self-construction for today's teenagers, as their accounts of the role of brands in self-construction and self-expression suggest. Given the kinds of material possessions that act as extensions of the self, I would combine clothing and school bags: the girls in particular in both cities discussed the expressive aspect of their bags. One of the Finnish girls and her friends used Longchamp school bags as an implication of wealth (see section 4.1.1, p. 91). Thus, a top-range school bag extended their selves to equal those of their wealthy parents, although the girls were not rich themselves. In a similar manner, one of the British girls referred to Pinko school bags. She said that people using these bags were considered stylish since they had a bag that was in style (see section 3.1.1, p. 67). Automobile brands (e.g., Smart, Honda) were, at best, material possessions these teenagers would probably desire to own in the future based on their current brand meanings, implying their appealing design, for example.

   Brands in these visible and publicly perceivable product categories were relevant in the context of self-extension by means of material possessions. Since some of the self-extensions concerned brands related to social identity (e.g., using particular brands in order to appear more mature), I will discuss this further in section 4.2.2. I will also keep my discussion on symbolic self-completion with brands for that section, which is a more appropriate context given the close connection between self-completion with social identities.

3.2.3   Brands providing protection and pleasure to the self

Elliot and Wattanasuwan (1998) propose that brands can be used as a means of protection of the self, since they may evoke feelings of nostalgia and provide relief from feelings of insecurity during an individual's life (Elliot &

Wattanasuwan 1998, 139). These thoughts are supported by Belk's (1988) earlier notions of brands as convenient mechanisms for storing memories and feelings attached to people's sense of the past (Belk 1988, 148). Among young people in their teenage years in general, and the informants of this study in particular, it seems that evoked feelings of nostalgia are not characteristic, which is not surprising given the fact that nostalgic feelings about material possessions are usually linked with elderly people.

However, one of the girls expressed nostalgic feelings about a brand from her childhood when she talked about her favourite and only pair of Diesel jeans, which she had and loved as a child. Her account indicated a feeling of security and continuity since she compared that a pair of jeans to a Teddy-bear and said that they would always be her favourite pair. Thus, the Diesel brand would probably evoke nostalgic feelings in her also in the future. In addition, I discovered that an association of a mother's Lacoste shirt with the 80s evoked feelings in her teenage daughter. These feelings seemed to be the main reason why she wanted the same brand of shirt. Further, nostalgic feelings were not always positive. Another Finnish girl talked about her negative childhood memories of the Finnish rainwear brand "Rukka": she avoided the brand as a teenager, and experienced no nostalgic feelings of self-protection (see section 3.1.3, pp. 73–75).

As I implied earlier in this chapter, the teenagers' brand meanings were not solely related to the self-concept, and also included meanings that affected the other side of self-knowledge, self-esteem. Self-esteem concerns how individuals feel about themselves, in other words their positive or negative self-evaluations (Smith & Mackie 2000, 116–117). According to Banister and Hogg (2004), higher-order needs such as for individuality, uniqueness, autonomy, social distinction and social identification, could be linked to the maintenance and enhancement of self-esteem (Banister & Hogg 2004, 851). Thus, how a person feels about himself or herself comes back to the development of the self-concept.

According to the accounts of the girls in particular, brands provided protection to the self by affecting feelings and self-confidence. In one case a designer-brand leather bag gave comfort and increased self-esteem when the girl was feeling down and blue because although things in her life were not as they should be, she "at least had a Louis Vuitton leather bag". Designer jeans from Miss Sixty would also increase her self-confidence in contexts in which she did not need comforting, so she would just feel more secure on the basis of the status and prestige of the brand. Here the designer jeans would enhance her self-esteem for reasons related to social distinction or identification (see section 3.1.3, p. 72).

However, brand meanings related to self-esteem were not explicit, but were implied through the desirable "brand-aided" reputation of being cool, fashionable, admired and "wowed at" by peers (see section 3.1.3, pp. 72–73). Designer brands served this function: making an impression with approved and appreciated brands seemed to make the teenagers feel more socially secure in front of their peers.

Furthermore, another of the girls implied that she exploited the wide variety of colours of the Benetton clothing brand to express her mood. In this case the mood had an influence on her choice of brand (and the particular colour), not the other way round (see section 3.1.3, p. 73). The boys' accounts did not include explicit links to self-esteem. However, one of the British informants mentioned that brands could change from being providers of protection for the self to presenting a threat to personal safety given the risk of getting mugged if designer brands were used in the "wrong" neighbourhoods and contexts (see section 4.1.1, p. 89).

In line with the notions of Campbell (1987), Gabriel and Lang (1995) refer to hedonic consumption as either traditional or modern. Traditional hedonism stresses the pleasurable sensations attached to senses such as taste and sight, while modern hedonism refers to the emotion accompanying diverse types of experiences (including feeling sad and negative) (Gabriel & Lang 1995, 104–106, see also Campbell 1987, 58–76). Both the girls and the boys expressed their personal attachment to brands in terms of loving, liking or hating them. Their emotional and personal reactions were based on their long and intense relationships with respective brands such as Quiksilver and Topshop, and the pleasure they gave according to the principles of both traditional and modern hedonism (see section 3.1.3, p. 74).

The notion of traditional hedonism was expressed by one of the girls, who "loved" Miss Sixty clothes due to the special cut and design that made them unique in her eyes (see section 4.1.2.2, p. 96). According to Gabriel and Lang (1995), if the key to modern hedonism is the search for pleasure through emotional experience, modern consumption could be seen as a developed instrument that enables individuals to imagine the "dramas" that give them pleasure (Gabriel & Lang 1995, 104–106). Another of the girls talked about her favourite brands (Gucci, Chanel and Dolce & Gabbana) being well-known, but not available to everybody because of their cost. She implied that she felt pleased to own things by brands "everybody" would like to have. She was thus searching pleasure through emotional experience based on the negative feeling of envy or the positive admiration of her peers (see section 3.1.3, p. 73). These findings are well in line with Hirschman and Holbrook's (1982) notions of hedonic consumption, which refers to the multi-sensory, fantasy-related and

emotive aspects of an individual's experience with products and brands (see Hirschman & Holbrook 1982, 92).

3.3 Summary: contextual self-related goals direct self-driven aspects of teenagers' brand relationships

In the first section of this chapter I presented the categorisation of teenagers' self-driven brand meanings arising from my emic-focused interpretation driven by the sensitising concepts of the self and identity. In the second section I discussed the implied brand meanings reflected in the motivational ground (etic-focused interpretation) in terms of self-construction, self-expression, pleasure and protection. Contextual self-related goals seemed to direct the self-driven aspects of brand relationships.

Brand meanings related to personality traits and style were utilised for the purpose of both standing out and fitting in. Teenagers´ accounts indicated that brands linked to meanings such as humorous, crazy, colourful, stylish, cool and rebellious were used for the purposes of self-construction and self-expression. The informants seemed to think that these characteristics were valued by their peers and resulted in social approval. It was impossible to distinguish between the purposes of standing out or of fitting in: the brands served both purposes depending on the nature of context.

The teenagers aimed at making an impression by taking advantage of brand meanings related to economic status, sense of fashion and maturity. Self-expression is closely related to making an impression on significant others. The accounts indicated attempts to impress others in terms of economic status (in fact, parental status), sense of fashion and maturity. Up-market designer brands represented an obvious expression of wealth. They were also utilised together with the leading youth fashion brands, to express fashion sense and thus to attract the aspired label of a cool teenager. In addition, some of the informants used classic designer brands in order to be considered mature, and to make an impression from this perspective.

Up-market designer brands had a positive influence on the teenagers' self esteem in making them feel special and generating desired 'wows' from their peers. As discussed above, expensive designer brands were used to impress other people. They also affected self-esteem in ways that reflect the two forms of hedonism. Firstly, owning a beautiful and special designer item made those concerned feel special, providing comfort when they were feeling down. Secondly, these brands provoked "wows" and other signs of admiration from peers who mattered, and in this way enhanced self-esteem. Self-esteem was further affected by the awareness of "not many people having the brand".

Finally, the nature of the context and the other people involved were reflected in the meanings of the chosen brands in the various situations. It appears from the findings that teenagers strove to express the "right" kind of aspect of their self depending on the context. Formal festive occasions and family dinners called for brands associated with maturity and classic style (e.g., familiar to parents), which were more "harmonious" and less striking. On the other hand, being with peers encouraged the manifestation of youth expressed through brands known for their striking and wacky details, approved of and cherished by peers.

Brand meanings and self-extension are discussed in section 4.2.2, since they are closely linked with social identities.

4 GROUP-DRIVEN ASPECTS OF TEENAGERS' BRAND RELATIONSHIPS

4.1 Group-driven brand meanings

Not only do possessions in general and brands in particular symbolise the personal qualities of individuals, they also symbolise the groups people want to belong to and their social standing generally. Thus, people express their personal and social characteristics through material possessions both to themselves and to others (Dittmar 1992, 10–11).

> I: What do you think, does that shoe say something about its wearer?
> Boy A 15 Hel, (A): Yeah it can tell, for example if the design of the shoe has some shapes, it may indicate what kind of a person you are, what kind of music you like and so forth.

The previous chapter concerned self-driven aspects of teenagers' brand relationships. The focus in this one is on the respective group-driven aspects, grounded in the emergent categories of group-driven brand meanings (see Figure 7). Given the "social nature" of the self and the self-driven aspects of interaction with others, there is inevitable overlap between the two categorisations. However, in the case of group-driven brand meanings the aim is to assess the influence of diverse social identities and social interaction on the process of making sense of the self and the social reality through brands. Individuals tend to construct their selves through association with and dissociation from particular groups of people, and social identities therefore usually play a vital role in the construction and expression of the self. Diverse formal and informal groups of people who use brands give them new, favourable and sometimes unfavourable, meanings in the minds of other consumers.

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│        Group-driven brand meanings       │
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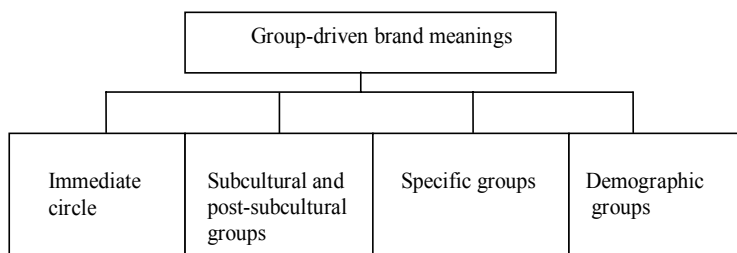| Immediate circle	Subcultural and post-subcultural groups	Specific groups	Demographic groups

Figure 7. Categories of group-driven brand meanings.

The group-driven aspects of teenagers' brand relationships related to close and significant actors in the social environment, diverse subcultural and post-subcultural groups, certain specific groups such as celebrities, and groups determined according to various demographic factors. The categories of brand meanings elucidating these aspects were broken down into a number of subcategories in order to deepen the analysis.

4.1.1 Immediate circle

The *immediate circle* included friends, other children at school and family members. They are the people in the social environment who are in closest contact with the actor on a daily basis, whose influence as socializing agents is the strongest. Peers outside the immediate circle (e.g., someone of the same age encountered in the underground) may have a strong effect on brand preferences. These are included in the subgroup "age groups", and together with the immediate circle they define what is cool, what is street-fashion-like and what is for young people.

Among the boys, the "for friends" brands were related to sports and skateboarding, since they more or less defined what the fashion was for the interviewees. They seemed to be socially safe options in terms of being considered cool, normal and accepted. The popularity of skateboarding was open to fluctuation on a time axis, but preference for the brands such as DC, Osiris and Ctrl (Control) was not. They were used by skaters, former skaters and non-skaters, described as "people who follow skateboarding fashion or youth fashion". The explicit meaning derived from these brands was naturally that the person was a skateboarder. The other meanings were related to cohesion and general acceptance creating a feeling of being on safe ground because particular groups of friends and other teenagers at school used them.

I: What are DC shoes like in your opinion?
Boy E 14 Hel, (E): They're for skateboarders, and they're also quite fashionable and stuff… And here's a pair of Osiris shoes.

I: Who wears them?
E: Hmm… Friends or, they're like shoes for leisure time. And then there's this DC skateboard.

Boy E 14 Lon, (E): Well, I think some people would buy the brands even if…, I would, 'cos I mean, I'm not a skater but I like those shoes, but some people would buy the brands even if they didn't like them maybe just to establish that they are cool or that they like the brands that you like.

Boy A 14 Lon, (A): Well with Nike, Adidas and Puma, you wear that because, to fit in with the crowd, and let's say if you were in Brixton, you wouldn't wear… sorry, if you were in Camden or somewhere like that, or Croydon you would wear probably Nike, Adidas and Puma to fit in with the crowd, because if you were seen around in Dolce & Gabbana or Polo Ralph Lauren, you'd probably get mugged.

Thus, these accounts referred to using brands and their meanings for blending in with the crowd and being like others who mattered, and did not seem explicitly concerned the expression of individuality and social standing among peer groups. However, they seemed to differentiate a certain in-group from an out-group as implied in the following citation concerning Replay and Timezone jeans. Furthermore, the informants talked about the snowball effect of Nike's white velcro shoes and Billabong jeans among their friends: as soon as they saw a friend wearing an interesting item they also wanted to have it. This behaviour seemed to stem from the need to be considered as stylish, cool, one of the crowd, good-looking and approved of in the eyes of friends.

Boy D 14 Lon (D): Someone either wants to fit in with a certain group of people, or stand out from the majority of people. Because there's a certain group of people who, a big group of people who are the kind of people who would wear the Replay, Timezone jeans, and someone buying those jeans would either want to fit in with that group of people or stand out from the rest of the people, majority of other people.

I: Why do you think it (Nike's white Velcro shoes) is popular among you and your friends?
Boy B 14 Lon, (B): I think some people just started wearing it and then the popularity just grows and Velcro is popular at the moment. It hasn't got anything special about them they're fairly simple, nothing extravagant but I think once one person starts wearing them, and another person will see them and they'll look good, and it's just the long chain reaction, they'll all

start wearing them and their friends will think, oh, they look nice and that's just passed down the line and a lot of my friends will wear these.

Boy D 14 Lon, (D): Yeah, I think my friends would much prefer to wear something from Quiksilver and Billabong as opposed to something from anything else. I think that then it means that friends and people like me feel that we need to wear those brands in order to fit in. In order to make our friends feel like we are a part of their group. So that's how the whole thing of brands spreads around, not by talking about it but just by generally wearing clothes and then going into a crowd, and then those people will go home and they'll all buy those clothes and it just spreads like that, really.

Girls' brands linked to meanings "for friends" and "for school mates" included Topshop (in the UK), Only (in Finland), Converse, iPod, up-market designer brands such as DKNY, Longchamp, and up-market youth brands such as Miss Sixty, Gsus, Diesel and Paul Frank. These brands involved meanings that stigmatised a group of friends in the eyes of others, unified and defined a group of friends, offered means of fitting with in class mates and school mates, and enabled identification with popular school mates considered to be "in" and fashionable. The feeling of being considered "normal" and similar to most peers, and of having "street credibility" seemed to be particularly important. Thus, teenagers were likely to feel the need to blend in with other teenagers.

I: Do you have any common brands, you and your friends?
Girl E 14 Lon, (E): Yeah, most of them are Topshop kind of people. I think, I'm just… The reason probably why we are friends is 'cos we have common interests and that's, partly, like the thing that we like the same clothes.

I: What kind of person are you in other people's opinion?
Girl D 14 Hel, (D): Probably quite normal, because a lot of people wear Only jeans. So, if they were to classify me based on them, I'd be quite a normal person. "A standard person"…
I: What is a standard person?
D: A person who doesn't wear radical clothes or use radical brands, but prefers clothing brands that are like normal... Or I mean brands that in a way others know about and approve of.

Girl D 14, UK (D): Most of my friends, we mostly shop at like Topshop, Miss Selfridge, like we buy shoes at Office and all the places I've

mentioned and we buy Diesel jeans, mostly. But most of my friends …, we just like to buy sort of, like it depends on what it's for, but a lot of my friends just buy the same things as everyone else, so, like what a lot of people of my age do.

I: Why do you think they do that?

D: Well I guess it's like to fit in. Cause it's like quite a lot of pressure to fit in.

I: From whom?

D: From each other I guess. It's not something that people talk about really like no-one actually thinks so inside their head but if you actually thought about it, you would see that there is.

The following citation concerning Longchamp school bags illustrates how the brand meaning in this case both united the girl with a group of friends as well as enabled her to separate this group from school mates and other peers. In addition, the up-market nature of Longchamp likely made her consider her group of friends wealthy in the eyes of others.

I: How did you get to know about it?

Girl G 13 Hel, (G): Friends of mine had one, and I thought it was so nice, and then they recommended it…

I: How many of your friends have a Longchamp (school) bag?

G: Almost everyone. So, it's like quite a common thing to have among my friends.

I: What do you think other people think about you, I mean this so-called Longchamp group of yours? Based on the fact that you have these bags…

G: Nice and wealthy people. That comes to my mind first, because they're quite expensive. I've been wondering how I've been able to get so many of these bags so fast…

I: What do these so-called "street cred" (credibility) people wear?

Girl E 13 Hel, (E): It depends on what kind of people you hang around with. But people at our school wear branded clothes like Miss Sixty and Diesel and all of these Gsus…

The notion of Topshop uniting groups of friends was not always considered in a positive light, since its wide popularity among teenage girls had also made it too common if "all teenagers" wore it. IPods were popular among friends, schoolmates and peers in general. Further, its popularity among the friends of the informants was not solely due to the functional benefit of listening to

music: it also fostered new friendships, connected old friends in a new way, and made them talk about music rather than not just listening to it.

Girl F 14 Lon, (F): Everyone has at least two things from Topshop, at least. Like on own-clothes-day here, if you said to everyone, put up your hand if you've got one thing from Topshop on, most people would put their hands up. Which is bad, kind of, 'cos then everyone comes to school wearing the same thing.

I: What kinds of people prefer Paul Frank?
Girl B 13 Hel, (B): I think it is like a brand for the young, I've not seen adults wearing it.
I: Can you tell me what kinds of adolescents use it?
B: Well… It's like, almost everyone in our class has Paul Frank, and we have like so different kinds of people in our class. Thus, not everyone is alike and yet they all wear Paul Frank.

Boy E 14 Lon, (E): Maybe somebody would get an iPod even though they don't like music, I mean that they don't have like a huge music taste, that they just, then maybe they'd do that and… I think it may also be with Converse or something like that or even Vans…I don't really know anybody who does that, but something like that, or like a Playstation, someone would buy one to start talking to a person about what happens, 'cos they've overheard, they want to get into the conversation, be someone's friend or something.

Finally, one of the teenage girls pointed out that, in general, the brands that were popular among friends were not necessarily brands that they owned, and included also those they desired but could not have for financial reasons, for example.

Girl A 14 Lon, (A): I think a lot of people like the iPod thing. Everyone has an iPod therefore they can talk about it. I think that kind of binds a lot of different friendships because people could borrow it and use it and that keeps people friends together as well.
I: Are there any other brands (other than iPod) that people talk about a lot in your class?
A: I think sometimes it's not stuff they have it's stuff they want to have they can talk about as well. So it's sometimes the top designers like Chloe and Dolce & Gabbana, these are just the kind of things that hold people together as well, it is not all about what they have.

Hygiene products and cars were considered family brands. Daily hygiene products such as hair-care products, are usually low-involvement and mundane. Chang Coupland (2005) defines an "invisible brand" as one that has been taken from marketplace to household, is considered mundane and blends into the household environment in an indiscernible matter (Chang Coupland 2005, 106). The limited reference to hygiene and other household products seemed to be attributable to their everydayness, routine-based consumption and invisibility.

I: What about L'Oreal… How did you get to know it?
Girl C 13 Hel, (C): Probably through my older sister. She always has those brands and stuff... Then like family members have used them first, I tried them, and then wanted to get my own.

One of the boys considered Volkswagen "the car of the family", something his parents and family had always had. He found it difficult to imagine his parents driving a car by any other brand. Not only did the Volkswagen brand mean "a car for our family", it also implied inertia due to the long common history and the relationship between the brand and the family.

I: Well, let's start this section by talking about the most important brand.
Boy E 14 Hel, (E): Well, like Volkswagen "the car of the people". It is important in a sense that my…, I mean my parents have always had Volkswagens. In a way it would feel strange if we like drove a Toyota. Volkswagen is kind of stigmatised at the back of my head. Like we have always driven it. So, that's why it's probably one of the most important brands.

The meaning of "being for the family" was not limited to hygiene products and cars, and also applied to sports equipment and computers. One of the teenage girls talked about the brand of floorball racket that united her and her father, resulting in a diverse brand preference compared to her team mates.

Girl E 13, Hel (E): Well, our team racket is actually "Exel", and I don't think there are like differences between the rackets… But it's like a thing between me and my father, a kind of our thing that we use "Fat pipe" instead…

Boy D 14 Lon, (D): I started to use Amazon because my mom used it. My mom was using it, she recommended it to me and I started using it myself.

And I did not have to choose Dell. My parents were both using Dell computers, so I grew up using a Dell computer.

Thus, the computer brand "Dell" and an the internet site "amazon.com" were both trustworthy everyday companions shared by family members, according to the informant cited above: his mother had recommended amazon.com, and that he had grown up with Dell computers since it was his parent's preferred computer brand.

4.1.2   Subcultural and post-subcultural groups

The use of brands by members of subcultural or post-subcultural groups may give them new meanings. Similarly, meanings of brands may communicate new things about members of groups to people outside them. In postmodern societies, individualism lies at the core of subcultures, thereby creating tribal communities that allow plenty of room for personal choice and for standing out as an authentic individual. These "post-subcultures" (e.g., piss-Lizzys, chavs, goths, skateboarders) could be considered micro-cultures of great individual variation, in which the group conscience is rather low compared to earlier subcultures such as punks and mods (Muggleton 2002, 49–52).

4.1.2.1 Subcultural groups

Of the more traditional subcultures the informants mentioned punks and rockers. The label concerned was a shoe rather than a clothing brand. The versatile Converse brand served the needs of both punks and rockers, in addition to being a widely accepted youth brand. It suited the image of both of these groups, whose members favoured different kinds of models. According to one of the boys, punks preferred the long-legged model, while rockers felt that ankle-length models linked them with their rock-music idols and the style they expressed. Thus, Converse seemed to convey a culturally-bound brand meaning in addition to the message of being young.

Boy C 14 Hel, (C): …it depends on the model and the user, since there are quite a few models with various styles.
I: Well, can you talk a bit about the kinds of models that are used and by what kinds of people?
C: Well, like the Converse All Stars' knee-length model is worn by today's

punks or those who aren't quite punks but are like them… Rockers use the Converse model that extends beyond the ankle.

Vans was also linked to rock music, grunge and indie rock in particular, partly because members of bands playing that kind of music wore them. Further, like Converse it also carried the meaning of being retro(active), which seemed to be "in" and included an up-to-date sense of what the youth fashion was at the time of the data collection.

> I: Well, what is the Vans brand like in your opinion?
> Boy A 15 Hel, (A): They make like good shoes, they try to make them a little bit old-fashioned in style. Like some stuff from the 70s and 80s.
> I: Hmm… What makes you say that it has stuff from the 70s and the 80s?
> A: They have like punk logos and stuff related to the rock style, which I associate with the 70s and the 80s. Then Vans is an extremely old brand, or I mean over 50 years old.

> I: What kind of people use Vans shoes other than skateboarders?
> Girl B 14 Lon, (B): Mainly like grungy people like skaters and grungers. I've got two pairs of Vans but I'm not very grungy so I suppose I am the odd one out. My friends say she's not grungy, but she wears them just because she likes them but it is usually weirdo grungy people who wear these shoes.
> I: What is a grungy person like?
> B: It is like rock music weird people who wear black all the time. They like random rock bands. That is what grunge is really.

4.1.2.2 Post-subcultural groups – Piss-Lizzys

Out of the post-subcultures, piss-Lizzys ("pissikset" in Finnish), was mentioned mainly by girls because it involves girls who dress and act in a certain way. It is a post-subculture of young Finnish girls who dress in expensive designer brands, tight jeans and tops, are considered arrogant among their peers, and use heavy make-up. The informants referred to designer brands and expensive youthful jeans brands as markers of piss-Lizzys, but a clear and common denominator was Miss Sixty jeans: the brand meaning related to the post-subculture of piss-Lizzys' was deeply imprinted in their minds. Thus, some of the girls who were afraid of being associated with this group, stopped wearing the Miss Sixty brand.

I: Okay. Can you tell me what products and brands piss-Lizzys use?

Boy A 15 Hel, (A): Hmm… Make-up, face creams and hairspray. Then they wear certain pants. I don't know… Diesel, Levis, Miss Sixty, brands like that.

I: Tell me something about it.

Girl A 14 Hel, (A): Well, Miss Sixty. Everybody is like, it's such a piss-Lizzy brand… Or like only piss-Lizzy would wear them.

I: Why is that, do you think?

A: Because they're really tight and flared. I have some of those tight Miss Sixty jeans and a friend of mine has loose-fit Miss Sixty jeans. And some people rip the Miss Sixty label of the back pockets… But I personally wouldn't do that, because it would make me feel more piss-Lizzy to hide that I'm a piss-Lizzy.

Girl F 14 Hel, (F): …then Pepe Jeans also has really good jeans, for example, I'm wearing a pair now. They're really expensive, but of really good quality. I mean Miss Sixty used to be a close brand for me…

I: Hmm…

F: But then it turned into a piss-Lizzy brand…

Miss Sixty did not suffer from negative brand meanings in the eyes of the British informants, and the less favourable cultural influence was limited to the Finnish interviewees. It was considered a stylish and unique brand that was suitable for teenage girls.

Girl D 14 Lon, (D): I love Miss Sixty, the reason I wear it is more like…, I wear the jeans, mostly, but the other clothes are really good as well, they like just fit really well and I just like the designs and the way they're cut is really nice.

I: What is their cut like?

D: It's like they make sort of unique pieces, like not the kind that you would see in any other shop and that's kind of why I like shopping there.

A Finnish post-subculture that was similar to the piss-Lizzys was the "fruittaris", which derives from the British slang word "fruitcake", meaning a homosexual. However, fruittari did not refer to a gay, but rather to a male person who cared about of his appearance and spent money on lotions, make-up and trendy clothes "like a gay person".

Girl A 14 Hel, (A): I think Lacoste shoes are something that really convey vanity. They are like white fruittari shoes that cost a huge amount of money, and you get laughed at when you wear them.

I: What do you mean by fruittari?

A: Well, a fruittari is like a guy who isn't gay, but who pays too much attention to his looks. You know, make-up and… Always new clothes, uses hand lotion, tucks his trouser legs into his white socks and wears Lacoste shoes…

Both piss-Lizzys and fruittaris were said to include both sexes, but as far as my informants were concerned, piss-Lizzys were girls and Fruittaris were boys.

4.1.2.3 Post-subcultural groups – Chavs

The notion of subculture in today's Great Britain has been overtaken by the rise of post-subcultures such as chavs and skateboarders, both of which leave room for individual variation within these youth cultural groups or "teenage tribes". The term "chav" refers to a working-class person who wants to show off, and tries to look like a member of the middle or upper class by wearing designer brands such as Burberry (see McCulloch, Stewart & Lovegreen 2006, 552 for the link between chavs and the lower social classes).

Girl C 14 Lon, (C): A chav is like, I think it's like someone who lives in like a council home and they wear like track suits and Boston caps or something...

The post-subcultural group referred to as chavs was linked to the giant sports brand Adidas. Given the fact that Adidas also featured as a casual and everyday brand for many British teenage boys, the chavish aspect was most likely limited to uses of certain kinds of outwear (e.g., hoodies). The rival brands of Adidas, Nike and Puma were not linked to chavs, maybe in part because they were considered more sophisticated as one of the informants suggested. "Chavish" sports brands were not limited to Adidas, and also included other brands, such as Reebok. Furthermore, the informants discussed "the iconic brand of the chavs", Burberry, as well as diverse fake versions of designer brands which were also regarded as signs of the chavs. The British teenage informants also linked sports brands with another post-subcultural group of teenagers, the townies. They were not really able to define the

differences between chavs and townies, but both of these groups and the associated brands were something to be avoided.

> Girl D 14 Lon, (D): But yeah, like a lot of chavs wear like Adidas, like trackies and things and most people wouldn't wear those things in case like they got assumed they were a chav.
> I: Okay. Can you name some other chavish brands?
> D: Well, now, like Burberry is like huge chav brand and like it used to be cool but now it's really not because chavs started wearing it and it's more, also another thing which is really chavish is like fake designer things like fake Burberry or fake anything, really, is like seen as less classy. But if you wear the real thing then it's like that's supposed to be not chav.

> I: Can you tell me about the brands that are not for you?
> Girl A 14 Lon, (A): Things like Adidas and a lot of sports brands …
> I: Why is that?
> A: Because I think it's the association with townies and chavs as well because I don't really like that, because I wouldn't want to have an association.

> I: What would you say, who is Adidas for and who is Nike for?
> Boy C 14 Lon, (C): I'd say Nike's for… I don't know, I'd say Adidas is more of a knock-off brand so like, 'cos for the tracksuit bottoms and things, and all sorts, and lots of Adidas clothing is worn by chavs and Nike is more sort, I don't know, more, probably sophisticated or something like that, more, just seems…
> I: What makes you say that Nike is more sophisticated when you're comparing Adidas and Nike?
> C: 'Cos Nike sort of has a much wider range whereas Adidas is more sort of going towards football and it's worn by a lot of chavs and garries and Nike is more… A garrie is a person that is similar to a chav but only wears footies and flat caps… sort of similar to a chav but they talk sort of differently.

4.1.2.4 Post-subcultural groups – Skateboarders

Skateboarding was a widely spread post-subculture among the male informants reflecting the trends of youth fashion. Since I have already discussed popular youth brands originating from skateboarding such as Vans and Osiris, I therefore refer here to the accounts labelling brands used by more

(or less) serious skateboarders. According to the boys, "hardcore skateboarding brands" included Circa, Element and Death, seemingly characterising more (or less) serious skateboarders. However, some of the informants also suggested that the Vans brand identified the person as a skateboarder, thus reflecting the contextual and constructive nature of brand meanings.

I: What makes them stylish and what makes them good?
Boy D 14 Lon, (D): The fact that, you know you can skateboard the best if you're wearing Vans trainers. They look really stylish as well, fairly cheap as well, and if somebody sees, because it says Vans on the side, they'd probably immediately know that you're a skateboarder. So it's a way of recognising a person as well.

I: Who uses these brands?
Boy E 14 Hel, (E): Circa is usually for skateboarders. I know people who wear Circa and they do skateboarding. Then Osiris is like for everyone.
I: What makes Osiris for everyone?
E: I don't really know. It's like the gang just tends to use it.
I: Well, how would you compare Osiris and Circa as brands?
E: Since I don't skateboard myself I would probably choose Osiris, but if I did then Circa. Something like that…

The endorsement effect was evident when the boys discussed how using a skateboard associated with professional skateboarders signalled either a genuine or an aspired image of a serious and skilful skateboarder. Thus, using a "pro-brand" was likely to enhance self-esteem of a teenage skateboarder.

Boy D 14 Lon, (D): The Element logo is very well known and if somebody sees that you've got an Element skateboard, they probably know you're serious because Element skateboards are…, all the professionals use Element skateboards.

Boy B 14 Hel, (B): A friend of mine, Taneli, uses these real skateboarder brands like DC and so on.
I: Why do you think he uses them?
B: I think he uses them, because… Well maybe in part because he likes them, but also like "hey look, these skaters and guys are sponsored by DC, so if I also use them…
I: Is he a pro-skateboarder?
B: No, he just skates with friends.

I: What does that tell about its user or does it communicate something?

Boy D 14 Lon, (D): I don't think it communicates much other than that the user is probably very streetwise…

I: What makes you say that?

D: I don't know, because you can only really buy Death skateboards in skateboarding shops, you can't buy them in shops like TK Max, things like that, so, many people know, if they see you wearing Death skateboard trainers, probably know you're a skateboarder, again, the same with Vans trainers.

4.1.3   Specific groups

The term "specific groups" here refers to groups of people who seemed to give the brands meanings that they may not have had if people belonging to these groups did not use them. I include "brand-sissies", celebrities, the athletic and "the successful" in this section on group-driven brand meanings.

4.1.3.1 "Brand-sissies" and Celebrities

Based on the descriptions of the Finnish boys I labelled one of the groups "*brand-sissies*". It comprised boys who seemed to be heavily influenced by their parents, especially their mothers. Some brands they wore and used were not in line with youth fashion. The brands and a passive attitude towards youth fashion in general were enough to label these teenagers sissy-like, although they also wore common and peer-approved brands such as Adidas and Nike.

I: Okay. Which brands are important to your friends, then?

Boy A 15 Hel, (A): Well, there are a few who can't do anything by themselves. You have to give them a push once in a while…

I: Tell me about them. What brands do they wear?

A: Well, for two of them, I think their parents buy their clothes. They don't look like clothes young people would buy.

I: Okay, so what brands do they wear?

A: I mean, some windproof pants and jackets and…

I: And these are your friends…

A: Yeah. There's nothing wrong with them.

I: Hmm... Well, what clothing brands do they wear?

A: Some Cap Horn, and one has clothes I've never heard of, I

can't even see a label… And they both just look like their parents buy their clothes…
I: Have you ever asked them if their parents really buy their clothes?
A: No, I haven't, but that's what we've thought, me and the guys. That's what I would guess…

Boy B 14 Hel, (B): Then I guess there's a group that are dictated to their mothers, if I can say so. They like wear what their mum says in the morning…
I: What brands do they use?
B: They might wear Stockmann's own labels like Cap Horn and… Bodyguard, and then what else do they have… They might also wear like Nike and Adidas, because they are anyway so common and widely used.

The use of Stockmann's (a leading department-store chain in Finland) own private labels such as Cap Horn and Bodyguard made these informants consider their friends somewhat sissy-like when it came down to contemporary youth fashion. These brands were for the masses and for various age groups, so wearing them could also indicate indifference to youth fashion in general. However, it is worth noting that brand-sissies were not excluded from the group on this basis, they were just considered as a bit "different". There was something similar in the British accounts when one girl referred to "weird teenagers" whose clothes were bought by their mothers, meaning clothes sold in Tesco supermarkets (see section 4.1.4.1).

The accounts also brought out brand meanings attributable to the brand preferences of idols and *celebrities*. If a celebrity was known to buy the brand its elegance, fineness and coolness were legitimized in the minds of teenagers. Celebrities were assumed to increase the status of these brands, which were not so common and out of reach for "normal" people. Brand meanings related to celebrities seemed to give an extra dimension to these products.

I: What makes Lacoste so elegant in your eyes?
Girl C 13 Hel, (C): Well, because it's expensive, and then I kind of know what is elegant and what isn't… Either they are so expensive or you just see celebrities wearing them in all kinds of magazines…

I: What makes people think "wow" when they see Lacoste?
Boy B 14 Lon, (B): I'm not sure, it's just, I'm sure there are lots of other products just like it but it's all about the brand. I don't know, it's like if something happens and someone famous will wear it then it'll be on TV and people will get interested in it and because that famous person is

wearing it, makes you think well if he's wearing it, then I'm wearing it to be like them. Whereas if celebrities didn't wear them and it was just an advert for this new Lacoste brand people would think, well, it's just a new top, he's wearing it, why should we buy it?

I: What makes Vuitton so cool and "in"?
Girl E 13 Hel, (E): Because like all the stars have it, and so… And it's quite elegant.

4.1.3.2 Athletic and Successful

As suggested earlier, teenage boys wear sports brands as everyday pieces of clothing because they offer a wide variety (e.g., t-shirts, shoes, sweaters and jogging outfits) and are popular, but also because they carry the meaning of being athletic and interested in sports. Brands for *"the athletic"* were not limited to traditional sports labels such as Adidas and Nike, and also included the more laid-back models that suited the athletic style in general. The all-round usefulness of Converse was further indicated when its sneakers-like model was also described as a sports shoe.

I: What do they bring into your world of favourite brands?
Boy B 14 Lon, (B): Well Nike is important in football, I'm generally a footballer, I play a lot of football for the school, and the Nike shoes in the shops are always new, they're always bringing in new things as well as Adidas.

Girl A 14 Hel, (A): …then there are of course these athletic adolescents who like always wear Puma, Nike or Adidas…

I: So, Converse shoes with leg and ankle parts are for punks and rockers, what else?
Boy C 14 Hel, (C): Well, there is a more sneaker-kind of shoe in the picture. They're mainly used by young adults and people who are, I don't know, quite sporty or who like that kind of model.

I included in "the athletic" brands used by sports idols since they carried the meaning not only of being sporty, but also of being good at the sport in question, as in the case of the brands of skateboarding professionals. The informants also mentioned football idols such as David Beckham, who is sponsored by Adidas, and "Nike players", the former Arsenal striker Thierry

Henry and Barcelona's former top player Ronaldinho. Brand meanings related to these top players seemed to work explicitly as a guarantee of the boot's performance, and together with stylish design implied that the wearer was a better player.

> I: Which celebrity would you choose to advertise Nike?
> Boy A 14 Lon, (A): Well, probably like a big sports star, because everyone…if someone like David Beckham got new boots everyone just gets it, that happens with Adidas like every couple of months he gets new pairs and then they come out in shops and everyone just buys them in the next two months and then another one and then everyone just keeps buying them 'cos he wears them, so if you have a big sports star it's guaranteed to do well.
> I: Could you name me some sports star for Nike?
> A: Well, like Thierry Henry, someone like that.
> I: Why is he suitable for that?
> A: Or like Ronaldinho because they are the two biggest players around and in England especially football's the main sport and probably for the whole world so if the two best players have it then quite a few people would also get it.

> Boy B 14 Lon, (B): I want those boots (Adidas Tunics), because they look so fashion…, well not fashionable, but they make you look good in a way. Because if you're wearing nice boots then it makes other people think that you're quite good at football, as well. 'Cos the nicer the boots are, even if it might not make a lot of difference, it changes other people's thoughts about how good you are at football.

Whereas celebrities (/famous people) and the athletic were quite clearly defined, "*the successful*" was a more interpretative category. This was closely related to the "wealthy" demographic group, but it illustrated brand meaning linked to a luxurious life and related contexts. It was not only a question of a economic position. In this group designer clothing brands (e.g., Calvin Klein, Giorgio Armani, Tommy Hilfiger, Lacoste) together with exclusive car brands, were used to express wealth, and material and non-material prosperity. Wearing a designer brand did not only mean that the person was wealthy, it was also considered to be indicative of good taste and social desirability. Mercedes-Benz was seen as a make of car for the rich, and stereotypically for businessmen even in comparison with Audi, which is commonly taken as a luxury car, too.

I: What kind of a brand is Calvin Klein?

Boy D 14 Hel, (D): I would say it's more for festive occasions, suits and stuff like that…

I: Okay.

D: Then there's the eagle of Giorgio Armani which I think is very similar to Calvin Klein, it's for the festive occasions and for the rich. That's what they are, and like Polo Ralph Lauren and stuff…

I: Hmm…

D: I think they're like that. But in my opinion they have really fine pieces of clothing.

I: How would you describe a typical wearer of Giorgio Armani clothes?

D: I would say quite wealthy, with good taste and so on. I would also think that he'd be funny and stuff.

I: How would you describe a typical Mercedes-Benz driver?

Boy E 14 Hel, (E): A businessman, suit, glasses, dark sunglasses and short hair. That would be it. And a briefcase.

4.1.4   Demographic groups

Demographic groups comprised user groups defined according to age, sex, and wealth, or combinations of these, such as "for wealthy men". The focus in the following sub-sections is on brand meanings among groups based among the age, gender and economic status of a typical brand user.

4.1.4.1 Children

Brands carrying the meaning "for children" or "for kids" included the clothing chain Gap and the supermarket chain Tesco (limited to the Tesco clothing). Some of the accounts implied that Gap had forgotten teenagers, and catered solely for the needs of children and adults. Association with childhood, to the previous stage of the teenager's life, seemed to be the reason why Gap was considered an uncool teenage brand. Understandably, the brands that symbolise childhood are not likely to extend to the next developmental stage. However, according to the account of one of the British male informants, not everyone minded the child connotations associated with the Gap brand, and some of those who did mind seemed to use it anyway.

I: What about Gap, what kinds of people wear Gap?

Boy B 14 Lon, (B): I think sort of, I think people wear Gap but don't admit it because they think it's for children. They think it's for young, little kids, babies and they don't think it's suitable, but really there's nothing wrong with them, I wear them, I know some of my friends do, they just don't say it.

I: Why aren't they cool?
Boy E 14 Lon, (E): Gap, it just seems to me that it's a younger person's, a much younger, even younger than me, childish, not childish but a child clothing that just doesn't, you had like, it can be for older people… So I think it just misses the teenagers out.

I: Okay, what was this you said, why wouldn't you buy stuff from Tesco? You said it's a supermarket, was there anything else?
Girl F 14 Lon, (F): It's a supermarket. It's for either really young people when their moms buy their clothes and it's just not right, a supermarket selling clothes. It's wrong. It's just not a place where anyone would go. If you ask like, anyone my age, like, one person out of 20 million people would say yes.

In the case of Tesco, the fact that it was a supermarket chain seemed to make it an uncool place for teenagers to buy clothes. A store offering anything from food to its own clothing lines was not likely to have the necessary street credibility and potential to be approved by peers. Thus, it "had to be" a place for clothing purchases meant solely for mothers of young children.

4.1.4.2 Teenagers

Brands carrying meanings "for teens", "for people of my age" and "for young people" understandably coincided with brands discussed earlier in the context of the "immediate circle". In addition to skateboarding brands, global and established sports brands (e.g., Adidas, Nike, Puma) were understandably associated with teenage boys since they represented casual and widely accepted everyday clothing among this group. They offered a safe means of assimilating with peers in the broader sense, not only being one of a group of friends.

I: Nike, Adidas and Puma, they are comfortable and casual, can you name me some other features that are common to them or typical to them?

Boy F 14 Lon, (F): Probably because, you know, a lot of teenagers, normally people of my age, wear those sorts of shoes, you know, when you're older, it's ok to wear like smarter shoes but in this age you don't really want to wear those smarter shoes. Fit in with the crowd more, casual shoes, Nike, Adidas and Puma, mostly people in this age wear instead of Lacoste or Dolce & Gabbana or stuff like that.

The youthful Converse and Emporio Armani (a sub-brand of Giorgio Armani) were also used to feel like an adolescent, and to express it to others.

I: Can you say what kinds of people wear Converse, I understand your friends do but how would you describe them?
Boy E 14 Lon, (E): Well, Converse are for teenagers, definitely, and they're laid-back shoes, and they're not like, they're all, they get frayed and wrecked, which makes them look cooler.

I: What would you say if you compare Emporio Armani with these remaining designer brands?
Boy F 14 Lon, (F): Probably Armani's a lot, again, meant for younger people, than Lacoste, or Prada or Dolce &Gabbana, it's probably more casual clothing.

The girls' accounts included typical teenager brands such as Topshop and Paul Frank. The inexpensive accessories chain "Accessorize" was also linked to the meaning of "for teenagers". Topshop with its wide, versatile and often affordable range offered the British girls the means for achieving diverse personal and social objectives. Further, Paul Frank clothes with their sympathetic monkey logo communicated laidback and humorous aspects of being a teenager. The girls discussed a number of designer brands, as they did in the case of the "immediate circle".

I: What else can you tell about Topshop, why do you think it is so popular, what kinds of people go and shop there?
Girl E 14 Lon, (E): Mainly people like teenage people, not young people, like really young people. There are some things for older people, but it's mainly teenagers and like.

Girl D 14 Lon, (D): That's Accessorize, it just sells like accessories basically, it's like hats, scarves, jewellery, belts and things and they just have really like fun stuff. It's quite similar stuff to Top Shop except it only sells accessories.

I: So what kinds of people buy stuff from Accessorize?
D: I think people like my age or little bit older. It's just kind of fun pieces, it's not like particularly sophisticated, but it's just fun, the things they sell.

In the case of Topshop, the meaning of being "for youth" to a great extent equalled being "for the masses", since it was so popular among teenage girls. This was indicated in practice, when one of the British informants pictured the presence and influence of Topshop on own-clothes-days in her private school.

Girl F 14 Lon, (F): Everyone has at least two things from Topshop, at least. Like on own-clothes-day here, if you said to everyone, put up your hand if you've got one thing from Topshop on, most people would put their hands up. Which is bad, kind of, 'cos then everyone comes into school wearing the same thing. Everyone's got something from Topshop, which is like, the most common one.

I will end this section with a couple of examples that differentiate typical youth brands from brands that have a cool edge and are "for a bit more mature teenagers". Not only did Converse communicate that the wearer was an adolescent or a teenager, it was also an impression of aspired-for maturity in that it was seen as a brand for young adults.

I: How would you describe a typical Converse user?
Boy C 14 Hel, (C): Well, usually quite young or young adult, young child.., that kind of person wears Converse. It depends a little bit on the model, what kind of Converse or what kind of user, because there are so many different kinds of models…

Burberry shared binary and contradictory demographic meanings. Although the Finnish teenager girls' user imagery of Burberry was linked to middle-aged women, they also thought it was appropriate for the girls of their age.

I: What is a typical Burberry user like?
Girl A 14 Hel, (A): A woman in her 40s or 50s.
I: Hmm..
A: Well, nowadays also girls of my age. And then like everything fits together. You have like a coat with a Burberry-designed lining, Burberry trousers, a Burberry scarf and so on. In certain circles Burberry is like an ideology.

Girl B 14, Lon (B): And then Chloe is like a younger person's and so is Dolce Gabbana but it can be for older people. Roberto Cavalli is for young people. It can be for older people as well but they would have to be quite cool older people.

Thus in the case of some designer brands, an association with older people was likely to make them cool and approved among teenagers. These brands had the potential of being youth brands with a maturing edge. The meaning of maturity was accompanied by the explicit meaning of acknowledgement and the implicit meanings of prestige and status, which these brands seemed to imply.

4.1.4.3 Adults and "Old people"

The accounts implied that brands "for the older" were typically worn by older people than the teenagers and, more generally the people classified as "the old" in their eyes. "Older people" covered quite a wide age range, between thirty and sixty. Designer brands were considered cool because the parents of some of the informants wore them and thus influenced the brand preferences of their children. Some friends could also be seen wearing them, but the exciting and relevant meaning they carried was a sense of maturity that came from their association with older people than the informants.

Boy F 14 Lon, (F): Lacoste is probably for older people, I would not wear it in this age.
I: Why wouldn't you?
F: It's a lot older trends, it's a lot older, it is made for older people…
I: What makes you say that?
F: 'Cos the designs, they seem for older people. You just see older people wearing those designs.
I: Are there any other factors (other than advertisements) that could make you think Lacoste is for older people?
F): Probably, 'cos my dad uses Lacoste, and I'd probably think it is for older people. I see lot more older people wearing Lacoste…

I: Then you have Boss and Burberry…
Boy B 14 Hel, (B): Well, I've never had any of their clothes, but some of my friends have them. You know, or your parents wear them, you can see that they are cool. Like these Burberry scarves and bags, they're like pretty well-known. Then there are these suits by Boss…

The classic looks of the designer brands Chanel and Gucci and their user imageries of sophisticated women made them brands mainly for older people. Burberry was linked to Longchamp and Benetton in a sense that the informants pictured the most typical user of these brands as an old person (e.g., old biddies or grannies), but found them appealing nevertheless. They were appealing because they were considered fashionable by these girls and likely by the important and influential people in their social environment.

I: What does Burberry bring into your world of brands?
Girl G 13 Hel, (G): It just brings that quality. Well, the first thing that comes to mind about the pattern of squares is grannies. And that's why I wonder whether I should buy the t-shirt or not. Because grannies use them, rich grannies use clothes like that. Or at least I've seen lots of them.

Girl B 13 Hel, (B): …I don't really think that many people in our class like Benetton either. Or at least I've never seen any…
I: What do you think, why not?
B: I don't know… Maybe they consider them to be too "spinster-like"…
I: Do you think they're "spinster-like"?
B: Yeah, some of them are really "spinster-like", but not all of them. If bother to look around a bit, you'll find some that aren't that "spinster-like". And then I like it 'cos I have all of those city shirts (e.g., London)

The account of one teenage girl illustrates how the coolness of "spinster-like" Longchamp bags makes "spinster-like" a cool trend for her. Thus, "with the aid" of Longchamp she considered herself a stylish teenage girl who was aware and used brands also beyond those that were considered cool teenage brands.

Girl F 13 Hel, (F): … then also because a Longchamp bag never gets old. It's like all these sixty-year-old women have them, and people of my age have them. And it's very practical when a mother and a daughter like the same thing. So they can buy like a mutual bag.
I: Aren't you afraid of being labelled "spinster-like"?
F: No. Well, some old biddies may have them, but old biddies also look like old biddies, so it doesn't look "spinster-like" on me.
I: Okay…
F: And right now, "spinster-like" is in fashion.

Although many classic designer brands worn by "grannies and old biddies" were considered cool and desirable, Marks & Spencer's was considered something to be avoided by a normal teenager. This was likely because of the out-dated designs and a strong linkage with older people. In addition, the generic nature of the brand (e.g., clothing and food) as in the case of Tesco clothes, was likely to diminish its value in the eyes of teenagers.

I: Yeah, that's what I thought of asking you next, who would wear Marks & Spencer's clothes?
Girl F 14 Lon, (F): Oh, old people.
I: But they probably have some younger lines, too. What kind of teenagers would wear Marks & Spencer's?
F: Weird ones.
I: Okay, what else?
F: No one else. It's just not a place, they just don't have very nice clothes there.

Compared with the brands preferred by teenagers Marks & Spencer's clothes seemed to lack status, prestige and style, as well as an appealing user image. One of the girls pointed out that her grandmother bought clothes from Marks & Spencer's.

4.1.4.4 Gender

The informants' accounts also implied how various brands were for girls, boys, women, men, or were unisex. Naturally, the popular sports brands carried also gender-related meanings, and they were never linked with femininity. As far as clothing was concerned, there were not necessarily strict boundaries that would have prevented girls from wearing so-called boys' brands if they wanted to express a more masculine style. This was very unlikely to work the other way round. On the other hand, some found it rather strange if a brand originally for boys launched a female range under another name.

Girl A 14 Hel, (A): … like I also wear loose jeans like Killah. I have a pair of them, and they're really comfortable. I don't think that if you're a girl and you have a pair of guy's jeans, it doesn't make you guy-like. It's just a way of finding your own style somewhere else than just…

Girl C 13 Hel, (C): …that is like a women's label, this Roxy, so Quiksilver also does women's clothes. I think it's a bit weird that Quiksilver, which basically for men, has the brand Roxy which is for women…

The Converse brand was understandably linked to both teenage girls and boys due to the fact that it was a widely approved of and a cool youth brand. Additionally, one of the male informants based his view of Nike as a unisex brand on its versatility and comprehensive product line. It was the only "athletic mega brand" that was considered unisex, but similar brands such as Adidas and Puma could also be expected to carry the same meaning.

I: What kind of people use Converse shoes?
Girl C 14 Lon, (C): I'd probably say like, I don't know, a lot of teenage girls and teenage boys wear Converse, and in America I think they wear Converse as well. They use it for like, I don't know if they do it now but few years ago they used them as like trainers but I think now they use it more as like a stylish kind of thing, like kind of vintage.

Boy C 14 Lon, (C): Well, Nike has a really wide range of different clothing… And they do clothes for both genders, so… And they specialize in different sports like football and basketball so…

4.1.4.5 Wealth and Class

The informants categorised some brands according to meanings such as "for the mega rich", "for the rich", "for the quite rich", "for the wealthy" and "for the middle class, not poor people". These brands included both designer brands such as DKNY, Lacoste, Tommy Hilfiger, and youthful jeans brands such as Diesel and Levis. Thus, they did not discuss brands and their meanings in relation to lower classes as a rule. However, some of the girls ruled out people from the lower classes with the expressions such as "not for poor people" and "not for chavs". The high cost of these brands seemed to be the driving force behind the meanings related to affluence. Not surprisingly, reference to class structure was limited to British accounts.

I: What about DKNY (what kind of person would it be)?
Girl C 14, Lon (C): I don't know… I suppose someone who was like, wore designer stuff as well, I think that they would wear DKNY. I don't think they'd be like, they don't have to be like mega rich like Dolce & Gabbana, but they'd have quite a lot of money to wear it.

Boy A 14 Lon, (A): What kinds of people use Lacoste?

I: Well, mostly like middle-class people and up from that. Anyone who…
Cool people, like people who keep up with all the fashion usually probably
have it, I think.

I: What kinds of people wear it (Tommy Hilfiger)?

Probably, more like, probably richer people would wear it, 'cos it's quite
expensive.

I: What kinds of people would wear Diesel jeans?

Girl F 14, Lon (F): More wealthy people, more middle class. I wouldn't see
any chavs wearing Diesel. You don't see any, like…

Finally, one of the many brand meanings associated with Burberry in
Finland was related to the ethnic minority of Fenno-Swedes and Swedes,
which are both often associated in a stereotypical sense with wealth, and
possibly with snobbism, in the eyes of the majority of Finns. One of the
teenage girls discussed this embedded meaning when she tried to explain why
Burberry suited her.

I: Well, why does Burberry suit you?

Girl B 13 Hel, (B): Well. I don't know if it like suits me, because I strongly
associate it with the Swedes or Fenno-Swedes.

I: Well, what do you think other people think about you when you wear
Burberry?

B: I don't know what they think about me, but I immediately think of
Fenno-Swedes, if I see some little kid wearing Burberry, for example. They
just have to be Fenno-Swedes… I don't know where that's come from, but
I've like always thought of it as a brand for Fenno-Swedes.

4.2   The social motives behind brand meanings

Embedded in their self-construction and self-expression is the image of
teenagers as trapeze artists balancing between standing out in the crowd as a
unique individual and fitting in by seeking group memberships as an
adolescent, a member of a new generation, a friend in a group or a
skateboarder, for example. Group-driven brand meanings are based on social
identity, an individual's membership of diverse formal or informal groups, and
the process consumer socialisation.

The social motives behind brand meanings explain the influence of diverse actors in an individual's social environment as well as the relevance of social interaction in general. As mentioned earlier, people belong to diverse formal and informal groups in their everyday lives. Life within and outside these groups, and daily social interaction in a general sense, are eased and influenced through the consumption of brands. In the next section, I will cover following social motives: self-construction and self-expression in the group context, self-completion and self-extension also in the group context, brands as a means of assimilation, and brands as connecting people.

4.2.1   Brands constructing and expressing the self in the group context

According to Escalas and Bettman (2005), reference groups are an important source of brand associations in that what is associated with them becomes associated with the particular brands they are perceived to use, and vice versa. Further, consumers form self-brand connections with brands consumed by in-group members, and avoid the brand associations originating from members of out-groups (Escalas & Bettman 2003, 339; 379). The informants' accounts reflected these aspects. Both girls and boys engaged in all three types of social categorisation when they constructed and expressed their selves: self-categorisation, in-groups and out-groups.

Self-categorisation occurred when the teenager related his or her usage of certain brands to adolescence. The girls considered brands such as Converse, Paul Frank, Accessorize, Topshop, and the boys major sports brands (e.g., Adidas, Nike and Puma) to be for people of their age, and were likely to exploit them in the construction and expression of their identities as teenagers (see section 4.1.4.2, pp. 106-107). Quiksilver and Billabong clothing were representative examples of *in-group* brands among the British boys. One of them talked about how these particular brands help the wearer to fit in with the group and made other members (friends) to feel that they were part of the group. He also suggested that brand usage spread within the group if a member was seen wearing some appealing brand, not by talking about it (see section 4.1.1, p. 90).

An interest in skateboarding opened up opportunities for the boys in terms of in-group memberships, where skateboarding stood for the shared interest and a mosaic of brands. Thus, although the "insiders" were not obliged to use any particular brand, they had a collection to choose from that gave a sense of affinity. They talked about makes such as Vans, Element and Death as in-group brands for skateboarders, although the fashionable and cool Vans was also likely to categorise its user as an adolescent (see section 4.1.2.4, pp. 99–

100). The Topshop clothing brand seemed to be a symbol of belonging, be it to a group of friends in class or an in-group of schoolmates, since the British girls implied that it was something they shared with their friends and schoolmates. This was apparently based on its wide acceptance and popularity. Moreover, although these girls were not likely to be "out" if they wore versatile Topshop, the generic nature of the brand was likely to decrease the feeling of being special and unique in the eyes and minds of other teenage girls (see section 4.1.4.2, p. 107). However, there was no indication in the accounts of British girls that any in-groups were "anti-Topshop".

Out-groups also played an important role in the definition and expression of the informants' identities in that they are defined in terms of what a person is and what he or she is not. Escalas and Bettman (2005) suggest that when out-group members start to use a brand associated with an in-group, its members may form an association with the brand that the in-group members would not want transferred to them. In a case like this a brand may become meaningful through the process of avoiding out-group symbolism in constructing one's possible self (Escalas & Bettman 2005, 379). Thus, brand association employed by members of an out-group may influence the construction and expression of the self in this inverted manner.

Eastman, Goldsmith and Flynn (1999) claim that status in today's societies is not based solely on hierarchical social differences, and that individuals are free to strive for it by purchasing up-market branded products and services (Eastman, Goldsmith & Flynn 1999, 41–42). This may be the case when teenagers save money to buy a designer item. However, the notion of buying status also results in contradictory behaviour. "Polluted brands" were abandoned as constructive and expressive tools of the self.

A post-subcultural group of chavs seemed to have ruined the reputation of Burberry and in part sports-related brands (e.g., Adidas) in the United Kingdom. Both the male and female informants acknowledged these brands to be "chavish", but since Adidas, together with Nike, also represented casual and hobby-related brands for the boys, they did not rule them out as strongly as the girls did (see section 4.1.2.3, pp. 97–98). Similarly, some of the Finnish girls would avoid wearing Miss Sixty jeans because the brand image had been stained by piss-Lizzys, a Finnish post-subcultural group of teenage girls, that was commonly associated with cocky as well as arrogant attitudes and behaviour. Some of the informants said that they had distanced themselves from brand in order to avoid being associated with piss-Lizzys (see section 4.1.2.2, p. 96). That was not how they wanted to construct and express themselves.

Brands linked mainly with children and "old people" were also likely to have an out-group image. One of the boys implied that he would not wear

Lacoste at his age because he considered the designs to be for older people. However, it was not always looked upon in this way in that it was also seen as a fashionable designer brand by a number of the other British male informants (see section 4.1.4.3, p. 108 and section 3.1.1, p. 68). Similarly, Gap, a "childish" clothing brand in the eyes of the British boys, was worn in spite of this reputation by one of them and his friends, although his friends would not want to admit to doing so (see section 4.1.4.1, pp. 104–105). Furthermore, one of the British girls alluded to more prominent out-group brands such as Tesco and Marks & Spencer's. She claimed that Tesco clothes would be worn by young children who were incapable of buying their own things, and Marks & Spencer's clothes were worn by old people and not by normal teenagers (see section 4.1.4.1, p. 105 and section 4.1.4.3, p. 110). Finally, a concrete Finnish equivalent of these "abnormal Tesco teenagers", was the group of boys that I labelled "brand-sissies" on the basis of the accounts. They were also stigmatised for wearing private label clothing purchased in department stores (see section 4.1.3.1, pp. 100–101).

4.2.2   Brands completing and extending the self in the group context

The theory of social identity developed by Tajfel explains the relationship between the self and groups. The concept refers to aspects of the self that derive from an individual's knowledge and feelings about the group memberships he or she shares with others (Smith & Mackie 2000, 205). Brands used by diverse groups, particularly reference groups, helped the informants of the study to express and define who and what they were. I will discuss the findings related to symbolic self-completion and extending the self in the group context together, since the extended self comprises the external objects that individuals consider to be embedded in their selves.

Symbolic self-completion theory (Wicklund & Gollwitzer 1982) concerns how people compensate for incomplete self-constructions through the acquisition of symbols (e.g., brands) associated with a desired social identity (Solomon 1996, 661; Wicklund & Gollwitzer 1982, 46–47). Belk (1988) discusses Wicklund and Gollwitzer's (1982) findings on the symbolic self-completion of MBA students, who seemed to use more items associated with the stereotypical businessmen (e.g., high-status watches and attaché cases) the more pessimistic they were about their career prospects (Belk 1988, 153).

The accounts indicated that teenagers used brands for the purpose of self-completion. Symbolic self-completion was implied in references to the Adidas football boots promoted and worn by David Beckham, a British football icon, for example. Adidas Tunics football boots would make a teenage boy feel like

a better player because they would influence people's opinions about his football skills (see section 4.1.3.2, p. 103). Similarly, both the Finnish and the British male informants implied that skateboarding brands preferred by professionals (e.g., Element and DC) would give the impression of being a really good skateboarder. Thus, teenage boys were likely to use the "skateboarding brands of pros" in order to complement their skateboarder identities and to give them more confidence in this respect (see section 4.1.2.4, p. 99).

Whereas in the case of self-completion it seemed that teenagers exploited brands that made them feel more satisfied with their athletic identity, using "maturing" brands to express maturity was related to self-extension. These products enabled them to show a trait they would not otherwise have. They extended their selves with the aid of Lacoste clothing and Gucci sunglasses, for example.

One of the boys extended his self by wearing Lacoste clothes that he associated with people aged eighteen and above. He was fourteen, and the Lacoste brand made him and his friends feel and look more mature. His account implied that it was cool to look older, not least in order to attract admiration from others. In addition, one girl had chosen an "adult-like, but not too much adult-like" model of Gucci sunglasses in order to appear more mature among her peers. Her expression of maturity was based on the typical users of such eyewear, adults. Although she clearly wanted to appear more mature, however, by choosing a "not too much adult-like" model she was not abandoning the idea of being a teenager (see section 3.1.2.2, p. 71–72).

Park and Lessig (1977) suggest that an individual may utilise reference groups for the purposes of self-construction and self-expression (Park & Lessig 1977, 103). Escalas and Bettman (2003) claim that those who are motivated to enhance their self-concepts form connections with brands that are used by groups, to which they aspire to belong (Escalas & Bettman 2003, 346). Influential aspirational reference groups include celebrities, sports heroes and film stars. According to McCracken (1989), "the celebrity world" is one of the most important sources of cultural meanings available to an individual consumer (McCracken 1989, 318). The influence of celebrities was clearly indicated by a British boy who implied that he wore Lacoste largely because he thought he would then be like the celebrity who he was imitating (see section 4.1.3.1, pp. 101–102). Furthermore, this particular boy suggested that wearing a good-looking branded top used by the popular and attractive-looking former Arsenal football star Freddie Ljungberg would also make him more popular among the girls. Thus, he used a celebrity brand in extending his self to include the aspect of being a ladies' man (see section 3.1.2.1, p. 70).

4.2.3 Brands as a means of assimilation

When people define and express themselves they are finding a balance between being the same and being different, particularly as teenagers. Brewer (1991) proposes that social identity is a compromise between assimilation and differentiation from others, in which melting in occurs in in-groups and the need to stand out is achieved through intergroup comparisons (Brewer 1991, 477). The findings of this study indicate that brands and their meanings are important elements in this act of balancing. Brewer's notion was indicated by one British teenage boy who talked about how his favourite jeans brands could be used for the purposes of melting in with members of the in-group and sticking out as a group from the majority (see section 4.1.1, p. 89). All of the self-related roles and functions of brands (defining, expressing, completing and extending) discussed so far serve the purposes of both assimilation and differentiation. However, the emphasis was on sticking out, so I will now focus on how brands as "bundles of meanings" assimilate individuals.

Although brands are symbolic sources for the construction and expression of the self, Thompson (2004) also stresses the importance of communal brands as foundations of group identification and experiences of social solidarity Thompson 2004, 98). The findings of this study were consistent with Thompson's notions. The informants' accounts were not endless manifestations of individuality and uniqueness: they also concerned brands that were "used by everyone", "for everyone", "casual" and "normal". The status of being a "standard and normal teenager" was achieved through wearing clothing brands that were widely accepted and worn either by peers or the masses in the social environment. As one Finnish teenage girl said, using normal and not too striking brands made her feel safe and secure in her daily social interaction. Shoes carrying sports brands such as Adidas, Nike and Puma were usually the casual options that helped the boys to melt into the crowd (see section 4.1.4.2, pp. 105-106). Similarly, the girls used common brands such as Topshop, Office (shoes) and Only in order to comply with the pressure to fit in (see section 4.1.1, p. 90–91).

These findings were consistent with Auty and Elliot's (2001) suggestion that teenagers' need to be liked and approved takes precedence over the need to be like others in the case of fitting in. The fact that it was "safely nice" not to stand out from one's peers was clear evidence of the need for social acceptance, as was the reference to the "increased sense of togetherness" that using the same brands evoked. Thus, these teenagers' accounts also suggested a need to be like their peers. This was expected, and is in line with Auty and Elliot's notions: they acknowledged that often the simplest way to be liked and

approved was to be like the people a person chose to be liked by (see Auty & Elliot 2001, 240).

4.2.4   Brands connecting people

All of the social sources of brand meanings are related to social interaction among individuals in group contexts, since a minimum of two people comprise a group in the eyes of its members and others. I could have discussed brand-assisted self-construction, self-expression, self-completion, self-extension and assimilation under the cumbersome title "The roles and functions of brands in social contexts". Sometimes I was obliged to use some "violence" in order to break down the bulky totality into the respective subcategories, many of which were intertwined: for example, assimilation with the help of brands was likely to consist of self-constructional and self-expressional elements (being streetwise and using Death skateboards – see section 4.1.2.4, p. 100). At the core of social sources of brand meanings is the individual's need to connect with other people, most often in an informal and implicit manner but sometimes more formally.

   A brand community is a form of consumer-brand relationship that connects people on the basis of a mutual interest in a particular brand. Muniz and O'Guinn (2000) suggest that a branded product or service is at the core of a community marked by shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility (Muniz and O'Guinn 2000, 412). There was no evidence in the teenagers' accounts of the existence of brand communities formed around one particular brand. There were references, however, to consumer-brand relationships with a number of brands that were of common interest among diverse groups of friends, school mates and peers outside school, for example. They were chosen from a pool of "cool and respected" brands (e.g., for teenagers: see section 4.1.4.2) and used in combination in order to fulfill both personal and social needs. These findings are consistent with Jørgensen and Østergaard's (2003) notion of brand mosaics and the need to investigate specific brands in connection with other brands, in a configuration. A brand mosaic could also be seen as a certain style that unifies a community (see Jørgensen & Østergaard 2003, 17).

   Although brands connected the teenagers investigated in this study in a number of ways, it would perhaps be appropriate to discuss the notion of brand-related communities only in reference to skateboarders, Finnish piss-Lizzys and British chavs. These are not today's subcultures, but they conform to the concept of post-subcultures. According to Muggleton (2002), post-subculturalists, unlike subculturalists (e.g., punks), value individualism over

the collective, and prefer difference and heterogeneity to collectivism and conformity. They are also characterised by fragmented identities, a fascination with style and image, and a positive attitude towards the media (Muggleton 2002, 49–52).

Brands played an important supporting role in these post-subcultures. They offered a choice of meaningful symbols that facilitated entry into a group, but they did not seem to be the focal point (see section 4.1.2.4, pp. 99–100). Thus, the "socially approved" and "street-cred" skateboarding brands gave room for individualism and personal style. The act of skateboarding was at the centre of the skateboarder communities. Skateboarder brands, including clothing, footwear and skateboards, were the symbols that expressed the skateboarder identity to others, constructed the self in terms of group membership, and encouraged solidarity among peers. However, some of them were extended and stood for adolescent male fashion in general, together with other sports brands (e.g., Adidas and Nike). Thus, not all of them necessarily only symbolised the involvement with skateboarding (see 4.1.2.4, p. 99).

According to Aito-Ihkula (2007), the piss-Lizzys post-subculture is composed of particular looks, parlance, attitude and behaviour (Aito-Ihkula 2007, 8). Thus, brands were not the main thing in this case either, but related the individual to this mainly female post-subculture. However, girls who were not piss-Lizzys seemed to consider certain brands explicit symbols of them. As discussed earlier in the context of out-groups, the Miss Sixty designer jeans brand was one that labelled the user a piss-Lizzy whether she was or not. Since the looks, parlance, attitudes and behaviours were considered arrogant and snobbish, some girls gave up using the brand so as not to be given the label. Other brands (e.g., Lacoste and Burberry) that were considered to characterize piss-Lizzys were expensive, up-market and served the purpose of attracting attention (see section 3.1.2.1, pp. 68–69). With the exceptions of skateboarders and piss-Lizzys, community characteristics did not feature in contexts in which brands connected the Finnish informants.

Of the post-subcultural groups featuring in the British data I chose not to cover "townies" and "garries" because the linking with brands appeared to be frivolous. However, the accounts suggested that Burberry and a limited range of Adidas (e.g., hoodies) were uniting symbols for chavs. The connection between them apparently made the other British teenagers abandon or avoid the brands so as not to be associated with this unattractive group of youngsters (see section 4.1.2.3, p. 98). Burberry seemed to be a connecting element for chavs, since it certainly unambiguously expressed "chavisness" in the minds of the out-group members among my British informants. According to McCulloch, Stewart and Lovegreen (2006), chavs in the lower social classes are likely to wear diverse brands that are considered expensive in their striving

for status (Lovegreen 2006, 552). Thus, information about their brands is likely very superficial given the type of informants in this study, and chavs as a potential brand mosaic are not considered further.

Brands were most likely to connect teenagers in social groups, which were often face-to-face groups such as a friends, classmates and schoolmates. The brands in question included "cool" clothing, bags, as well as entertainment electronics such as Playstation and iPod. One of the British girls admitted that most of her friends were "Topshop kind of people". She further implied that the reason they were friends was probably their shared interests, including a taste for Topshop clothes. School bags also symbolised groups of friends, as one of the Finnish teenage girls implied in the case of Longchamp bags (see section 4.1.1, pp. 90–91).

Whereas clothing brands connected groups of friends and made them feel part of a face-to-face in-group, iPod and Playstation seemed to take the matter of bonding even further. Given the interactive nature of these branded products, they were also likely to make people socialise and communicate, and at best function as an admission ticket to a group. According to one of the British boys, a teenager not particularly interested in music or video games might buy an iPod or a Playstation just to get into social interaction with his peers and try to make new friends. Talking about songs in iPods and sharing them, and the contents and special features of video games gave a natural access to groups and new friendships. The notion of connecting and friendship was also touched on by one girl when she talked about exchanging songs among iPod users. Finally, another of the girls suggested that it was not only the brands she and her friends used that connected them, but also the brands they desired. Thus, some of these desired brands were topics of social interaction, and united the girls in this "day-dreamy" manner (see section 4.1.1, p. 92).

Sometimes brands were considered to connect a set of individuals in a group in the eyes of others, without their being aware of it. One of the Finnish boys discussed "brand-sissies", a group of adolescent boys considered by others to be dominated by their mothers when it came down to consumption. The label also reflected their passive attitude towards youth fashion and the use of less stylish brands (e.g., private labels of department-store chains) that other teenage boys did not use. However, the use of private labels and a low interest in consumption did not turn "brand-sissies" into an out-group in terms of friendship: they were merely considered a bit weird teenagers (see section 4.1.3.1, pp. 100–101).

The accounts also indicated that the connecting dimension of brands was not limited to peers, and could well extend to family members. One of the British boys talked about how he grew up with Dell computers and preferred

online-shopping at Amazon based on the choices and recommendations of his parents. In addition, one of the Finnish boys discussed how family car brands symbolised their family given their long history and loyalty to a particular make. This kind of connecting power was also implied when one teenage girl said that she did not use the brand of floorball racket her team members used, and preferred the brand her father used. She explained as "a common thing between me and my dad". Although they were already connected as father and daughter, this particular brand symbolised the connection of their sports identities (see section 4.1.1, p. 93–94).

4.3 Summary: group-driven aspects of brand relationships are grounded in the interplay between social approval and disapproval

In the first section of this chapter I presented the categorisation of teenagers' group-driven brand meanings that resulted from my emic-focused interpretation driven by the sensitising concepts of the self, identities, social identity and groups. In the second section I discussed the implied brand meanings reflected in the motivational ground (etic-focused interpretation), which consisted of self construction and self-expression in the group context, self-extension and self-completion, assimilation, and finally conformity. The group-driven aspects of teenagers' brand relationships seemed to be grounded in the interplay between social approval and disapproval.

The teenagers constructed and expressed themselves by means of brand meanings linked with both in-groups and out-groups. In-group membership was indicated by the use of commonly approved and cool brands among the group. This bestowed feelings of conformity on the members, and differentiated the group from out-groups. These social identities were expressed through sports and skateboarding brands, for example, as well as through down-market and up-market fashion brands. The use of clothing brands favoured by celebrities generated some feelings of prestige and pleasure among those teenagers to whom they were available. Some informants also constructed and expressed themselves by refusing to buy or abandoning brands linked with dissociative groups.

Brand meanings linked to unappealing post-subcultural groups resulted in the abandonment of the brand, and "sissy brands" (private labels of wholesalers) turned one friend into a weird teenager. The accounts implied that meanings linked with unattractive user groups resulted in avoidance of the brand. The piss-Lizzys in Finland had ruined the reputation of the Miss Sixty brand, and another post-subcultural group of chavs had turned the classic

designer brand Burberry into "marca non grata" in the eyes of a number of the British informants. These negative brand meanings were created in a cultural sphere, so they did not cross the borders of the two countries. Private-label clothing brands were linked with user images of sissies and weird teenagers whose mothers bought their clothes. However, the accounts did not suggest that these people were excluded from the groups – they were just considered a bit different.

Symbolic self-completion was implemented through sports brands promoted by sporting stars. It was most prominently indicated in the case of football boots and skateboarding equipment. The fact that particular brands were associated with particular professional athletes resulted in feelings of being a better football player, for example. Thus, using the same brand, or in some cases the same model, brought these teenagers closer to their aspirational group of professional sportsmen and made them more proficient in the eyes of others.

Up-market designer brands associated with older users served the purpose of self-extension in the form of expressing maturity in front of other people. Although these teenagers did not wish to be associated with "old people" or to be like an old biddy, they did not mind the cool maturing effect of certain brands linked with older user groups. The aspect of maturity seemed to be exploited by some classic designer brands that were likely to add coolness to the constructed and expressed self. Thus, the teenagers used these brands to extend their selves to include something they would not otherwise have.

Normal, casual and widely popular everyday youth brands made the teenagers feel socially secure, as well as "being like and liked" in their daily interaction with their peers. In addition to the brands that expressed the special nature and uniqueness of the user, there were those that were linked with normality, everydayness and adolescence, and provided a socially safe ground in the context of daily interaction with peers and other people. These brands assimilated the teenagers with others that mattered, and paved the way for vital social approval.

Finally, the connecting and social aspect of entertainment electronics brands facilitated membership of new in-groups. The accounts implied that certain brands related to listening to music and playing video games served as a means of connecting current friends, and as a potential channel for making new friends who might otherwise be unapproachable.

5 DISCUSSION: TEENAGERS' MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS WITH BRANDS

Teenagers live their lives in diverse contexts in which they as individuals interact with the social world that surrounds them. The glimpse into the world of self- and group-driven brand meanings and the motives behind them has confirmed the existence of wide-ranging and in-depth elements of brand relationships in their day-to-day existence. In this second phase of my etic-focused interpretation I will discuss the conclusions of the study from the perspective of motivational principles (Striving for mastery, Seeking connectedness, Valuing me and mine) presented by Smith and Mackie (2000; 2007) that guide any human interaction with the social world. My aim in doing so is to generate more in-depth insights into the aspects of teenagers' brand relationships discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. First however, I will discuss brands and their meanings in terms of social construction of reality.

5.1   Introductory remarks

According to the basic premises of Lewin's field theory (1951), teenagers' interaction with brands took place in diverse *fields* and were characterised by *interdependence*, a basic assertion of the field theory. Lewin conceives of all behaviour, including action, thinking, striving and valuing, as a change in some state of a field in a given unit of time. He refers to fields as life spaces that consist of an individual (or a group) and the "psychological environment" as it exists for him or her (or the group). He defines life space as including all facts that at any given time have existence for an individual or a group, and excludes those that do not. Interdependence, on the other hand, refers to the fact that diverse parts of a life space are, to some degree, dependent on each other. Thus, existence in a given life space is never actualised without something else being in the same life space at the same time (see Lewin 1951, xi–xii).

   The teenage informants of this study constructed their reality with brands in diverse fields in which diverse contextual aspects of the self, identities, were prominent. Thus, the diverse identities of teenagers were likely to have an impact on the portfolio of brand meanings in the mind of an adolescent

individual. Although brands are not human beings, they could be seen to be in an interdependent relationship with them (see Fournier 1998). The teenagers both interpreted the received aspects of brand image (e.g., brand personality, and user and usage imagery) as personal brand meanings and created new meanings through their own or other people's consumption (e.g., new user groups, new contexts of use).

Teenagers' brand meanings were constructed as combinations of cognitive and social processes, and did not form in the minds of the teenagers in a vacuum. As Smith & Mackie (2007) suggest, they were affected by the thoughts, feelings and behaviour not only of the people who were physically present in their life spaces, but also of those who were not (e.g., celebrities) (see Smith & Mackie 2007, 15). While the influential power of parents declines after childhood, the thoughts, feelings and behaviour of different in-groups and out-groups, including aspirational and dissociative groups, is likely to increase. The closest and most available groups, such as friends, school mates and team members in sports, are likely to have a major impact on teenagers' constructions of reality with brands. According to Eder and Nenga (2003), adolescents prefer to discuss their problems, feelings, thoughts, fears and doubts with their best friends rather than their parents. Close friendships provide an important opportunity to increase self-knowledge through mutual reflection (Eder & Nenga 2003, 168). The brands and brand meanings shared by members of these groups offered a way to understand the surrounding psycho-sociological environment. In a similar manner, members of not physically present aspirational groups (e.g., idols and celebrities) left their mark on teenagers' brand meanings. It was not only the thoughts, feelings, values and behaviour of other individuals and groups in their life space that affected the meanings teenagers ascribe to brands, but also cultural influences, particularly the related to youth post-subcultures. Homans (1958) describes social behaviour as an exchange of goods, both material and non-material, such as symbols of approval and prestige (Homans 1958, 606). In line with this notion, it is safe to assume that teenagers' lives with brands represent social behaviour in which shared meanings of products (and services) are at the core of the symbolic exchange.

5.2   Self-driven brand meanings and motivational principles

5.2.1   Striving for mastery

Smith and Mackie (2000; 2007) define "striving for mastery" as an understanding of oneself and the social world and applying that understanding the respective understanding to help control outcomes in daily life (e.g., Smith & Mackie 2007, 17). Self-understanding is related to the construction and expression of the self moulded by the demands and rewards of significant and meaningful actors in the social environment. Individuals have positively evaluated goals towards which as consumers they direct their behaviour. They are motivated to approach the goal and are willing to use brands to fulfill their desire (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard & Hogg 2006, 95). Brands as meaningful and communicative "partners" assisted teenagers in the process of making sense of themselves, and in the process of socialisation in which they learn to confront and deal with everyday challenges in their journey towards adulthood. In Lewin's terms, the teenagers wanted, with the aid of brands and their meanings, to reach the state of "being established", with a well-defined position and definite relations with the many parts of a highly differentiated life-space (see Lewin 1951, 140). "An established teenager" is likely to better manage and control the outcomes of his or her acts.

   In addition, referring to Heider's (1958) work, Hinton (1993) suggests that individuals have a need to make sense of the surrounding world in order to be able to predict and control it. An understanding of the reasons behind other peoples' behaviour offers the necessary support for decisions and choices concerning one's own behaviour, as well as guidelines for predicting the behaviour of others (Hinton 1993, 139; see Heider 1958; see also Ross & Nesbitt 1991, 77). According to Heider (1958) intention is the core factor in personal causality. Thus, personal causality refers to situations in which a person intentionally brings about something that was his or her goal (Heider 1958, 100). Intentionality seemed to underline the teenagers' lives with brands in general, and their striving for mastery in particular. They seemed to be well aware of their actions and reactions in using diverse brands in diverse contexts in their everyday lives. Whether they used shared and common brand meanings for standing out or fitting in, or feeling better about themselves, for example, their action was indeed goal-oriented. The depth of the respective information processing no doubt varied, but the intentional use of brand meanings seemed to be characteristic.

   The brand-meaning subcategories "personality traits" and "personal style" referred to understanding, constructing and expressing the self. Whether the

self was actual or aspired brand meanings facilitated self-construction and self-expression through both cognitive and social processes. The influence of the social environment is particularly important in these self-related processes, since in early adolescence an individual is particularly open to external influences. Teenagers were likely to present themselves in manners that yielded rewards from the people who mattered.

Brand meanings associated with "personality traits" and "personal style", included qualities like "humorous", "cool", "stylish" and "unique". Teenagers were likely to value associations with such qualities, and to find them rewarding. According to Harter (1999, 60), these are the kinds of characteristics that are likely to foster peer approval (Harter 1999, 60; see Damon & Hart 1988). These qualities are characterised by the fact that they are all more or less defined by other people (peers). Thus, the brands that carried the respective brand meanings were likely to assist in constructing and expressing the self, the potential result of which is reward and approval in daily life. A teenager using a cool or fashionable brand was likely to be perceived as such by others. Receiving feedback as cool and fashionable, the self was likely to be enhanced accordingly. As a result, the teenager felt even more cool and fashionable. Basing his argument on premises of Homans' (1958) theory of social exchange, Hollander (1981) proposes that the more an individual's behaviour is rewarded the more often he or she is likely to perform it, but too much reward of one kind is likely to reduce its value and result in satiation (Hollander 1981, 39–40; see Homans 1958). With regard to teenagers' use of brands linked with "fashionable", "stylish" and "cool", it could be proposed that being continuously rewarded for using a cool brand, for example, would not result in a decrease in the value of the reward. However, the individually experienced value was likely to decrease if too many people started to use the brand, turning it from something that is cool into a generic brand for the masses.

People are strongly dependent on others and their evaluations, and making a favourable impression is usually a good way of securing rewards that others control (Baumeister 1998, 704). The brand meanings "crazy" and "humorous" enabled teenagers to stand out and attract attention as interesting and different. Using brands linked with these meanings also enabled them to make an impression on the opposite sex. According to the boys, laid-back and humorous youth clothing brands with extraordinary features helped them to express the qualities they had or aspired to have in front of teenage girls. In addition, young people tried to impress others with their sense of fashion by using "stylish", "fashionable" and "cool" brands, as well as diverse designer brands that were commonly considered "prestige", "up-market" and "high-end market", highlighting the real or aspirational aspect of wealth. Baumeister

(1998) points out that, according to Jones and Pittman's (1982) taxonomy of instrumental goals in impression management, convincing others that one has appealing traits as a way of getting others to like one, refers to ingratiation (Baumeister 1998, 704; see Jones & Pittman 1982).

The results of this study also indicated that teenagers are likely to make an impression by using so-called maturing brands. These brands carried meanings related to older user groups, and were considered cool, unique and adult-like. They enabled the teenagers to add a fraction of their next life stage to their selves and to express it to others. This was likely to result in "respect" and admiration in the eyes of peers, as in the case of brand meanings linked to prestige and wealth. Brown (2000) discusses two sources of status. Firstly, high status implies a tendency to initiate ideas and activities that are taken up by other group members. Secondly, status also implies some consensual prestige, a positive evaluation or ranking by other individuals in the group (Brown 2000, 73; see Sherif & Sherif 1964 and Homans 1950). These two aspects are connected. This was also evident in the teenagers' brand meanings: those who came up with fashionable, mature and expensive brands were likely to be highly ranked among their friends and peers.

The teenagers exploited brand meanings in order to manage the contexts of their everyday lives and festive occasions. Meanings shared with actors in the social environment (e.g., friends, peers, parents) directed the choice of brands to fit diverse contexts and to satisfy the real or assumed expectations related to them. Expensive designer brands were, as expected, considered to suit festive occasions, both more formal adult celebrations and youth parties. Thus, the brands carrying meanings of status and prestige were obvious choices in these contexts. Similarly, youthful, casual and informal brands (e.g., athletic brands and youth fashion) were used to meet the demands of daily life contexts. The role of brand meanings in controlling everyday life was apparent in an account in which the teenage boy concerned talked about how he wore a youthful jeans brand with striking details while hanging around with his friends in his leisure time, but preferred a classic jeans brand when he wanted to be considered more mature and a "non-child" individual while eating out with his parents. According to Lewin (1958), an adolescent no longer belongs to the "less privileged" group of children (despite being mature), but at the same time he or she is aware of not being fully accepted as an adult by adults (Lewin 1958, 144).

Thus, the teenagers seemed to exploit brand meanings in order to achieve diverse self-related goals, which could be considered positive and socially desirable objectives. In addition their understanding of the meanings enabled them to avoid inconvenient and at worst threatening contexts. This was elucidated by one boy who chose to wear popular sports brands instead of

designer brands so that he would not be mugged in certain parts of his home city.

These findings reflect the notions of Gollwitzer and Moskowitz (1996) that individuals have desired states to which they aspire and continue to strive towards until their experienced state sufficiently matches the desired (or altered) state. Brand meanings help them in the transition to the desired state. Reaching this state provides people with a sense of coherence as it enables them to experience the social world with social actors in a way that conforms to their beliefs, wishes, desires, values and needs (see Gollwitzer & Moskowitz 1996, 362).

5.2.2   Seeking connectedness

According to Smith and Mackie (2007, 17) "seeking connectedness" refers to individuals' attempts to create and maintain feelings of mutual support, liking and acceptance from the people and groups they value. Since this motivational principle is perhaps the most group-based, I will cover it in more detail in the context of group-driven brand meanings. My aim here is to elucidate the findings regarding "seeking connectedness" from the perspective of self-driven brand meanings.

At the core of seeking connectedness is a striving for similarity and mutual interest. Referring to the findings of Rubin (1973), Sears, Freedman and Peplau (1985) offer two explanations for the importance of similarity in interpersonal attraction. Firstly, it is usually rewarding in that people similar to oneself usually agree with one's ideas, thoughts and opinions as well as bolster one's confidence in the rightness of one's views. Similar values and interests are likely to provide the ground for sharing enjoyable activities with others (Sears, Freedman & Peplau 1985, 216–217; see Rubin 1973). In the current study, brand meanings related to personal style, such as stylish, fashionable and cool were constructed in the context of goal similarity and rewarding social interaction. Teenagers using brands linked with respective meanings among peers using and appreciating similar brands were likely to consider themselves fashionable, stylish and cool, and vice versa: they were likely to confirm other teenagers' impressions of their personal fashion-consciousness and stylishness. Secondly, the connection between similarity and liking stems from the premises of cognitive balance theory developed by Heider (1958), according to which people have a tendency to like people who share their values and beliefs. Furthermore, people usually want the individuals they like to have the same attitudes as they have (see Heider 1958, 195). They thus strive to maintain harmony and consistency among their

attitudes by organizing their likes and dislikes in a balanced way (Sears, Freedman & al. 1985, 217).

The striving towards balanced states was particularly evident in the case of brand meanings related to "personal style". Cognitive consistency and a state of harmony were achieved when two of the informants considered a brand fashionable, stylish and cool. The balance resulted from a combination of these favourable evaluations. Similarly, balance was achieved when there was mutual agreement on which brands were uncool and out of style. I will expand on the question of dislikes in the case of post-subcultural brand meanings in section 5.3.2. Meanwhile, Festinger (1954) proposed that individuals, as a result of social comparison processes, want to reduce the discrepancy with respect to opinions and evaluations (Festinger 1954, 124). Brand meanings connected with personal style, such as "fashionable", "stylish" and "cool", evolved from such processes, which ended up in balanced states with common favourable evaluations of brands and their users. Discrepancy was reduced or eliminated because the teenagers had reached a common understanding of what were "favourable" and "non-favourable" brands.

Brand meanings grounded in personality traits (e.g., crazy and humorous) did not seem to be directly linked with getting connected, but a teenager using crazy or humorous brands was also likely to be considered cool. Moreover, up-market designer brands were used not only to make an impression and to manifest individuality and uniqueness, but also to foster connection with peers. In peer groups in which they were common, they served the purpose of both being like and being liked by others. This was illustrated in one account suggesting that a designer bag brand served as a symbol for a group of teenage girls in terms of expressing their close relationships with each other, and not just for giving the impression of having a wealthy background.

Brand meanings are contextual in nature, not fixed. Thus, an attempt to categorise particular brands in particular contexts would be beyond implementation. The need to create and maintain acceptance by peers was in some cases obvious given the nature of the occasion. Brands linked with status, luxury and finesse enabled the teenagers to mix in festive and formal occasions, as opposed to being "one of the guys" the respective brands were more likely to further the aims of making an impression in informal peer parties.

5.2.3   Valuing me and mine

"Valuing me and mine" referred to individuals' motivation to see themselves and the people and groups linked to them in a positive light (Smith & Mackie

2007, 17). Brand meanings reflecting aspects of self-esteem and self-enhancement are cornerstones of this motivational principle. Self-esteem is usually regarded as "global self-esteem", which was defined by Rosenberg (1965) as an overall positive or negative attitude toward the self. According to this definition, high self-esteem does not imply arrogance or ostentation but rather indicates acceptance of oneself as a person of worth; low self-esteem, on the other hand, produces feelings of unworthiness (see Simmons 1987, 172–173; Rosenberg 1965, 30–31). Self-enhancement refers to the individual's tendency to maintain positive self-regard (see Kurman 2006, 339). It is one of the three main motives behind self-knowledge, the other two being "appraisal motive" (people seek to appraise their liabilities, opinions and traits) and "consistency motive" (people are reluctant to change their opinions). Self-enhancement could also be understood as the desire for favourable information about the self. Individuals tend to have strong preferences concerning the nature of information, and usually they like to know that they are good, competent, likable, attractive, skilful, and so forth (Baumeister 1998, 688–689).

The teenagers implied that they exploited the uplifting potential of brand meanings when they were feeling good and when they were feeling down. Their use of approved and appreciated brands seemed to link them with the positive meanings they carried in the eyes of others. Yet again, it was a question of brand meanings "cool", "stylish" and "fashionable". Thus, not only were these brand meanings relevant in constructing and expressing the self-concept, they were also the ones teenagers tended to adopt in order to enhance their self-esteem. The brands linked to these meanings were quite obvious choices when the young person wanted to see him/herself in a positive light, since most teenagers would like to be considered "cool", "stylish" and "fashionable". These meanings are explicitly related to appearance. The link between appearance and self-esteem is implied by Harter (1993), for example, who suggests that regardless of the developmental stage, self-evaluation concerning physical appearance is inextricably linked to global self-esteem (Harter 1993, 95). Thus, brand meanings related to personal style were likely to make teenagers more attractive and appealing to others who mattered, and in this way to have a positive influence on self-esteem. The power of these brand meanings lied in the fact that the people who mattered to the users associated them with the brands.

The use of brands carrying uplifting meanings was likely to generate desired outcome in two ways. First, as one of the informants said, "using cool brands preferred by peers makes me a cool person", and secondly, the uniqueness of brand that made the user feel unique in the eyes of his or her peers. Thus, in this case the positive self-image was based on the notion that

not many people had the brand. These young people seemed to enjoy the "wow" factor associated with wearing a particular designer item, when most of their peers had to settle for clothing brands of the masses.

Brands carrying the meanings of status and prestige seemed to have a comforting effect, particularly among the girls: their accounts suggested that a luxurious designer item had the potential of making them feel better, when they were feeling low. Thus, in this case self-esteem was not bolstered as a direct result of positive peer feedback or of making an impression, but as a consequence of the hedonistic possession of such a prestige item, when "anything else sucked". According to Pfeffer, Cialdini et al. (1998), the majority of people prefer to see themselves in a self-enhancing light, which makes them consider themselves superior to their peers and the average person (more attractive, more skilled and more intelligent) (Pfeffer, Cialdini et al. 1998, 314). While the brand meanings of "cool", fashionable" and "stylish" did not explicitly indicate congruency with this finding, those linked with uniqueness, prestige and status seemed to reflect the striving for superiority over other people. Such brands were used in order to enhance self-esteem, and to achieve equality with or superiority over other people.

5.3 Group-driven brand meanings and motivational principles

5.3.1 Striving for mastery

With regard to group-driven brand meanings, it seemed that the teenagers pursued mastery in terms of social identity through the use of brands linked with rewarding group memberships and the avoidance of those related to dissociative groups. Lewin (1951) refers to the teenager as a "marginal man", a person who stands between two groups to which he or she does not belong, or who is at least uncertain about his or her belongingness. Being neither a child nor an adult creates a state of conflict and tension that the adolescent needs to resolve. The uncertain character of values and ideals prolongs this unpleasant state. The need to structure the evolving field and to resolve conflicts is likely one reason why adolescent are ready to follow anyone who offers a definite pattern of values (Lewin 1951, 141–143). Brand meanings were a form of salvation in that they gave a structure to everyday life and helped to solve conflicts in the path to adulthood. The brands concerned were used to construct and express the social identities of adolescence. Thus, in today's consumer-cultured society an adolescent could also follow *anything* that offered a structure during his or her time as a "marginal man".

Brands linked with meanings related to adolescence (e.g., "for youth" and "for teenagers") were, as expected, essential for the construction and expression of the self, and were usually used by friends and peers. They were also sometimes linked to being "normal" and "common", which made them socially safe and minor risk options in striving for mastery. In line with the notions of Eiser (1978), these brands did not need to provide intrinsic enjoyment, since they provided a vital external reward, approval by peers and insurance against ridicule (see Eiser 1978, 249–250). Furthermore, since it was important for the teenagers to separate themselves from life-stage groups to which they did not belong, they usually kept away from brands carrying meanings such as "for children", "for adults" "for the elderly" and "for the old". However, as in the case of self-driven brand meanings, teenagers were not always that strict with adult brands, since they did not mind their maturing effect: a glimpse of maturity in the expressed self could carry the reward of being considered a cool and special person among peers.

Making sense of the self and the surrounding social world was also related to brand meanings born among subcultural and post-subcultural groups. This type of meaning enabled the teenagers to express their musical tastes and (post- and) subcultural group memberships, for example, as well as to take distance from groups that were not appealing or were to be avoided. They were likely to stop using a preferred brand if it was adopted by members of unappealing post-subcultural user groups, and in doing so they lowered the risk of receiving less rewarding feedback and provoking non-supportive reactions from others. Furthermore, according to the accounts, the teenagers also used brand meanings for the purpose of self-extension. One of the boys said he aspired to include a notion of being a ladies' man in his self by using the same brand of clothing as his football idol, who was known to be popular among the opposite sex.

There was one case of a teenage boy who chose not to wear designer brands in the less wealthy neighbourhoods of his home city due to the risk of getting mugged. Since a designer brand was likely to link him to "wealthy" or/and "snobbish" people in the eyes of the adolescents living in these parts of the city, he utilised shared stereotypical brand meanings in order to avoid undesired reactions from others, and chose to wear sports brands in order to blend into the social environment.

Finally, the private labels of retail chains, particularly in the case of clothing, served the purpose of striving for mastery in that they were to be avoided. They were often considered too generic (e.g., food and clothing), and contaminated by user-image brand meanings such as "for a sissy" or "for a weird teenager". Thus, avoiding such labels gave teenagers protection from the image of a parent-steered or "abnormal" teenager.

5.3.2   Seeking connectedness

Again with regard to group-driven brand meanings, seeking connectedness was related to parents, friends, other peers, subcultural and post-subcultural groups, and celebrities. In the case of family members it was a question of maintaining a connection and symbolising it, not attempting to create new connections per se. Thus, meanings such as "for our family" in the case of cars, and "for me and my father" in the case of a floor ball racket seemed to symbolise one aspect of natural family ties.

Teenagers are likely to seek connectedness for sense-making reasons and in order to enhance their self-esteem. The informants of this study strove to become connected with other people by using brands that were linked with meanings such as "for youth", "for my friends", "for everyone" and "normal". According to Argyle (1992), people usually characterise friends as people who are liked, whose company is enjoyed, who share interests and activities, who are helpful and understanding, and with whom one feels comfortable and is emotionally supported when needed (Argyle 1992, 49). Essential feelings of mutual support and approval were likely to result from using brands that express the sense of being "one of the guys", which also satisfies the need to fit in as a non-striking individual. The roles of similarity and mutual interest were clearly indicated in an account of one of the female informants, in which she said that part of being friends was having a mutual taste in clothing brands. Two individuals belong to together when they are similar in some respect, such as their likes and dislikes (Heider 1958, 17).

The brand meanings "for youth", "for my friends", "common", "for everyone" and "normal" emphasised the quest for conformity. When individuals interact they are under pressure to conform, and are likely to exhibit similar behaviour to that of the other group members. Conformity usually serves the important function of establishing order and stability in interaction with others (Shaw 1981, 180). In addition, as Brown (2000) referring to Deutsch and Gerard's (1955) suggests, a vital reason behind conformity is the need to avoid the possibility of social ridicule, of being considered the weird one (Shaw 1981, 135; see Deutsch & Gerard 1955). The respective brand meanings were used by the teenagers in this study to protect them from unpleasant interaction and attacks against self-esteem as well as to make them feel socially at ease in everyday life contexts with peers and other relevant actors. According to Marlowe and Gergen (1969), the more the individual wants to be positively regarded by others, the more he or she conforms to group pressure (Marlowe & Gergen 1969, 617). Thus, the harder a teenager is looking for harmonious social relations and for esteem from

others, the more he or she is likely to use brands linked with meanings of uniformity.

Thus, not only did the brand meanings of adolescence serve the aims of striving for mastery, they also seemed to carry weight in terms of being considered "one of the guys" among peers. Brands meant "for teenagers", "for peers" and "for friends" were likely to create feelings of mutual liking and acceptance. In addition, the need to get connected was not limited to close and distant peer groups, but also included aspirational reference groups such as celebrities and idols. Brands seen on or promoted by their idols appeared to connect the teenagers with them mentally.

Teenagers' attitudes toward their idols' brands reflects Heider's dichotomy of desire and pleasure: these concepts do not only express a value relation between a person and an object, they also stand for a distance relation (see Heider 1958, 139). Teenagers were likely to gain pleasure from their relationships with brands as they gained pleasure from feeling similar to their idols. Brands used or promoted by teenage idols were likely to decrease the distance between teenagers and supported teenagers' desire to be like their objects of aspiration. The accounts of the teenagers suggested this link in brand meanings such as "used by celebrities" and "used by Beckham". Meanings linking teenagers with celebrities were also likely to be associated with luxury and prestige.

Brands that carried post-subcultural and subcultural meanings connected teenagers with each other. For example, particular skateboarding brands facilitated connection with peers, since they were also usually symbols of being a teenager and provided a means of fitting in. Musical taste was another unifying factor. Certain youth footwear and clothing brands carried the meaning of being for "rockers" and "for indie-music -lovers", and in this manner helped the informants to make new friends and engage in social interaction with others having similar interests. Reflecting Heider's (1958) balance theory, a balanced state of dislikes was apparent in the brand meanings "for piss-Lizzys" and "for chavs" related to these Finnish and British post-subcultural groups, respectively. In these cases the state of imbalance turned into balance when a previously cool and stylish brand was abandoned on account of its new uncool users. A teenager in a state of imbalance will evaluate the brand favourably, but will give an unfavourable evaluation of another teenager who likes it. The radical act of abandoning the brand restores the state of balance and cognitive consistency.

Finally, in addition to becoming connected through these symbolic and categorising brand meanings, the teenagers also exploited meanings of a functional nature. The obvious meaning associated with iPods is "for listening to music", but in some accounts this was complemented with "for making

friends". For example, one of the informants claimed that some adolescents, who were not particularly interested in music, used their iPods in order to make new friends and to avoid being left out of conversations in their peer groups. Thus, teenagers were also likely to become connected beyond the symbolic meanings of brands.

5.3.3 Valuing me and mine

It seemed that the teenagers took over the brand meanings of in-groups in order to feel good about themselves. These brands were usually associated with "cool", "fashionable" and "stylish", qualities that were desirable and self-enhancing. Being associated with peers using such brands enabled these teenagers to view themselves as cool, stylish and fashionable.

In addition, the use of designer handbags as school bags was connected to status and prestige in terms of valuing oneself and the people and things around one. The brand meaning "for wealthy people" implied by one of the girls aptly illustrated how a common prestige brand made her value the others (friends) in her group, and see them in a positive light. This finding reflects Argyle's suggestion that luxurious items signal that users are rich, which contributes to the self-esteem of the individual. The satisfaction derived from using such an item is likely to result in feelings of happiness, not least since for some people wealth is one indication of success (see Argyle 1987, 208). Since these teenagers were "wealthy" only through their families, they actually sought to enhance their self-esteem by signalling the wealth of their parents.

Sports brands used by idols and celebrities were adopted by some teenagers for the purposes of self-extension and symbolic self-completion. In the former case it was a question of adopting the brand used by an idol in order to feel like a soccer star, for example. Implicit in this was the notion of being a talented football player, which reflects symbolic self-completion through brand meanings. Symbolic self-completion was also indicated in an explicit manner when one teenager said he expected others to consider a him better football player if he wore a good-looking and fashionable pair of soccer boots. Thus, the brand meaning of competence apparently increased his self-esteem with regard to his footballer identity. Mruk (2006) discusses Branden's (1969) notion of self-esteem as the product of a relationship between competence and worthiness, when feelings of worth are generated through the competent exhibition of certain types of behaviour (Mruk 2006, 164; see Branden 1969). Thus, the teenager in question expected a shared association with a talented

football player to make people think of him as a competent football player, or at least as more competent than he felt he was.

Furthermore, Brown (2000) points out that individuals are likely to feel better about themselves when they have done well at something. In the group context, this would suggest that people prefer comparison with those of a lower standing in the group. However, Brown (2000) refers to Festinger's (1954) notion that people try to surpass each other in terms of achievement (Brown 2000, 81–82; see Festinger 1954). This simultaneous unidirectional drive upwards and the pressure towards uniformity reflect the desire to be slightly better than those with whom the individual compares himself or herself (see Festinger 1954, 127). Both the desire to compare oneself with people of higher standing and the drive to excel others were apparent in brand meanings linked to sport stars and the issue of competence.

One aspect of valuing the people and things that one relates to is to distance oneself from undesirable groups of people and things that are extraneous. The teenagers indicated in their accounts that they would not appreciate the brands that carried meanings linked to dissociative groups. Thus, they seemed to feel good and appropriate when they made a clear statement by avoiding a brand that had the potential to make them see and understand themselves from a less positive perspective. These findings are in line with Brown's (2000) suggestions that people tend to assess the worth of an in-group in comparison with other groups. The result of this inter-group comparison is crucial for an individual since it has an indirect effect on self-esteem. If the in-group is superior in some respect, then an individual member can bask in that reflected glory (see Brown 2000, 312)

5.4   Summary: brand meanings and motivational principles reflecting teenagers' brand relationships in daily life

In sum, teenagers' relationships with brands could be described as a dynamic field of overlapping elements. Brand usage is driven by the context and the social actors in it. Particular brand meanings are exploited in diverse types of contexts, and the different meanings attached to a particular brand may be exploited in a "regulated" manner depending on the context. Similarly, diverse motives and motivational principles are intertwined on account of the social nature of an individual's construction of reality, and the self-concept that incorporates a number of social identities. Given the relevance of social identities and the fact that brand meanings are socially constructed, the distinction between self-driven and group-driven meanings could be described as a "thin red line".

Brand meanings were exploited for all of the three motivational purposes discussed: striving for mastery, seeking connectedness, and valuing me and mine. These purposes were intertwined and interactive. Usually, striving for mastery and control over life was associated with common and shared brand meanings that were also linked with seeking connectedness and valuing me and mine. Being considered fashionable or/and cool was likely to make it easier to control the outcomes everyday life, to become connected with peers and other appealing groups, as well as to foster feelings of self-worth. Similarly, acknowledged brand meanings facilitated understanding of the social reality as well as of the social actors and their behaviour. Given this understanding, teenagers are likely to get connected with other teenagers, and to increase their self-esteem, by not being an outsider. Self-enhancement could also follow from taking on the appealing aspects of in-groups and avoiding the unappealing aspects of out-groups. By way of a conclusion, Table 1 below clarifies the links between brand meanings and motivational principles.

Table 1. Brand meanings and motivational principles.

Motivational principle/ Type of brand meaning	Self-driven brand meanings	Group-driven brand meanings
Striving for mastery	*Personality traits & style:* "Humorous", "stylish", "unique", "cool" for seeking rewards. *Impression:* "Prestige", "up-market", "classic" and "maturing" for expressing the aspect of wealth and maturity. *Contexts:* "Festive", "formal", "laid-back" and "youthful" for meeting the demands of diverse contexts and being accepted.	*Immediate circle:* "Normal" and "common" for being socially safe. *Demographic groups:* "For youth" and "for teenagers" for expressing being an adolescent. *Subcultural & post-subcultural groups:* Addressing musical taste ("for rockers") and attitudes towards post-subcultural groups ("for chavs", "for piss-Lizzys") as way of constructing and expressing the self. *Specific groups:* Self-extension based on the brand preferences of idols.
Seeking connectedness	*Personality traits & style:* "Fashionable", "stylish" and "cool" for similarity and a	*Immediate circle & Demographic groups:* "For my friends", "normal",

	balanced state.	"for everyone" and "for youth" to meet demands for uniformity and order in interaction. ***Subcultural and post-subcultural groups:*** "For skateboarders" and "for rockers" for expressing connecting mutual interests, and "for chavs" and "for piss-Lizzys" to take distance from dissociative groups. ***Specific groups:*** "Used by celebrities" for getting connected with an aspirational group and the related lifestyle.
Valuing me and mine	***Personality traits & style:*** "Fashionable", "stylish" and "cool" affecting self-esteem based on its link between physical appearance and self-esteem. ***Impression:*** "Prestige" and "up-market" for self-enhancement and superiority through the status embedded in the respective brand.	***Demographic groups:*** "For wealthy people" linked with luxurious brands for increased self-esteem. ***Post-subcultural groups:*** Valuing oneself by avoiding not appreciated brands linked to "for chavs" and "for piss-Lizzys". ***Specific groups:*** "Used by a sports idol" for feeling like a top athlete through symbolic self-completion.

Teenagers *strive for mastery* through understanding how brands and their meanings are utilised by others in the social environment. The accounts indicated that, as expected, the informants adopted brand meanings that were most likely to guide to "the path of rewards" among peers and others that mattered (e.g., parents). In doing so, they constructed and expressed their selves through brand meanings such as "humorous", "stylish", "unique", "prestigious", "up-market", "classic" and "maturing", which were understood to be appreciated among their peers, and had the potential to make a positive self-expressive impact on others in the social environment. In addition,

striving for mastery was implied in meanings based on social categorisation. One way of engaging in rewarding behaviour was to express the aspect of being adolescent and being like others. Brands linked with adolescence ("for the youth"), normality ("normal", "common") and friends ("for my friends") enabled these teenagers to manage their daily social interaction without the fear of being laughed at or being mobbed. Their self-construction and self-expression through brands and their meanings became manifest as a combination of what they believed and aspired to be and what they were not or did not want to be. In meeting the "approved and rewarding standards of teenage life" they also exploited brand meanings implying some particular musical taste, expressing a link to a favourable post-subcultural group, and taking distance from brands linked with dissociative teenage groups. Finally, they extended their selves through brands associated with celebrities and sports idols. Being a cool and an admired individual among peers was likely to result in being better able to control and manage the outcomes of everyday life.

In terms of *seeking connectedness,* the shared brand meanings "fashionable", "stylish" and "cool" among in-group members concerned similarity. These meanings were defined and attributed to the respective brands by members of the group. The use of stylish and cool brands as defined by others that mattered resulted in the mutual and self-enhancing feelings of coolness and stylishness in a balanced state. Not only did brands linked with adolescence, normality and friends enable these teenagers to manage their daily social interaction without fear of being laughed at or mobbed, they were also vital in terms of getting connected with others and fitting in as "one of the guys". Subcultural and post-subcultural brand meanings enabled them to get connected on the basis of youth culture, to delineate the aspects that were to be avoided. The brands linked with these meanings enabled them to meet the demands of uniformity and gave them order in their social interaction. Finally, the teenagers exploited meanings linking brands to celebrities: they appeared to follow the media in order to keep up-to-date on the brands their favourite celebrities used (wore) or promoted. Their perceived coolness, and the admiration and respect of their peers resulting from their use of "celebrity brands" made it easier for them to get connected, and offered a subject of interest to be shared and discussed.

Finally, motivational principle of *valuing me and mine* in terms of "fashionable", "stylish" and "cool" was indicated via the acknowledged link between physical appearance and self-esteem: being associated with such characteristics based on brand preferences was likely to have a positive effect. Brands linked with "prestige" and "up-market" served the aims of self-enhancement and the expression of superiority among peers. Similarly,

owning luxurious brands "for wealthy people" had a positive effect the self-esteem. Brands carrying subcultural and post-subcultural brand meanings enabled these teenagers and their friends to express what they valued and did not value. Finally, in addition to implying exploitation of brand meanings related to celebrities and sports idols for the purpose of self-extension, the accounts also reflected aspects of symbolic self-completion: sharing a sports brand or a particular model with a top athlete made the user feel like a better (or great) athlete in front of his or her peers.

In conclusion, my aim was to show the wide-ranging relevance of brand relationships in teenagers' daily lives. Brands are relationship partners teenagers love to hate and hate to love, they help them to express and construct their identities, and give them confidence in the exciting and insecure search for a balance between fitting in and sticking out. Today's teenagers on their journey to adulthood, engulfed in a consumer culture, exploit the meaningful qualities of the brands that help them to manage the psycho-social challenges of everyday life. The passage from childhood to adulthood is eased, to some extent, through the fostering of socially rewarding brand relationships, and avoiding or terminating involvement with brands that are "non grata".

6 ASSESSMENT OF THE STUDY

My focus in this concluding chapter is on the validity of the whole research process. I will discuss it in terms of the aspects of the trustworthiness. The chapter ends with some suggestions for future research.

6.1   Trustworthiness

The validity of a scientific study is not limited to the quality of the collected data, but concerns the whole research process, the adherence to generally accepted scientific values, the internal logic and the external applicability of its findings (Halinen 1994, 338). Mishler (1990) defines validation as the process(es) through which the researcher makes claims and evaluates the trustworthiness of the reported observations and interpretations (Mishler 1990, 419). The constructivist concept of trustworthiness comprises credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Denzin 1994, 508).

In order to demonstrate the "truth value" of the research findings the researcher needs to show that the reconstructions (findings and interpretations) gained during the research are *credible* to the constructors of the original multiple realities. This means that the respective multiple constructions must be represented in an adequate manner. Lincoln and Guba (1985) further propose that the implementation of credibility criterion is divided into two parts: carrying out the research so as to increase the probability that the findings will be considered credible, and demonstrating the credibility of findings with the approval by the constructors of the multiple realities under study (Lincoln and Guba 1985, 296). Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed three techniques for increasing the probability of the credible findings. These techniques are *prolonged period of engagement* (learning the context, minimising distortions, building trust with the respondents), *persistent observation* (identifying and assessing salient factors and crucial atypical happenings), and *triangulation* (using different sources and methods in the data collection) (Lincoln and Guba 1985, 307).

In first two of these this study falls short: due to data-access problems, especially in London, prolonged periods of engagement and persistent observation were not feasible. The interview data was collected during single sessions lasting between 90 minutes and two hours. I had met the Finnish

interviewees once before the interviews, but in London I was a stranger to the informants. However, I familiarised myself with the contexts of teenagers and brands as portrayed in the literature on teenagers and youth culture, in the pilot interviews conducted in Finland, and in the 170 essays entitled "Brands in my life" written by Finnish and British teenagers. When it came to minimising distortions, I relied on clear and thorough essay instructions, and also created a laid-back, an open and an informal atmosphere during the interviews. Naturally, if I had been able to get to know the respondents better I may have obtained more credible data. However, my assurance of strict confidentiality seemed to bear fruit in the interviews in that at times I was given sensitive information concerning close friends, family members and even teachers. Since I was interested in brand meanings of personal relevance constructed in the everyday lives of the informants, I considered the relevance of assessing the possibility of distortion relatively low.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) claim that the purpose of prolonged engagement is to expose the researcher to the multiple influences (multiple shapers and contextual factors) that have an effect on the phenomenon studied. It gives scope to the study, whereas persistent observation facilitates the identification of the characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the research problem thereby adding depth Lincoln and Guba (1985, 304). In this study the researchers' prior knowledge, the pilot interviews and the essays compensated deficiencies in this respect.

Thirdly, with regard to *triangulation*, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest referring to Denzin's (1978) typology, that the use of diverse sources may imply various copies of one type of source (e.g., interview respondents) or different sources of the same information (Lincoln and Guba 1985, 305; see Denzin 1978). I used both of these forms. When it came to multiple copies of one type of source, I obtained essays from 170 informants (88 in Helsinki, 82 in London) and conducted twelve interviews in each city. I used both the essays and the interview material in building my understanding of brand meanings and the motives behind them.

In the context of credibility Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss peer debriefing (an external check on the research process), negative case analysis (an activity aimed at refining the working hypothesis as more and more information is generated), referential adequacy (checking the preliminary findings and interpretations against archived "raw data"), and member checking (checking the findings and interpretations with the respective informants) (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 301). My supervisors provided an external check on the research process in the form of feedback. With regard to negative case analysis, I did not have a working hypothesis per se, but the research objectives were refined and shaped as more information was generated. In

addition, referential adequacy was achieved through reflection on the raw data on the teenagers' brand meanings in the light of the preliminary categorisations. Thus, in a way it was included in the general process of comparing earlier empirical findings, earlier theoretical knowledge, and later empirical findings. I abandoned the idea of conducting member checking due to the hectic schedules and the geographic distances involved, especially in the case of the informants in London. If I had decided to implement member checking with my interviewees I would have wanted to do so face-to-face, not by post or e-mail.

With regard to credibility, the researcher should describe the process and the results of the analysis in manner that allows the reader to follow its course and the researcher's interpretations, and to accept or reject them. The objective is that the researcher's reconstructions should correspond to the research participants' constructions of reality (Toom 2006, 244). In this report I have tried to stay on a clear and transparent path in presenting my findings and my emic-focused interpretations of brand meanings together with my etic-focused interpretations of the motives behind them. The thematic basis of my emic-focused categorisations lies in the sensitising concepts used in approaching teenagers and the brands they used. Similarly, I carefully linked my etic-focused interpretations to the respective emic brand meanings with appropriate cross-references. Thus I have tried to make it easy for the reader to follow my lines of thought and interpretation from brand meanings to the respective motives.

Transferability concerns how results and interpretations can be applied to some other contexts. In terms of external validity, the constructivist approach focuses on the working hypotheses and times and places in which they were found to hold. Thus, the researcher is not able to specify the external validity of the study, but he or she can provide a thick description to enable the interested reader to make the transfer or to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be considered a possibility (see Lincoln & Guba 1985, 316).

I have described my informants as 13-to-15-year-old consumption- and brand-oriented teenagers who live in cities. This is undoubtedly relevant knowledge that not only facilitates understanding of the interpretations and results of the study, but also elucidates the aspects that need to be taken into consideration when making transferability judgements concerning other contexts. My task as a constructivist researcher was indeed to provide a thick description. Although the purpose of this study was not to provide a comparison per se, similar findings on many aspects of brand meanings and the motives behind them, despite the varying sizes of the commercial environments, would suggest that the interpretations and results could apply to city teenagers in other industrialised countries and developed societies.

Dependability refers to the appropriateness of the research questions and methodological shift, thereby covering the researcher's methods and decisions during the process of data collection and analysis (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 324; Husu 2004, 181). Husu (2004) further points out the two-folded nature of methods: they both open up the researched phenomenon to the researcher and limit his or her understanding of it. Thus, no single method is likely to reveal the researched phenomenon in its entirety (Husu 2004, 24). I will first discuss the quality of the data collection and the potential biases.

The focus in this study was on real-time data rather than retrospective accounts of favourite brands and the process brand-meaning development. Since I was interested in current brand meanings in their current social environment, I believed that this would yield the most accurate body of empirical data. Naturally, mutual past history and experiences were implied in the discussions, since without the shared relationship there would have been no brand meanings stored in the minds of the informants. Regardless of my orientation to the current situation, these accounts of personal experiences and the changed meanings of a particular brand over time illustrated the dynamic nature of the phenomenon (e.g., see Rindell 2007 on "image heritage").

Although I had a list of questions covering my interest area at the interviews, I mainly asked spontaneous questions in order to elicit a variety of brand meanings. This kind of approach may carry the risk of preference for a certain kinds of probing questions (e.g., who is the typical user of the brand?), which would result in a biased set of brand meanings. However, since I did not base my conclusions on the saturation principle, I see no possibility of major bias caused by my interactive role when the teenagers were talking about various aspects of their favourite brands. Moreover, had I been a passive interviewer I believe I would have obtained poorer empirical data and a limited view of the diverse aspects of teenagers' brand relationships. I need to stress that I was active only when needed. Thus, if an informant covered the interest areas of the study in answer to my initial request to "Please tell me what your favourite brand in the collage is", I let him/her do the talking and asked specific questions only when necessary. In addition, the informants were likely to let me know if my probing questions were inappropriate or irrelevant to the brand in question.

My informants were likely to have constructed the brand meanings prior to the interview, and at best articulated them during our interaction. The brand meanings they implied were subjective, contextual and open to changes over time. Since they were mental constructions based on past and current shared experiences and knowledge, none of them were more or less appropriate in the teenage context. Thus, depending on the informant and his/her background,

the same brand may have been linked with the contradictory meanings of "posh/up-market" and "casual".

I used collages as a stimulus and as supporting material in the research interviews, not as an object of analysis. Rather than simply asking the informants to talk about their favourite brands I used the collages in order to make it easier for them to give me a full picture. The visual stimulus material (magazines) and the collages were meant to help them to recall and organise their favourite brands and thereby to provide rich and versatile research data. Given the knowledge about their brand preferences and other interests I had gleaned from the essays, I knew I would likely cover the majority of them with hobby-related, sports, youth and fashion magazines. Furthermore, I asked all of the informants to draw or write about any "missing" favourite brands using crayons. Thus, I was able to map a comprehensive picture of those that were close and important to them. The disadvantage of using collages in the way I did was the possibility that stimulus material would make the informant choose also some brands that were not among his or her favourites, but which he or she might have considered "Ok". The likelihood of this increased the more difficult the informant found it to pick out his or her favourite brands when browsing through the different magazines. However, I consider the possibility of this type of bias to be minimal, and its potential influence on the research findings to be even more minimal.

One reason why the researcher may be misled in an interview is that the informant intends to be misleading (Van Manen 1979, 544). In this study the risk that the researcher would be given misleading information was very small, and irrelevant in any case because the informants were talking about brand meanings constructed in their minds as a result of interaction with the social environment, not about some obsolete and factual pieces of information. Moreover, it was unlikely that these teenagers were motivated to give the researcher irrelevant or misleading information since they would not have gained anything by so doing. The idea of ruining an interview with an adult who compensated for their time and effort seemed quite far-fetched. It seems safe to assume that the misleading, or rather "off-focus", information was restricted to the rare occasions on which the informants "mistakenly" chose "Ok" brands for their collages on account of the stimulus the magazines gave them.

Both the data collection and analysis were subjective. As implied earlier, I did not choose to have a detailed list of questions for the interviews, but rather relied on spontaneous questions in order to gain insight into the meanings attached to brands. Other researchers might have used other methods of data collection (e.g., reference-group discussions), and may not have ended up

asking the same spontaneous questions had he or she also decided to adopt a very vague and supportive approach.

I was certainly guided in the data analysis by my own preconceptions and understanding, which took me through the process in a manner that no other researcher could fully match. The categorisation of teenagers' brand meanings in particular was open to question, given my background and approach. It is thus entirely possible that some other researcher conducting the analysis in a different way would have ended up somehow deviant categories of brand meanings. However, I would claim that the differences would mainly be limited to the ways in which the empirical brand-meaning categorisations were presented, and the likelihood of major discrepancies in the thematic outlining of the categorisation would be quite low. In addition, other researcher might have emphasised different concepts than I did in my approach to teenagers' lives in terms of brands and their meanings.

Finally, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the aspect of *confirmability* elucidates the extent to which the findings of the study are shaped by the respondents, and not by the affecting aspects of the researcher (e.g., bias and interests) Lincoln and Guba (1985, 318–320). Thus, if the findings of a study are considered credible and transferable, they should also be confirmable. During my validity assessment I elaborated on the issues that influenced the credibility and transferability of this study during the whole research process, from my sensitising concepts and data collection procedures, and from nuance to the practices and principles of my data analysis. The aim of this report is to enable the reader to follow the course of the study and to evaluate it in as appropriate a manner as possible.

6.2   Avenues for future research

As I pointed out in the introductory chapter, there is a lack of research on teenagers' brand relationships. My aim in this study was to increase the body of theoretical knowledge, but there are many open avenues for further research. Given the approach and methods I adopted, a number of interesting questions remain unanswered.

I have considered teenagers' brand relationships in the light of basic motivational principles. My aim was to give an overview of the role of brands in terms of striving for mastery, seeking connectedness and valuing oneself and the people and things around one. It would be very interesting in the future to focus on only one of these motivational principles as a basis of reflections on brand relationships. I believe that this kind of focus could generate more in-depth knowledge about the role of brands in teenagers' daily

lives. In a methodological sense these kinds of studies might benefit from ethnographic approaches to empirical research. On the practical level, brand-marketing practitioners might benefit from research that is limited to one brand at a time.

During the process of conducting this research I have become interested in ways how brand meanings are constructed in the minds of teenagers and consuming individuals in general. Although I have not concentrated on how brand relationships evolve, I hope I have generated ideas and shed light on some influential elements regarding their initiation and development. My focus has been on brand-meaning creation in the context of individual and social environments. Research on the influence of the marketing environment and its actors in the process of personal brand meaning creation would be very welcome and would complement the findings generated in this study. I also think it would be interesting to find out how diverse types of brand meanings are constructed, and how, why and in which contexts they are re-formulated.

Although I used empirical data from two different cities in two different countries, I did not engage in comparison between the two nationalities per se, and rather took advantage of the rich international data for the purposes of creating an in-depth understanding of my research subject. I touched on some country-specific aspects, but left international comparison for studies to be conducted in the future. It would be interesting to concentrate on the similarities and differences concerning teenagers' brand relationships in a number of countries, and to seek explanations from a sociological perspective. In addition, at a certain stage during the research process when I faced data-access difficulties I considered conducting the study as a comparison between city teenagers and teenagers in rural areas in Finland. This kind of comparative study would also have the potential to give new insight into teenagers' lives with brands and would enhance understanding of the elements directing brand-meaning development in diverse environments.

Finally, studies on brands and brand meanings in relation to self-knowledge have usually concentrated primarily on the self-concept, while the relation of between brands and self-esteem has received less academic attention. In the light of the findings of this study, it would be fruitful to investigate this link and thus to make a contribution to the research on consumer behaviour. The accounts of the female informants in particular indicated the role of brands as regulators of mood and self-esteem.

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